

**Promoting and Defending the Rights of
Nature in Ecuador: Divergent
environmentalisms and counter-hegemonies**

Stefan Rzedzian

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle
University

December 2018

Abstract

This thesis contributes to academic knowledge on the subject of the rights of nature, both in Ecuadorian and international contexts. Current literature on the rights of nature in Ecuador largely focuses on their significance in as much as they mark a radical shift away from conventional methods of development, with scarce attention being paid to the forms of activism and varying cultural politics that exist at the forefront of the rights of nature issue. I analyse and discuss these processes of environmental activism which are predicated upon the promotion and defense of the rights of nature, particularly regarding the dynamics between activists operating across and within different geographical scales. The research utilised ethnographic methods over a period of ten months fieldwork in Ecuador, obtaining data via participant observation and semi-structured interviews with a variety of rights of nature activists, ranging from NGOs to student groups. This is supplemented with a discourse analysis of the 108 documents produced thus far by the United Nations Harmony with Nature project.

The thesis makes 5 fundamental claims:

- 1) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is fundamentally anti-state in its character, but is also diverse.
- 2) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is predicated on material issues, such as security, territory, and human rights.
- 3) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is deeply embedded within the state-society-extractivism nexus.
- 4) International rights of nature activists “scale-up” the rights of nature according to environmentalist values more characteristic of the global north than the global south, such as the intrinsic value of nature, universalism, and an agenda of “biocentrism”.
- 5) International rights of nature activists appropriate and misrepresent the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador in order to promote the rights of nature as a successful and viable political project.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisors Dr. Raksha Pande, Prof. Rosaleen Howard, and Prof. Nina Laurie for their continued advice, encouragement, and support throughout the process of writing this PhD. Without you all I would not have been able to get this project to where it is today. I would also like to thank Dr. Patricia Oliart for her supervision during the early stages of my research.

I also want to express my gratitude to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research, and to the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University for providing the environment within which I could carry out my PhD.

To everyone in Ecuador who was involved in my research, without you this project would not have been possible. I owe you an eternal debt of gratitude for your participation, your time, your patience, and for the experiences we shared. *Ama la vida.*

I would also like to thank all of my friends in Newcastle who have been nothing short of brilliant over the years. Matthew, for all the mixes, inspirational talks, musings, and support through the ups and downs. Wilbert and Nathar, for the regular evenings of venting in the pub. Tom and Jaclyn, who have remained two of the most caring friends anyone could ask for. Mark and Anna, for being so unwavering in their support throughout the good times and the bad.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their continued love and support which played such a key role in helping me to see this project through. Jan and Katie, for putting a roof over my head during the (many) times I needed it. My mum, for her sustained belief and confidence in me throughout my entire life, no matter the circumstances. My dad, who continues to be my lifelong inspiration. My nephew, Richard, for always being a reminder that even when life seems complicated, happiness is exceptionally simple. Lastly, my niece, Anya, whose strength in the face of adversity inspires us all every day.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The Research Site: Ecuador	3
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Outline of the Thesis and Summary of Key Arguments	6
Chapter 2. From Social Movements to the Rights of Nature	11
2.1 Introduction	11
<i>2.1.1 Political Ecology</i>	13
2.2 Social movements and the environment in Latin America	14
<i>2.2.1 Social movements and key concepts in social movement theory</i>	14
<i>2.2.2 Social movements and the protection of the environment in Latin America</i> 17	
<i>2.2.3 Social movements and the protection of the environment in Ecuador</i>	25
2.3 Conceptualisations of “Nature”	33
<i>2.3.1 The nature-society dualism</i>	33
<i>2.3.2 Neoliberal Nature</i>	39
<i>2.3.3 Nature as a Site of (Counter-)Hegemony</i>	41
3.0 Conclusion	46
Chapter 3. Understanding the Rights of Nature in Ecuador: Histories, Politics, and Tensions	48
3.1 Introduction	48
3.2 Tracing the rights of nature project	48
3.3 The Cultural Politics of the Rights of Nature Project	51
<i>3.3.1 Deep Ecology and Biocentrism: The Question of Ethical Extension</i>	53
<i>3.3.2 Holism</i>	54
<i>3.3.3 From Holism to Rights</i>	56
3.4 The emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador	60
<i>3.4.1 The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador</i>	61

3.4.2 <i>The Environmental Movement in Ecuador</i>	64
3.4.3 <i>The 2006 Election and the Writing of a New Constitution</i>	66
3.5 The rights of nature in Ecuador: Contemporary issues	70
3.5.1 <i>Implementation of the rights of nature</i>	71
3.5.2 <i>State pressure on activists</i>	73
3.6 Conclusions	75
Chapter 4. Methodology	76
4.1 Introduction	76
4.2 Ethnography	77
4.3 Selecting Spaces for Research	79
4.4 Identifying participants	81
4.5 Recruiting Participants	82
4.5.1 <i>Reflections on “deep hanging out” as a method of recruitment</i>	87
4.6 Participant observation	89
4.7 Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews	91
4.8 Discourse Analysis	93
4.9 Data Analysis: Coding and Writing	95
4.10 Ethical Considerations of Doing Research in Politically Sensitive Environments	97
4.11 Forging Personal Relationships in the Field: Reflections on objectivity and the Insider/Outsider dichotomy	99
4.12 Reflections on Positionality: The political production of knowledge and acknowledging one’s limitations	102
4.13 Conclusions	105
Chapter 5. From the courtroom to the streets: The radicalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador	107
5.1 Introduction	107
5.1.1 <i>Notes on the Data</i>	108

5.2 Being a Grassroots Rights of Nature Activist in Ecuador	112
5.3 The Significance of the Protest Space	114
5.4 Mobilising Against the Extractivist State: The Functions of Legitimacy	118
5.4.1 Account and analysis of first protest	120
5.5 Negotiating the Contentious Relationship with the State: Re-Contextualising Activist Identities	125
5.6 Mobilising Against the Extractivist State II: Internalising and Experiencing Criminality	129
5.6.1 Account and analysis of final protest	132
5.7 Conclusion	137
Chapter 6. The Rights of Nature as Activist Knowledge(s): Conceptualisations and Subjectivities	139
6.1 Introduction	139
6.1.1 Notes on the Data	140
6.1.2 Spatial and Temporal Context of the Meetings	147
6.2 Ecologies of Knowledge within Social Movements	150
6.3 Decommodifying Nature	153
6.3.1 Decommodification of Nature Within a Broader Anti-State Discourse	154
6.3.2 Decommodification of Nature: Contestation within an Ecology of Knowledges	160
6.4 Decolonisation of Knowledge and Territory	165
6.4.1 Decolonisation of Knowledge: Associating the Rights of Nature with Indigeneity	166
6.4.2 Decolonisation of Knowledge	167
6.4.3 Decolonisation of Territory	170
6.5 Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and Contestation in the Ecology of Activist Knowledges	172
6.6 Conclusions	174

Chapter 7. Scaling-Up the Rights of Nature: International Rights of Nature and the United Nations “Harmony with Nature” Project	176
7.1 Introduction.....	176
7.1.2 Notes on the Data	179
7.2 Bringing the Rights of Nature to the United Nations	181
7.2.1 The United Nations’ (sustainable) development agenda.....	186
7.3 Creating a new paradigm?.....	190
7.4 From Bolivia to Rio and beyond.....	193
7.5 The Cultural Politics of the Harmony with Nature Dialogues	195
7.6 The Rights of Nature: The answer humanity needs?	200
7.7 State and Institution-Centrism regarding the implementation of the rights of nature	203
7.8 How is the Case of Ecuador Used in the Harmony with Nature Project?	206
7.9 Conclusion	212
Chapter 8. Conclusions.....	214
8.1 Introduction.....	214
8.2 Summary of Research Findings.....	215
8.3 Contributions to Knowledge	221
8.4 Avenues for Future Research	223
Appendices.....	225
Appendix 1: Example interview schedule.....	225
Appendix 2: Interview request letter	228
Appendix 3: Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth	229
Bibliography	232

List of Tables

Table 1: Types of primary research sites

Table 2: Categories of participant groups and organisations

Table 3: Table of participants

Table 4: Active and passive participant observation

Table 5: Biographical table of key participants in chapter 5

Table 6: Table of organisations and groups in chapter 6

Table 7: Biographical table of key participants in chapter 6

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of South America

Figure 2: Geographical regions of Ecuador

Figure 3: Map of zones in Quito

Figure 4: Photo of anti-government protest marching through the Centro Histórico
19/3/15

Figure 5: Map of Ecuador with cities

Figure 6: “*La Mano Sucia de Chevron*” Photo of President Correa in Sucumbíos

Figure 7: “*Today tomorrow and forever I will defend our territory*” Photo of Javier
Ramírez

Figure 8: Chart of participant numbers in the 2016 Virtual Dialogue according to
continent

Figure 9: Participant numbers in the 2016 Virtual Dialogue according to country

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The notion of “giving rights to nature” is an idea that has been gaining significant ground in recent years (Borràs, 2016; Burdon, 2010; Margil, 2017; Rühls and Jones, 2016). In contexts of extractivism (Valladares and Boelens, 2017), climate change (Espinosa, 2014), and sustainable development (Kauffman and Martin, 2017), it has begun to permeate local, national, and international discourses on our place in the world, as well as the ontological underpinnings of nature-society relationships (Burdon, 2010; Rühls and Jones, 2016; Youatt, 2017). At the time of writing, the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia have inscribed such rights into their national constitutions, while others, such as the Mexican government, have developed similar frameworks at regional levels, or developed them on case-by-case bases, such as in India and New Zealand. The idea has also featured heavily within discussions of sustainable development at the United Nations (Espinosa, 2014). Evidently, then, the idea of constitutional rights for nature spans a wide variety of places, scales, and cultures.

Ecuador marked the first formal case of national constitutional rights for nature, inscribing such rights into their constitution in 2008, with Bolivia following quickly afterwards by writing similar (yet importantly, different) rights into its constitution in 2010. Both of these cases relied on significant efforts from civil society organisations (Espinosa, 2014), and marked a radical shift in the way that nature-society relations were portrayed in the highest legal documents of both countries (Acosta, 2015; Humphreys, 2017).

Since then, a wealth of academic literature has emerged on the subject of the rights of nature in the context of Ecuador (for example: Akchurin, 2015; Espinosa, 2015; Kauffman and Martin, 2017; Lalander, 2014; Tanasescu, 2016a, 2013; Valladares and Boelens, 2017), Bolivia (for example: Fabricant, 2013; Gregor Barié, 2014; Gudynas, 2013; Lalander, 2014; Zimmerer, 2015), and in the international sphere (for example: Esborraz, 2016; Espinosa, 2017, 2014; Tanasescu, 2016b; Youatt, 2017). Thus far, however, little research has been conducted into the social movement dynamics of the rights of nature, and where this has been done it largely focuses on the *international* movement which has gained significant traction in recent years (see for example:

Espinosa, 2017; Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). Furthermore, research conducted on rights of nature activists in Ecuador has predominantly focused on *elite* activists, that is to say, those with the most visibility, such as leading academics and organisation leaders (see for example: Akchurin, 2015; Fitz-Henry, 2018; Tanasescu, 2013). Consequently, there is a dearth of research which analyses the less-visible activists' behaviours and subjectivities around the rights of nature in Ecuador. This is significant given that these activists are, generally speaking, in a less-privileged position due to their lack of resources when compared with their well-networked and interconnected counterparts, a situation that is common within multi-scalar social movements (Sikkink, 2005).

My research works towards filling this gap, by drawing on the cases of rights of nature activists in Ecuador whose experiences have, thus far, remained unexplored within the academic literature. Crucially, my research shows that the rights of nature movement is not homogenous nor monolithic in its character, especially when we consider the ways in which it functions across scale and place. Taking a political ecology approach, I illustrate how many rights of nature activists in Ecuador vary in their cultural-political positions and subjectivities around the rights of nature when compared with how these rights manifest in an internationally "scaled-up" context which is driven primarily by activists from the global north. I show how rights of nature activists in Ecuador are more likely to espouse concerns over security, political representation, territory, and human rights, particularly in the context of extractivism, whereas international activists are more likely to promote concerns regarding the intrinsic value of nature, framed within a more post-materialist form of environmentalism.

Furthermore, I show how both perspectives on the rights of nature are positioned as engaging in counter-hegemonic struggles, and how they come to dynamically interact with one another. This contributes to theoretical debates within the political ecology of social movements on the existence of multiple hegemonies (Harris, 2015; Waters, 2015; Bakker, 2015), where thus far little attention has been paid to the existence of multiple *counter*-hegemonies and their interactions within social movements across geographical place and scale.

1.2 The Research Site: Ecuador

The research I present in this thesis took place in Ecuador. Ecuador is a predominantly Spanish-speaking country located along the equator in South America. Other languages in Ecuador include over twelve indigenous languages, such as: A'ingae, Paikoka, Waotirito, Zápara, Shiwiar, Achuar, Shuar, Kichwa, and Shimingae (Haboud, 2009). Consequently, Ecuador is a highly diverse country, particularly in the context of its indigenous nationalities, of which there are fourteen that are formally recognised by the government (Becker, 2010).



Fig. 1: Map of South America (source: Lonely Planet)

Ecuador is divided into four distinct geographical regions: the coastal lowlands (or the *Coast/la Costa*), the Andean highlands (or the *Sierra/la Sierra*), the Amazon (or the *Oriente/el Oriente/la Amazonia*), and the Galapagos.



Fig. 2: Geographical regions of Ecuador (source: WikimediaCommons)

The data presented throughout this thesis was collected within the highlands region of the country (henceforth referred to as the *Sierra*, or *la Sierra*), with a particular (although not exclusive) focus on the country's capital, Quito. This was the case due to the fact that the organisations and groups I contacted were most often based in Quito, and whilst I was conducting my research the majority of their operations and activities regarding the promotion and defense of the rights of nature were conducted either in Quito or across the Sierra. It is important to state that I did not contact groups and

organisations *because* they were based in Quito, rather (and as I was often reminded of by participants in the research) the fact that the city is the country's capital means that it functions as a central hub of activist activity, particularly due to the high density of NGOs and universities.

For the two empirical chapters of this thesis which draw on ethnographic data (chapters 5 and 6), the specific geographical locations (i.e. particular towns or cities) where the data was obtained are discussed in further detail there.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to explore the issues mentioned earlier in this chapter, my research was driven by three key questions, and one supplementary sub-question. These are:

- 1) How do activists in Ecuador seek to promote and defend the rights of nature?

- 2) What are the cultural-political dynamics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador?

- 3) How do international rights of nature activists attempt to “scale-up” the rights of nature?
 - 3.1) How does this manifestation of the rights of nature compare with that which is articulated by activists in Ecuador?

These questions allowed me to analyse the intricacies and nuances of rights of nature activism in Ecuador, whilst also enabling a critical comparison of these rights in a multi-scalar sense. Fundamentally, through these questions I was able to explore the complex relationship between local and international forms of rights of nature activism in a social movement context.

In order to show how this thesis utilises these questions to explore the issues laid out earlier in this chapter, I now provide an outline of the chapters as well as a summary of the key arguments I present.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis and Summary of Key Arguments

Chapter 2 locates this thesis within the existing literature on social movements, the environment, and conceptualisations of nature. It first positions the thesis as existing within current political ecology perspectives, before then going on to frame the work presented henceforth within the relevant conceptual and empirical debates. It considers the issue of social movements and the environment in Latin America, first by outlining the key concepts utilised in the study of social movements (with a particular focus on human geography and political ecology perspectives), before then going on to discuss the existing literature on social movements and the protection of the environment in Latin America, and then Ecuador specifically. The chapter then explores the existing literature on conceptualisations of “nature”, first by discussing the issue of the nature-society dualism, followed by a focus on the notion of neoliberal nature. This section is then finished with a discussion of nature as a site of (counter-)hegemony, where I draw on Gramscian political ecology to synthesise the three key concepts explored throughout the rest of the chapter – social movements, the environment, and conceptualisations of nature.

Chapter 3 outlines the emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador. I argue that the emergence of these rights in Ecuador was both problematic and strategic, owing significantly to divergent, yet simultaneously complementary, cultural politics between local social movements and the international rights of nature movement. Furthermore, I argue that the particular political context within Ecuador in 2008 (embedded within significant historical-political processes of social movements, the state, and extractive industries) offered a strategic site for the international rights of nature movement to further their nascent “project”. I begin by tracing the rights of nature as a political project, closely aligning it with the trajectory of the international rights of nature movement, paying particular attention to the role of certain organisations based in the United States. Within this section I illustrate the roles of biocentrism, holism, and rights, within the rights of nature project. I then go on to consider the particular historical and political dynamics of Ecuador which, I argue, provided such fruitful ground for the emergence of the rights of nature at a national-constitutional level. Here I draw attention to the role of the indigenous movement in shaping the country’s politics over recent decades, as well as the significance of certain aspects of the environmental movement, with commentary also put on the strategic alliance between these two groups in the context of resistance against the country’s extractivist model of development. I then go on to discuss how actors from

these movements were involved in the writing of Ecuador's new constitution in 2007, and their impact on the legal-formulation of the rights of nature. Finally, I illustrate the contemporary issues facing the rights of nature in Ecuador, focusing on the practical implementation of these rights, as well as the relationship between activists and the state.

Chapter 4 sets out the methodology that underpins my research. I begin by outlining the core tenets of an ethnographic approach to research, reflecting particularly on the processes of critical ethnography. I then lay out the ways in which I went about selecting the relevant spaces for my research, identifying participants, recruiting participants, as well as providing a reflection on the role of "deep hanging out" as both a method of data collection as well as recruitment. I then go on to outline the different approaches to participant observation which I utilised (active and passive participant observation), and how I used them in different situations – namely street protests and organised discussion groups. Following this, I discuss the two types of interviews which I used (semi-structured and unstructured interviews) in order to complement my other forms of data collection. I then finish the data collection section with a discussion of discourse analysis, the key method utilised for the data presented in chapter 7, where I analyse the corpus of documents made available by the United Nations on their Harmony with Nature project.

Chapter 5 is the first of the three empirical chapters presented in this thesis. The chapter explores the radicalisation of the rights of nature movement in Ecuador, drawing on my ethnographic work conducted with rights of nature activists during a series of street protests in Quito. I show that grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador favour a fundamentally anti-state, and subsequently nationally counter-hegemonic, narrative of the rights of nature. I argue that this is the case due to the contentious relationship that exists between activists and the state, particularly in the context of mobilisation against extractivism. Consequently, I posit that for grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, the rights of nature are embedded within the state-society-extractivism nexus. Given that the state plays a key role in the country's extractivist model of development, the promotion and defense of the rights of nature emerging from civil society has been pushed to the fringes, and consequently radicalised. I begin by establishing what it means to be a grassroots rights of nature activist in Ecuador, predicated on the notion that these rights of nature activists primarily target their activism at issues in Ecuador itself. Following this I explore the significance of the protest space within rights of nature

activism in Ecuador, before then going on to illustrate the spatial and temporal contexts of the protests I attended. I then analyse the role of anti-extractivism within a broader anti-state discourse within the narratives presented by these activists around the rights of nature, focusing particularly on the role of legitimacy in the context of who is responsible for defending the rights of nature. This is supplemented with an account and analysis of a protest in Quito on the 19th of March 2015. I then go on to discuss how a key shift occurred in the activist identities of my participants, moving away from one of legitimacy and lawfulness towards one of increased radicalism and illegality; I posit that this was the result of rising tensions between activists and the state in the context of (anti-) extractivism. In order to show how this shift occurred I discuss particular actions and narratives utilised by the state, and then demonstrate how these became internalised and embodied by the activists themselves; this is supplemented with an account and analysis of a later protest I attended in Quito on the 13th of August 2015.

Chapter 6 is the second empirical chapter of this thesis. The chapter focuses on how the rights of nature are articulated as various activist knowledges, drawing on my ethnographic work conducted with rights of nature activists over a series of organised discussion groups which were designed to foster the production and sharing of knowledge around the rights of nature. Building upon the findings of Chapter 5, I show that anti-state narratives, particularly in the context of (anti-)extractivism remain central to these rights of nature discourses. I argue that this manifests through two key narrative threads – the decommodification of nature, as well as the decolonisation of knowledge and territory. Furthermore, I posit that these conceptualisations of, and subjectivities around, the rights of nature are embedded within a contested “ecology of knowledges” (particularly in the context of issues such as biocentrism and anthropocentrism) which functions within and across different geographical scales. Fundamentally, while reinforcing the finding that the rights of nature are commonly viewed in anti-state terms, this chapter reveals that the cultural politics of the rights of nature movement in Ecuador is complex and nuanced. I begin by clarifying the spatial and temporal contexts of the meetings, before moving on to a discussion of knowledge ecologies within social movements, particularly in the sense of how contestation and hybridisation between knowledges can occur across geographical place and scale. I then discuss the first of the two narrative threads (decommodification of nature) by illustrating how this functions within the broader anti-state discourse outlined in Chapter 5, as well as how activists draw on positions across the anthropocentric-

biocentric spectrum to formulate interpretations of what the rights of nature signify. I then move on to analyse the second of the two narrative threads (decolonisation of knowledge and territory), where I begin by discussing the (arguably problematic) association of the rights of nature with indigenous peoples and indigenous knowledges. I then show how rights of nature narratives of knowledge are primarily concerned with issues such as eurocentrism and the role of the United States, embedded within the continual anti-state and anti-extractivist discourse. Following this I look at how narratives around the decolonisation of territory further reproduce the anti-state and anti-extractivist discourse, drawing particular attention to the ways in which extractive industries are represented as colonising forces in both national and international contexts. I finish with a reflection on how these themes constitute fundamentally counter-hegemonic knowledges, which compliment the broader position of the rights of nature movement in Ecuador, as I explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7 is the final empirical chapter of the thesis. It analyses how internationally-networked rights of nature activists from around the world attempt to “scale-up” the rights of nature. I draw on my analysis of the corpus of available material from the United Nations Harmony with Nature project in order to do this. I argue that the role of the rights of nature within this project has, over time, become dominated by elite activists (predominantly from the global north), who forge a narrative of the rights of nature that is embedded within a post-materialist cultural politics, concerned with promoting the intrinsic value of nature. Furthermore, I show that the process of “scaling-up” in this context is reliant on embedding the rights of nature within discourses of development, which I posit to be state-centric, institution-centric, and universalist in their ethos. I argue that, when we consider how these issues are compounded, they present a divergent counter-hegemonic project to that which grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador articulate. In line with this, I consider the Harmony with Nature project to be appropriative of the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador by framing it as a success, and by misrepresenting (or indeed, not representing at all) the lived realities of rights of nature activists in the country. I begin by historicising the United Nations Harmony with Nature project, tracing its inception within a broader framework of sustainable development, followed by a discussion of the extent to which the project can be considered counter-hegemonic. I then go on to illustrate the cultural politics instilled within the Harmony with Nature project, and how the rights of nature fit in to its proposed framework.

Following this, I move on to a discussion of how state-centrism and institution-centrism remain central to the Harmony with Nature project, with a particular focus on how this affects the subsequent articulations of the rights of nature. Finally, I analyse how the case of Ecuador is used to support the broad agenda established by the rights of nature activists taking part in the Harmony with Nature project. I argue that the counter-hegemonic narrative formulated by these international rights of nature activists in fact comes to reproduce the hegemony of the Ecuadorian state in its ability to administer the rights of nature on a national level. Given that this is what grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador challenge, I posit that not only do these counter-hegemonies diverge, but that the “scaled-up” manifestation of the rights of nature impacts grassroots efforts in a negative manner.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion to the thesis. I begin by synthesising the arguments laid out in the previous chapters by providing a summary of my key research findings. I frame this according to the central research questions which guided the thesis, as laid out in Chapter 1. Next, I demonstrate my contributions to knowledge, focusing on the themes and concepts, both empirical and theoretical, with which my research engages. Here I position my conclusions within wider debates on the rights of nature, social movements, and the environment. Finally, I indicate where further research might be conducted in order to gain deeper understandings of the issues I have analysed throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2. From Social Movements to the Rights of Nature

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is predicated on three key concepts which must first be explored and explained in order for the arguments developed throughout this research to be contextualised and understood.

These three themes are:

- Social movements
- The environment
- Conceptualisations of nature

Within this chapter I explain why these themes are central to the overall argument upon which this thesis is based, and why they are significant to understanding the promotion and defense of the rights of nature in Ecuador. I bring together perspectives from human geography and political ecology in order to contribute unique and original insights to the discussions on the rights of nature in Ecuador, especially around issues such as place, scale, and transnationalism.

The chapter is divided into two core sections, based upon empirical and conceptual discussions respectively. The first section will consider how Latin American social movements have engaged with issues around the environment, and in particular the ways in which the environment and environmental issues intersect within a myriad of social, political, and economic processes (such as the extraction of natural resources, violation of human rights, and the production of climate change). Within this I consider how the emergence and the defense of the rights of nature in Ecuador are bound within these broader processes, and how the analysis and concurrent arguments put forward in this thesis can enable us to critically consider how these rights manifest and function within this wider context, and how my research sits within the broader field work.

In order to do this, I will briefly detail how social movements and social movement theory have been engaged with by human geographers and political ecologists, especially in the context of Latin America, before moving on to a discussion of the nexus that exists between social movements and the protection of the environment, again with a geographical focus on the Latin American region. I draw attention to the role that social

movements have played in shaping the political landscapes of their respective countries, particularly in the context of many Andean countries, and most specifically in the context of Ecuador. Given the empirical examples and material dealt with in this thesis, I choose to focus on the ways in which social movements operate within and across geographical scales, their tactics of resistance (for example, street protest, the occupying of public spaces, and the production and dissemination of knowledge), their cultural politics, as well as issues around inclusion and exclusion. These issues remain salient within the overall discussion of the promotion and defense of the rights of nature in Ecuador put forward by this thesis due to the fact that, as I argue, they directly impact the manner in which these rights manifest and function, albeit often problematically.

Afterwards I move on to a discussion of the ways in which the concept of “nature” has been engaged with by human geographers and political ecologists, particularly in the context of neoliberal nature, nature as a site of (counter-)hegemony, and the nature-society dualism. This chapter illustrates how these three issues are inextricably linked, and how the nexus between them is particularly useful for understanding the rights of nature in Ecuador. This is because, as I argue, the emergence of the rights of nature (both in Ecuador and beyond) disrupts conventional understandings of nature-society relationships by treating “nature” as a legal and moral actor, as well as a bearer of rights. This speaks to issues around not only formal political and legal social structures and institutions, but also the fundamental challenge put to the ontological assumptions that guide social attitudes towards (and perspectives on) nature - especially in the sense of value, morality, and justice. This discussion on the conceptualisation of nature is significant given the fact that the rights of nature are inherently bound within conceptualisations and assumptions around what nature *is* and how “it” should be regarded within social, political, economic, legal, and cultural frameworks. I consider the ways in which ideas around nature are highly contested (both within academia and beyond), but also how work in human geography and political ecology have enabled us to regard nature as socially produced, constructed, and subsequently operationalised. I draw on literature from poststructuralist, feminist, and post-Marxist political ecologies, as well as more-than-human geographies, in order to consider how the emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador can enable us to better understand the problematic and complex subject of nature-society relationships.

2.1.1 Political Ecology

While multifaceted and heterogeneous in its nature, political ecology is most commonly viewed as a framework of thought that seeks to analyse the relations of power that are found at the intersection between society and the ecological web of life within which it exists (Walker, 2005; Peet and Watts, 2004). As a discipline it draws extensively on perspectives from human geography and political economy. On this spectrum I regard this thesis as drawing more from human geography, given the attention given to micro-level processes within the workings of social movements, as well as the direct concern with geographies of scale and multi-scalar power relations.

I identify this thesis as a piece of scholarship that contributes to the broad literature on political ecology for two key reasons that align with Peet and Watts (2004), and Watts (2000) respectively:

- 1) It “understands the imaginary basis of [social movements’] oppositions and visions for a better life and the discursive character of their politics, and sees the possibilities for broadening environmental issues into a movement for livelihood entitlements, and social justice.” (Peet and Watts, 2004, pp. 38-39).
- 2) It seeks to explore conflicts around environmental issues, particularly in the context of “knowledge, power and practice” and “politics, justice and governance.” (Watts, 2003, pp. 257).

However, these two articulations of the character of political ecology must not be taken as default definitions. Indeed, it is almost absurd to attempt an all-encompassing definition of political ecology, given its heterogeneous make-up. Instead, political ecology embraces a rich tapestry of definitions which contribute to the overall rejection of, and opposition to, what Robbins (2012) terms “*apolitical ecologies*”, in particular those that align closely with the political economic status-quo, also known as the *modernisation* approach(es) (for a summary of some of these approaches see Buttel, 2000).

Furthermore, the myriad of political ecology perspectives share the core assumption that changes in the environment and ecological conditions are fundamentally political processes, and that the costs and benefits (and thereby the winners and losers) are not distributed equally (Robbins, 2012). Consequently, political ecology tends to direct its questions at this maldistribution, as well as the social and political structures that allow said maldistribution to function. In this sense, there is an inherent position of resistance

and social critique that lies within political ecology perspectives, grounded in discussions of nature-society relations.

2.2 Social movements and the environment in Latin America

2.2.1 Social movements and key concepts in social movement theory

The role of social movements in Latin America has drawn significant academic attention in recent decades, particularly in the wake of several waves of important political shifts within the region since the early 1980s (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992). From resistance directed toward neoliberal structural adjustment policies, to the advancement of indigenous rights, or agrarian reform, the power of social movements to critique and mobilise against the status-quo has helped to shape and reform the political landscape across many Latin American countries (Stahler-Sholk et al., 2014).

However, what does it mean to speak of a social movement? Producing a specific, and all-encompassing definition of what exactly constitutes a social movement is of course problematic, as by their very nature social movements are complex, heterogenous, and dynamic in their existence and functionality (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992). However, scholars working on social movements broadly agree that a social movement is a collective of social and political actors, made up of a variety of individuals and organisations who advocate contentious political stances (Nicholls, 2007). The notion of contention stems from the fact that social movements' positions are inherently at odds with the positions of certain other groups in society. Consequently, social movements' agendas are often constituted by perspectives which challenge the ideological status-quo, or which challenge other actors and their agendas, operating within political, cultural, and economic hierarchies of power. Importantly, social movements differ from special interest groups and political parties in the sense that they operate as loosely associated, horizontal (i.e. non-hierarchical) networks comprised of distinct actors and organisations which attempt to interact on the basis of forming and maintaining alliances, which operate in a decentralised fashion (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Furthermore, their tactics and strategies for actualising their contentious politics are often achieved through non-traditional means; this refers both to their decentralised and structurally horizontal nature, but also to the actions which they take in order to mobilise their agendas, such as street

protests, demonstrations, or the establishing of coalitions between geographically disparate actors (Nicholls, 2007).

Given the deliberately contentious nature of social movements' political projects, they often tend to advocate for varying aspects of social justice, stemming from fundamental claims as to the redistribution of power and/or resources. In recent decades this has frequently manifested in the context of resistance toward the uneven nature of capitalism, and more recently neoliberal capitalism. This has been the case both for social movements operating in the global north (for example see: Harter, 2004; Johnston, 1994; Morell, 2012; Pickerill, 2004) as well as the global south (for example see: Escobar, 2011, 1992; Forsyth, 2007, 2001; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2014).

Across many of the social sciences there has been a trend that seeks to rigidly classify social movements, and their motivations and tactics, into strict typologies that are more easily understood, consumed, and communicated within both mainstream and academic discourses. However, in the context of human geography, and to a large extent political ecology, this dedication to classification in the name of typological organisation is far less prominent (Perreault, 2008). Instead, human geography and political ecology have been more sympathetic to the highly complex, diverse, and often interlinked formations and functions of social movements, with particular attention in human geography being paid to, the roles of space and place (see Miller, 2000; Routledge, 1997; McAdam, 1982; Soja, 1980; Diani, 1997; Coleman, 1988). Fundamentally, work in these areas (see, for example: Escobar, 1998; Karriem, 2009; Machado, 2018; O'Connor, 1992) has been based on and elaborated upon the critiques of the ways in which power, particularly within and between capitalist political economies, is unevenly distributed, organised, and dispersed; and how social movements engage with, and emerge from, these uneven and unequal contexts of power.

Additionally, both in human geography and political ecology (and most significantly for this thesis), the concept of scale has been of great interest to scholars working on social movements, especially in the context of transnationalism and international activist networks. Crucially, it is not only spatial differentiation and variegation that is true of the dispersion of power, as power is also unevenly distributed and functionally-varied across and within geographical scales. For example, as Sikkink (2005) illustrates, the complex dynamics that lead to the availability and accessibility of political opportunities vary

drastically according to the scales at which different social movement actors operate. As a result of this, restraints, constrictions, and opportunities can be bound within scalar relations and hierarchies of power, especially within the context of the state and overlapping state-regulated spaces. This is particularly true when one considers the role of international institutions and organisations which are able to not only operate within, but also grant access to dense and far-reaching political, social, and economic networks, when compared with more locally or nationally bound actors (Sikkink, 2005; Keck and Sikkink, 2014).

Furthermore, the concept of scale has been salient in the context of social movements in the sense that some scholars have paid close attention to the process of “jumping” scale (see for example: Sikkink, 2005; Tarrow & McAdam, 2005; Glassman, 2002; Perreault, 2003; Laurie et al., 2003). This notion refers to the process by which social movement actors seek to access and operate within different geographical scales in order to expand their political opportunities. Furthermore, the same is also true for the issues and agendas put forward by these social movement actors; that is to say, political issues themselves can also “jump” scale along with the actors that advocate them (van Schendel, 2002). These ideas have been particularly pertinent in the context of Latin America, where indigenous and peasant movements have “jumped” scale in order to strengthen their positions and acquire greater visibility and access to resources. This most frequently occurs in the context of engaging supranational institutions such as the United Nations, as well as a variety of global development institutions and organisations (Laurie et al., 2003; Perrault, 2003; Keck and Sikkink, 2014; Glassman, 2005). This process of “jumping” scale has often been used to attempt to subvert and contest the power of global capital, but also to bypass the nation-state in circumstances where state coercion, oppression, or simply dysfunctionality hinders the potential progress available to social movements (Glassman, 2005).

However, it is important to remember that the process of “jumping” scale does not necessarily prioritise the international or the global; indeed, the international is also reliant on spatial and place-based localities which together form a co-constitutive political network of relationships (Marston et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to problematise the fact that issues of scale “jumping” imply a hierarchical and vertical relationship between scales, as well as the actors operating within them, and can discursively reproduce problematic binaries, such as that between the global and the local. As a

consequence of this, value-laden assumptions can be made which reinforce the ideological status-quo when considering the, in fact highly complex, nature of the flow of knowledge, resources, and political power between different geographical places and the agents that exist within them (Marston et al., 2005; Peck, 2009).

Evident, then, is that social movements are highly complex and diverse social phenomena, bound within a myriad of political power relations and networks. Human geography and political ecology have both contributed greatly to the problematising of spatial, place-based, and scalar issues, which had previously been largely ignored by social movements scholars (Nicholls, 2007; Perreault, 2008). Here I have highlighted the merits of taking a “scalar” approach to social movements, demonstrating that by examining and analysing the multi-scalar processes of social movements, we are able to better understand the complex interactions between actors and organisations. These interactions are, evidently, bound within the uneven distribution of power and political resources across geographical scales, and therefore by approaching social movements through a lens of scale we are able to more clearly understand the manner in which this uneven distribution shapes the manner in which social movements and social movement action manifests differently across a variety of geographical contexts.

Next I shall discuss how these issues and concepts have been utilised in the context of Latin America specifically, with a particular focus on social movements’ engagements with the protection of the environment.

2.2.2 Social movements and the protection of the environment in Latin America

“Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything, from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European - or later United States - capital, and as such has accumulated in distant centers of power. Everything: the soil, its fruits and its mineral-rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and to consume, natural resources and human resources. Production methods and class structure have been successively determined from outside for each area by meshing it into the universal gearbox of capitalism. To each area has been assigned a function, always for the benefit of the foreign metropolis of the moment, and the endless chain-of dependency has been endlessly extended. The chain has many more than two links. In Latin America it also

includes the oppression of small countries by their larger neighbors and, within each country's frontiers, the exploitation by big cities and ports of their internal sources of food and labor.”

(Galeano, 1997, pp. 2)

Struggles over natural resources, often some of the most common sites of social movements' engagement with the environment in Latin America, are intricately woven within the histories, the political economies, and the political ecologies of a region that was shaped by colonialism - a process and period of time that thrived off the extraction of resources for the purpose of fuelling development in certain areas of the world, at the expense of those areas from where the resources themselves came. Consequently, the issue of natural resource extraction in Latin America is inextricable from the region's experiences of past and present imperialisms, as well as the inherent connections these maintain with the global capitalist system.

Resource conflicts in Latin America have frequently been conceptualised in terms of local struggles versus global economic interests (Bebbington, 2009), and therefore along a *David versus Goliath* narrative. The indigenous community fighting against the occupation of its land by a multi-national oil corporation; or the campesino movement that is battling against the mining firm which continues to pollute the local water supply, contaminating crops and livestock pastures. These conflicts, as well as the social movements that seek to negotiate and combat them, are bound within the complex networks of power relations inherently constituted by global neoliberal capitalism and its forging of the extractive frontier (Arsel et al., 2016). It is no wonder, then, that the ire of many environmental social movements in Latin America is directed towards the actors which endorse, perpetuate, and defend such a system - be it the corporations, the state, or even other local actors who are complicit in the maintenance and operationalisation of such economic models of extractivism.

While the colonial period saw the lands of Latin America pillaged for their natural resources, so too did the neoliberal reforms put in place during the latter part of the twentieth century, designed to open the region's economies and political institutions to international flows of capital. Many Latin American countries, especially those across the Andean region as well as those with territory in the Amazon rainforest, were encouraged

to adopt economic policies based on the extraction and export of natural resources; this brought with it new political ecologies of development, democracy, and of resistance (Conde, 2017).

Social movements in Latin America have a rich history, as well as a rich tapestry of scholarly enquiry into their emergence, activities, successes, and failures. Notably, in the context of Latin America, social movements' engagement with the aforementioned phenomena of neoliberalism and global capitalism, especially concerning issues such as political representation, human rights, territorial disputes, and environmental concerns has all been of particular interest to experts, and have been well documented throughout the years (see for example the edited collections by: Alvarez et al., 1998; Escobar & Alvarez, 1992; Petras, 2011; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2014, 2008). Clearly, while Latin America has been of particular interest to scholars working on the emergence and functionalities of social movements, the myriad of different types of these movements has consequently burgeoned within academic literature as well. In recent decades this has especially been the case for human geography (despite the discipline joining the debates on social movements comparatively late when compared with some of the other social sciences). As Perreault (2008) shows, scholarship in human geography which focused on social movements in Latin America more than doubled between the early 90s and early 2000s, with the most common area of research being indigenous and ethnic identities (Perreault, 2008, pp. 1366).

For the purpose of this thesis I shall, in this chapter, primarily be focusing on Latin American social movements that have had a particular focus on the protection of the environment. However, it is important to state here that this environmental ethos does not exist within a vacuum, and that the protection of the environment can come from social movement actors who may not in fact identify as exclusively "environmental". For example, certain human rights abuses and the organisations that seek to combat them can often be closely linked to environmental issues, this is particularly salient in the case of some of the highly biodiverse regions within Latin America which suffer from extreme levels of natural resource extraction (Martinez-Alier, 2002). In this sense, I shall also seek to highlight the intricate networks and relationships that exist between different social movements and social movement actors that engage to varying degrees with environmental issues.

However, in order to further consider the ways in which certain social movements engage with environmental issues, it is first necessary to consider how and why these social movements emerge in the first place. Many human geographers and political ecologists, myself included, agree with the notion of conflicting ‘social metabolisms’ (see, for example: Conde, 2017; Dwivedi, 2001; Martinez-Alier, 2002). The notion of a ‘social metabolism’ refers to the intricate socio-economic networks that exist within different geographical locations, and which manifest across a variety of geographical scales. Then, the idea of these conflicting is referent to the processes and spaces in which different social metabolisms come into contact with one another, and the impact is seen to be negative. For example, it is commonly posited that the social metabolism of the global north is reliant upon ever-increasing sources of energy (Dwivedi, 2001; Martinez-Alier, 2014), and that this comes into direct contact with the social metabolisms of local communities in, for example, Latin America, where the resources to provide this energy are harvested. This is evident in situations where the pollutants from a mine, or an oil well, contaminate the soil or the water of local communities, thereby negatively impacting their subsistence livelihoods; and it is at these sites of socio-political struggle that social movements emerge.

From this point, it is important to state that notions of “environmentalism”, or “environmental activism”, are in many cases remarkably different in Latin America than in say, North America or Western Europe. By this I refer to the differences and nuances that exist at the intersection between human beings and the environment, and how these manifest differently across geographies of place, space, and scale. For example, as has been demonstrated in other research conducted on Latin American environmental movements, ideas of environmentalism are often intricately intertwined with local struggles for democratic representation, human rights, and health. This notion is what Martinez-Alier (2002) refers to as the “environmentalism of the poor”, contrasted with the forms of environmentalism more common in the United States and Western Europe which often take eco-centric views when considering eco-philosophical and eco-political issues.

This is exceptionally pertinent for the core arguments put forward in this thesis, and has immediate and significant impacts on the ways in which the rights of nature manifest within and across different layers and facets of the rights of nature movement. Fundamentally, what this thesis demonstrates is that these different perspectives on what

“environmentalism” is, or *should* be, results in a conflict of knowledge which causes inconsistencies and fragmentations within the different manifestations of the rights of nature, and the ways in which they are promoted and defended. However, the research upon which this thesis is based, and the subsequent arguments made, disrupt conventional understandings of the “environmentalism of the poor”, by demonstrating that environmentalisms of the global north and global south also exist within complex networks and ‘ecologies of knowledges’ (de Sousa Santos, 2009), where one may draw upon the other in order to forge contextually-relevant and place-based narratives of environmentalism. While this does not represent a rejection of the “environmentalism of the poor” thesis (indeed, I continue to draw on it extensively throughout this research), it does regard the notion that somehow philosophies and forms of environmentalism can be exclusively divided into global north and global south variants as problematic. I contend that attention must be paid to the networks of these ‘situated environmentalisms’ (Lawhon, 2013) in order to understand them in a more comprehensive manner.

The idea of the “environmentalism of the poor” is inextricably bound within the political economy and political ecology of wealth, natural resources, and development, as well as political and ethical issues around social justice. As Martinez-Alier (2014) notes: “Whereas wealthier people of the North have in general lost the idea of the environment as their source of livelihood, the poor and largely rural populations of the South are more connected to the environment, and thus have a more intimate understanding of what is at stake by not managing it carefully [...]. In the North on the other hand, while people consume large quantities of imported energy and materials, and produce increasing amounts of waste, many of the effects are exported elsewhere.” (Martinez-Alier, 2014, pp. 240).

Consequently, social movements attempt to rectify the power discrepancies that are rooted within this (mis)use of the environment and natural resources, either by direct (in some cases hostile) confrontation or by offering alternatives (Escobar, 2011; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). In this sense, the more crises that arise which are rooted in environmental issues, the more social movements are born and manifest within the affected countries, regions, or localities – however, it is worth remembering that social movements only rarely appear *from* abject poverty, given the chronic lack of resources and time that come as a result of such destitution (Bebbington, 2009). Rather, certain

levels of resources are necessary in order for a social movement to flourish, and this is evidently why the multi-scalar and geographically disparate nature of social movements is so important – so that those with few to no resources are able to acquire them through socio-political networks of solidarity and activism.

In the context of Latin America, this is most visible in examples of the extraction of natural resources, such as oil drilling, mining, deforestation, and water disputes. Research on natural resource extraction and social movements in Latin America (see for example: Bebbington et al., 2008; Celis, 2017; Escobar, 1998; Himley, 2013; Paredes, 2016; Jenkins and Rondón, 2015) is far-reaching and deals with a wide range of issues; this is unsurprising given the multi-faceted nature and myriad of social issues that intersect with such extraction. For example, research on mining and the subsequent anti-mining movements that spawn has been particularly prominent in recent years, with significant scholarly enquiry having been developed in the context of the Andean region in particular (see especially the extensive catalogue of work by Anthony Bebbington: for example, Bebbington, 2012; Bebbington, 2009; Bebbington et al, 2008; Bebbington et al, 2007). Such scholarship on anti-mining, and resource extraction in general, in Latin America has frequently focused on the organised negotiation and contestation processes around when, where, and how proposed projects are approached, confirmed, or resisted, often with particular attention being paid to the different organisational and institutional actors who are involved in these resistance processes (see: Muradian et al, 2003; Moore & Velásquez, 2012). Understanding these processes and strategies of contestation is crucial to the overall understanding of how social movements work in the context of resistance to natural resource extraction, as well as the cultural politics that underpin their actions.

Strategies vary from radical forms of social movement resistance such as street protests which aim to disrupt and occupy public spaces in order to give visibility to political issues, establishing blockades to either hinder entrance to communities (or where this takes place in more urbanised centres, to disrupt the flow of transport in and out of cities) (Cameron et al, 2012; Becker, 2010; Helwege, 2015; McDonell, 2015), to participatory methods of resistance such as consultation forums and their associated networks, which attempt to engage in formal, institutional democratic processes, in efforts to reject extractive activities (Chartock, 2013; Riofrancos, 2017; Walter and Urkidi, 2017). However, these forms of contestation and negotiation are not necessarily mutually

exclusive; indeed as Anguelovski (2011) demonstrates, the role of radical contestation is significant in the run-up to consultations with extractive industries, as communities and associated social movements attempt to assert power so that any negotiations that do take place can do so on more equal footing. Furthermore, social movements do not limit themselves exclusively to certain types of strategies or others, rather they operationalise different strategies depending on the “specific historical and environmental circumstances” (Peluso, 1992), and the varying social and political tools that are available to them at any given time (Conde, 2017).

Furthermore, literature on social movements and the environment in Latin America has also taken great interest in the conflicts that emerge around the issue of natural resource extraction (see for example: Carruthers and Rodriguez, 2009; Dwivedi, 2001; Kröger and Lalander, 2016). These conflicts exist and manifest both at the level of knowledge and in the physical materialities of relationships that intersect along the lines of territorial or resource-based connections between individuals, groups, and communities. For example Muradian et al. (2003) demonstrate the networked flows of resistance and the embedded cultural politics within these networks can vary significantly between actors operating at different scales, again akin to the fragmentations that appear between internationally-operating organisations in the global north and local communities they engage with in the global south. They show that, in the context of one particular mine in northern Peru, attitudes towards mining resistance that drive the local socio-political struggle are more grounded in issues of community interconnection, dependence, and trust, as opposed to environmentalism for the sake of an innate and essentialised ecological value system, as is found within some international NGOs (Muradian et al, 2003).

This, akin to Martinez-Alier’s “environmentalism of the poor”, again reflects the different ways in which environmentalism and environmental movements can manifest culturally across different geographical spaces, as well as the problematic relationship which often exists between symbolic and material approaches to the environment. Additionally, and perhaps more obviously, they show that different value systems also exist between the other (non-environmental) actors engaged in mining disputes, for example between privately contracted “experts”, mining companies, and local populations. This, they argue, is often what leads to conflicts around natural resources; this is significant given that, as previously stated, it is these conflicts which social

movements frequently find themselves at the forefront of. Bebbington (1996) also illustrates this issue of conflicting value systems in the context of resistance to the extraction of natural resources, when he demonstrates that such resistance can often be based upon notions of territoriality and the preservation of local economies. In this sense, the local community resistance is predicated on the rejection of accumulation by dispossession, against privatisation, and against outside actors arriving to use the community's land for themselves.

The notion of competing value systems is also elaborated upon by Dwivedi (2001), who illustrates the necessity to conceptualise and approach environmental issues, and the social movements involved with them, in a multi-dimensional fashion (that is to say in a manner by which the different levels, facets, actors, and the varying tones of cultural politics are simultaneously visible and problematised) thereby accounting for the inherent complexities and collisions both of ideologies and practices. Dwivedi also attributes the ever-deepening and expanding of these networks to the “globalisation of environmental protest” (Dwivedi, 2001 pp. 21), which, he argues, is significantly linked to the rapid rise in communications technologies, most specifically the internet. In this sense, the expansion and deepening of environmental social movement networks is a double-edged sword and does not simply imply an egalitarian strengthening of a fictitious homogeneity of political issues, perspectives, and value systems equally distributed across geographical space and scale. This is significant in the context of this thesis, as I explore how these competing value systems manifest within rights of nature activism in both local and international settings. This issue of conflicting value systems is not limited to geographies of scale in a vertical sense, however. As, for example, Avcı (2015) shows, the same problems can arise when indigenous populations are forced into territorial and resource-based disputes with mestizo populations who live within the same area. In these contexts, indigenous movements may attempt to mobilise political and cultural identities, knowledges, and the value systems bound within these in order to secure access to land and the resources within it for the purposes of protecting both it and their livelihoods.

However, as Jenkins (2014) states, much (although certainly not all) of this work focuses on macro-level theorisations and processes, often with a particular focus on institutional or organisational perspectives, with scarce attention being paid to the micro-level issues which arise in the context of individual activists' lives and their individual perspectives. Pickerill and Chatterton (2010) have also highlighted this issue in the

context of scholarship on activism more generally, demonstrating that it is a problematic trend within many facets of the literature. This same issue is reproduced in the context of much scholarship produced on the rights of nature and the rights of nature movement in Ecuador (see, for example: Tanasescu, 2016; Borràs, 2016; Daly, 2012). While this thesis does draw attention to some of the more institutional processes and dynamics that exist around the rights of nature, it also directly contributes to micro-level understandings and perspectives on the significance of the rights of nature, and how they manifest through individuals' own and collective action.

Fundamentally, then, it is clear that the environment has been and remains a site of contestation, both symbolically and materially, in Latin America. Social movements have often played a key role in this contestation through their radical and non-radical methods of resistance and organisation, negotiating the conflicts between affected peoples, private business, and the state, while also setting environmental agendas which shape the varying political ecologies across their regions. However, divisions and contestations also exist within the movements themselves, often bound within divergent value systems and cultural politics, particularly around what the environment itself represents, and the inherent conceptualisations of nature-society relations that are bound within this.

2.2.3 Social movements and the protection of the environment in Ecuador

Ecuador's experience with social movements and their engagement with the environment is much like many other Andean nations' (often grounded in the context of extractivism), however with certain differences and nuances, attributable to the country's own unique history and domestic politics.

To begin, the issue of oil has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping the environmentalism(s) of Ecuador; the extraction and exportation of oil has been the cornerstone of Ecuador's economy since the 1970s, when the military government began funding large-scale public projects via the wealth gained through selling the commodity. Crucially, the Correa administration (significant given that it was under president Correa that the rights of nature were enshrined into the country's constitution) benefited the most from oil price rises when compared with any other Ecuadorian government since the end of military rule (Riofrancos, 2015). Furthermore, oil-related issues have historically been

the most visible both nationally and internationally as regards environmental politics in Ecuador (Lewis, 2016). In this sense, notions of environmentalism and social movements in the context of Ecuador are fundamentally bound within the geographies and political ecologies of oil extraction, and while mining has become more prominent in recent eco-political discussions in the country, the spectre of oil looms large over the Ecuadorian environmentalist context.

Unsurprisingly, then, the role of environmental social movements in Ecuador has historically, and only up until recent years, been heavily skewed towards the lowlands Amazonian region (Davidov, 2013), given that Ecuador's oil wealth exists almost exclusively within its territory in the Amazon rainforest, and large-scale mining has only recently become common in the country. As has been illustrated by both Davidov (2016) and Sawyer (2002), among others, this is significant for the forms of environmentalism that have characterised social movement involvement in Ecuador's eco-political arena. Fundamentally, we can see that environmentalists and activist groups operating in Ecuador have been able to capitalise on the symbolism that comes from the Amazon rainforest (in as much as it represents a global commons, and a home to native indigenous groups who have become exceptionally adept in self-orientalising for political means), in order to effectively scale-up their activism from local struggles to international and transnational ones (Davidov, 2016; Sawyer, 2002). However, the particular role of oil in Ecuador's environmental history has resulted in divergent forms of environmentalism in the country (Davidov, 2013). For the purpose of this thesis this is important, as I demonstrate that for grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador the issues of oil and mining are used in conjunction with one another in order to further a wholly anti-extractivist agenda.

Within the current academic literature on social movements and the question of oil drilling in Ecuador, two cases remain the most visible – the Chevron-Texaco lawsuit which began in the 1990s, and the decision made by the Correa administration to drill in the Yasuní National Park. I choose to focus on these two situations because, as stated, they are the most prevalent within the literature on social movements and oil in Ecuador, and furthermore they both demonstrate clear cases of social movements effectively scaling-up their methods of resistance in order to better acquire political momentum and the resources necessary to bring greater visibility to their causes. While social movement resistance to, for example mining, is indeed present in Ecuador, these social movements

have not scaled-up and engaged as significantly with transnational activist networks, nor with the international political community. However, a growing body of work is emerging on the subject of social movements and their resistance to mining in Ecuador, especially since president Correa announced in 2012 that he wanted mining to play a larger role in the country's economy. For detailed accounts of social movement resistance to mining in Ecuador see, for example: (Avcı, 2015; Buchanan, 2013; Jenkins and Rondón, 2015; Kuecker, 2007)

The Chevron-Texaco legal saga began after local indigenous and campesino communities mobilised in order to hold the oil giant to account for the massive damage that had been caused by the leaking oil emerging from the primary pipeline utilised by the company. This (the trans-Andean) pipeline spilled an estimated 16.8 million gallons of crude oil into Amazonian headwaters between 1972 and 1990, with secondary pipelines estimated to have leaked similar levels as well (Sawyer, 2001). As Chevron-Texaco invested minimal resources into the maintenance of these pipelines, and the cleaning up of these spills, affected communities and Ecuadorian environmentalists pursued legal action against the company in order to seek recompense for the damages to their livelihoods and lands as a result of the toxic chemicals that had infiltrated the soils and waters. The lawsuit marked the first time in Ecuador that subaltern groups had mobilised in order to file suit against a major extractive corporation in defense of the environment and their human rights. In this sense, the case of Chevron-Texaco was one that once again operated along a hybridisation between defending the environment and defending human rights abuses, akin to many of the situations highlighted thus far in the academic literature on social movements and the environment in Latin America.

The indigenous movement of Ecuador proved to be crucial to the mobilisation of the campaign against Texaco, especially the Amazonian regional branch CONFENIAE (La Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonia Ecuatoriana/ The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) (for a comprehensive account of the rise of the indigenous movement in Ecuador see for example: Zamosc, 2006, 2008; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2005 pp. 136 – 175). Indeed, as Sawyer (2001, 2002, 2006) highlights, it was in the CONFENIAE headquarters where the first formally organised meetings regarding the decision to confront Chevron-Texaco took place. From there the indigenous, campesino, and environmentalist alliance organised and mobilised against the oil giant through a variety of institutional and radical forms of

resistance and contention. This variety of social movement resistance was significant, in the sense that while the institutionally-based lawsuit was eventually the centrepiece of the fight against the oil company, the widespread social resistance and civil disobedience through events such as protests, and the presence of anti-Texaco graffiti in many major cities all across Ecuador demonstrated that the Chevron-Texaco issue was by no means limited to one specific geographical space or group of people (Lewis, 2016; Sawyer 2002, 2001). Indeed, Chevron-Texaco became a highly politicised national topic, and it still remains so to this day in the context of Ecuador's contentious extractivist economy, and the ways in which social movements engage with actors that endorse and maintain such an economic model of development (Lewis, 2016; Davidov, 2013).

These forms of social movement resistance did, however, reap significant backlash from the Ecuadorian state. Research on social movements and their engagements with neoliberalism, and in particular the neoliberal state, has demonstrated that in many circumstances the state remains as the vanguard of private and corporate interests (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2005). During the protests and civil unrest that came from the anti- Chevron-Texaco movement, the Ecuadorian state cracked down heavily on activists and protesters, showing that the newly neoliberalising government was indeed more concerned with protecting global economic interests over those of the aggrieved local population (Sawyer, 2001). As we shall see both later in this chapter and throughout this thesis, the problematic relationship between the Ecuadorian state and environmental social movements has remained relatively unchanged, with president Correa's government engaging in similar tactics throughout his time in office.

Furthermore, the matter of Chevron-Texaco propelled Ecuador's environmental and indigenous politics to the global stage. Crucially, the local indigenous, campesino, and environmentalist alliance operationalised a global discourse of environmentalism which swiftly caught the attention of green groups in North America and Europe who, within months, joined their political alliance (Sawyer, 2001). In this sense, Ecuadorian social movement actors were significantly aware of the necessity to shift their cultural politics, as well as engage in strategic primitivism in order to heighten their visibility in the international political arena and across geographical scales, a strategy that remains salient for many still today (Davidov, 2013).

Finally, the movement itself had three key targets for their efforts of resistance – the government, the corporation, and the international banks who they saw as responsible for Ecuador’s reliance on oil for the purpose of development (importantly, the launching of the Chevron-Texaco lawsuit coincided with a significant wave of neoliberal reforms in the country). While the social movements’ national mobilisations enabled them to confront the government, it was the scaling-up and transnationalisation of their resistance to the international level which helped them to more effectively challenge the Chevron-Texaco corporation itself, and to a lesser extent the banks (Sawyer, 2002, 2001). Furthermore, while scholars have not made specific reference to this, the shifting of discourses and cultural politics reflects the contestation of different value systems and perspectives on what environmentally-minded social movements regard as significant in terms of the environment.

The research conducted on the Chevron-Texaco issue in Ecuador illustrates the effective tactics and mobilisations of social movements in the country, contextualised by the socio-political interconnections between the environment and human rights. Furthermore, it highlights the ways in which social movements’ engagement with the environment is bound within the global capitalist political economy, especially as regards the issue of extractivism, and its role in models of economic development. The research explored here thus far also illustrates the ways in which environmental social movements in Ecuador successfully drew attention to their cause by scaling-up their forms of resistance and engaging in transnational activist networks, while concurrently adapting their discourses and cultural politics to more effectively obtain political standing and the resources necessary to confront the targets of their resistance.

While the issue of Chevron-Texaco has remained a salient topic in Ecuador’s eco-political context, more recently the subject of the Yasuní national park, and president Correa’s eventual decision to drill for oil there, has become the new face of the fight against oil in the country, with significant social movement mobilisations taking place against it. The Yasuní issue began with president Correa’s initial, and much internationally praised, plan to “keep the oil underground” with the Yasuní-ITT initiative (for more on this initiative specifically, see: Larrea and Warnars, 2009), a project that had significant support from indigenous and environmental groups within the country, many of which had assisted him in gaining power. However, once the initiative fell through in

2013, large-scale protests erupted across the country, already existing social movements mobilised, and a new movement known as the *Yasunidos* emerged.

Similar to the Chevron-Texaco situation, the subject of the Yasuní has been politicised throughout Ecuadorian civil society, and has not in any way limited to a specific group of people or geographical location (Lewis, 2016). Indigenous groups, youth groups, and otherwise non-political actors expressed outrage at the government's decision to drill for oil in one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, let alone the country. Indeed, as Coryat (2015) states, the government certainly did not help itself by widely disseminating information through media coverage on the subject of the Yasuní-ITT initiative, praising the pristine nature of the region, and heralding it as a national treasure. Fundamentally, however, the case of the Yasuní national park reignited Ecuador's national political dialogue between the perceived necessity of a poor country to extract natural resources in order to support its population, and the perceived necessity to preserve the country's mega-diverse flora and fauna, as well as the livelihoods of the people living within close proximity of it (for a comprehensive discussion of this without a specific focus on social movements, see: Lalander, 2014, 2016).

As has been demonstrated throughout research conducted on the subject of oil drilling in the Yasuní, values varied significantly in regards to what the national park symbolised to the nation, and this is often reflected in different social movements' articulations of their resistance; however, at the same time many of these issues continue to be interwoven by actors mobilising politically for the preservation of the national park. For example, as Rival (2010) illustrates, the core themes which are focused upon by many social movement actors are the inherent value of the biodiverse nature of the park itself, as well as the protection of indigenous groups who live there, especially two thus far uncontacted groups. Other groups, such as environmental economists, both within Ecuador and abroad, attempted to quantify the biodiversity which exists in the Yasuní, and contrast this with the monetary value of the oil below its soils. This received mixed reactions from the previously mentioned groups, some of which saw this as a valuable exercise in promoting the protection of the national park, while others refused to accept that such a thing is quantifiable in the first place (regardless of whether or not it supported their position) (Rival, 2010). In this sense, cultural and political differences around what the park symbolises emerged within the widespread and disparate movement(s) that

sought to politicise the issue, and while they remained united, it was clear that the valuation of the “nature” of the Yasuní brought points of contention.

Furthermore, the case of the emergence of the Yasunidos was particularly interesting, given that the movement itself was the first environmental social movement in Ecuador to emerge completely independently of any political parties or the indigenous movement (Coryat, 2015). This is not to say that other environmental *groups* had not emerged previously in this fashion, however these other groups were primarily formal organisations such as NGOs which maintained a centralised organisational structure. Instead, the Yasunidos represent a decentralised, heterogenous, and fundamentally youth-led collective with a core focus on challenging extractivism in Ecuador.

The Yasunidos conduct activism both on the streets, in political institutions, and online, however the vast majority of their activism is based on social media. For this reason, their primary method of resistance has been critiqued as having limited reach, given that access to the internet and social media is by no means universal in Ecuador (Coryat, 2015 pp. 3751). However, given their social media power, their movement spread beyond Ecuador, with Yasunidos Facebook pages emerging in places such as Holland, the UK, and the United States. In this sense, the power of social media enabled the Yasunidos to scale-up their movement, and bring their issues to a global audience, again reminiscent of Dwivedi’s “globalisation of environmental protest” (Dwivedi, 2001 pp. 21). However, in this case such a process was not driven by institutional or NGO campaigns, but rather through horizontal networks of activism driven by the use of social media, a strategy increasingly employed by youth-led activist groups and social movements around the world (Juris and Pleyers, 2009).

However, as previously stated, the Yasunidos’ activism was not exclusively limited to online resistance and campaigns. In August 2013 they mobilised to enact a referendum on the government’s decision to drill for oil in the Yasuní national park, and while they drastically exceeded the number of votes officially required by the government to announce a referendum, the government denied their efforts and renounced their campaign, regarding it as illegitimate (Coryat, 2015; Morley, 2017). Indeed, conflicts between the Correa government and environmental social movements has been well documented, with the state cracking down on protests, detaining movement leaders, and dissolving NGOs involved in promoting environmental activism (Arsel and Angel, 2012;

Becker, 2013; Dosh and Kligerman, 2009). In this sense, President Correa's "post-neoliberal" Ecuador has been seen to remain as the vanguard of the extractive industry (and also becoming a direct part of it in the case of nationalisations of extractive businesses), much as previous administrations had before him (Elwood et al., 2016; Radcliffe, 2012; Shade, 2015; Wilson and Bayón, 2017).

Finally, the role of social movements in securing the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador was crucial. This influence was two-fold, both in the context of the formal process of constitutionalisation of the rights of nature specifically (Espinosa, 2015), as well in the context of garnering support for the drafts of the constitution in its entirety, which was important for Rafael Correa's ability to secure his mandate (Lalander, 2016). In this sense, social movements (both environmental and indigenous) were vital to the shaping of the formal and institutional manifestation of the rights of nature in Ecuador (this is explored in more depth in chapter 3 of this thesis).

Furthermore, the ability to constitutionalise the rights of nature in Ecuador was reliant on a transnational network of social movement activism with significant input as to the drafting of these rights coming from a U.S.-based NGO, and key actor in the international rights of nature movement (Akchurin, 2015; Espinosa, 2015; Tanasescu, 2013). This NGO provided experts on the subject of the rights of nature, and particularly on the matter of translating such rights into constitutional law, thereby establishing a knowledge network between the two countries and the social movement actors fighting for the promotion and defense of the rights of nature. In this sense, the transnational advocacy network proved crucial to the formalisation of the rights of nature through the linking of particular personnel, their expertise, and their own experiences, as well as conceptualisations, of the rights of nature. This, too, is discussed in greater depth in chapter 3.

However, the current literature on the rights of nature in Ecuador largely focuses on the significance of these rights in as much as they mark a radical shift away from conventional methods of development, with scarce attention being paid to the forms of activism and varying cultural politics that exist at the forefront of the rights of nature issue. For example, some have discussed the intricacies and problematic nature of the constitutional articles themselves, highlighting the fact that the constitution itself not only grants rights for nature, but also grants extensive provisions for the (state-led)

exploitation of natural resources in the name of development, thereby producing an inherently contradictory eco-political situation in the country (Kauffman and Martin, 2017; Kröger and Lalander, 2016; Lalander, 2016; Radcliffe, 2012; Tanasescu, 2016a). Others have argued that the inclusion of the rights of nature at the constitutional level in Ecuador represents a fundamental shift in thinking around environmental law that significantly disrupts the global capitalist system and its associated ideology (Acosta, 2015; Acosta and Martínez, 2009; Gudynas, 2011a, 2016; Kothari et al., 2014), and that the subsequent emergence of these rights in other countries demonstrates a growing and successful trend in such thinking (Borràs, 2016; Youatt, 2017).

Furthermore, the majority of this current research on the subject of the rights of nature in Ecuador remains focused on macro-level theorisations and considerations. Consequently, this results in little to no attention being paid to the dynamics and forms of social movement resistance that materialise around these rights at the grassroots level, especially in the context of those rights of nature activists who operate outside of formal organisational or institutional spaces. Therefore, this thesis analyses and discuss these processes of environmental activism which are predicated upon the promotion and defense of the rights of nature, particularly in the context of the dynamics between activists and their knowledges which operate across and within different geographical scales. In this sense, this thesis contributes to the critical understanding of the flows of power in the context of the cultural politics and value systems within the rights of nature movement, both within Ecuador and beyond.

2.3 Conceptualisations of “Nature”

2.3.1 The nature-society dualism

Since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, grounded in Cartesian rationality and then further compounded during the period of the Enlightenment, the notion that society is separate from “nature” has provided much of the basis for the philosophical, political, and economic status-quo (Harvey, 1996). This dualism (the assertion of two things being conceptually separate, or opposite) along with others such as mind-matter, emotion-reason, civilised-barbarous etc. have come to support the social structures upon which society has been based, as well as guiding many of the intellectual pursuits of post-Enlightenment scholars. Importantly, there are deeply political dimensions to the

operationalisation and functionality of such dualisms. For example, throughout the colonial period the prominence of Eurocentric thought and the Cartesian dualisms that informed it enabled, as well as justified, the subjugation of the colonised through hierarchical dualistic conceptions of humanity and human behaviour. Perhaps most famously, Said's critique of Orientalism and the myriad of dualisms that came to formulate the notion of the "Other" (Said, 2001) demonstrated that understanding the power and functionality of binary thinking is fundamental to studying the way in which cultures assert dominance over others.

Early geography and nascent anthropology were, as Robbins (2012) argues, largely utilised as tools of social and political control, operating within a framework of colonial power relations, responsible for conquest and oppression by imperialist nations. Often abiding by logics of environmental determinism which came to justify racial binaries of civilised/uncivilised and modern/backwards, the notion of "nature" or the "natural" was seen as both unidirectional and deterministic (for example see: Huntington, 1915 and Guyot, 1873). This is to say, despite the rapidly changing landscapes and ecological conditions as a result of industrialisation and imperial conquest, the perception of nature-society relations was one that regarded society as shaped by nature, and not vice versa.

Early forms of political ecology (or, at least what can today be regarded as such) sought to dismantle this field of elitism, subjugation, and oppression, dominated by "scientific" frameworks of knowledge that served to further Eurocentric worldviews and imperial power. One of the earliest cases of this was the social ecology of Peter Kropotkin, a Russian activist, philosopher, and anarchist, whose work came to shape much of the way in which we see political ecology today. For Kropotkin, the natural world (both human and otherwise) was bound not only by competition (as was argued overwhelmingly by the Darwinists of the time) but also by support and mutual aid, and that in fact, the "competition" thesis was merely elite scholars projecting their own conceptualisations on the social order onto the rest of the natural world (Kropotkin, 1888). Furthermore, Kropotkin was one of the earliest scholars in this field to acknowledge the fact that nature-society interactions are significantly impacted by processes of economic production. He argued that processes such as herding, fishing, and farming (and other methods of "making a living") provided the best lens through which we could understand the relationship between human beings and the world around us

(Kropotkin, 1990). In this sense, Kropotkin realised that not only do environmental conditions impact the ways in which humanity operates, but that the opposite is also true; human activity directly affects the systems of life within which we function, and that consequently the nature-society relationship is not unidirectional, but mutually-constitutive.

Moving forward, Marxist political ecology and human geography have continued to combat the notion that “nature” and society (or culture) are philosophically separate entities, arguing instead that the two contribute to the formation of the other, and that in this sense society is nature and nature is society. Within Marxist thought, and by Marx himself, this is considered in *material* terms, i.e. that the social production of nature exists to the extent that humanity physically alters the world around it, and that humanity is also inherently reliant upon the world around it and takes shape accordingly (Ginn and Demeritt, 2008). This has especially been considered in the context of capitalism and modernity, in as much as these two socio-political phenomena rely upon and thrive under the proposition of a nature-society dualism (Harvey, 1996). This can be seen for example in the context of commodification, in the sense that when the status-quo worldview is one that sees human beings as separate from nature, that the latter is more easily subjugated and exploited by the former. However, as Castree (2000) and highlights, the breaking of this dualism within Marxist thought has not been totally realised, and in many cases the notion of an external nature that is philosophically separate from society is still highly pervasive. This is certainly not helped by the tribalism that persists within the overall umbrella of Marxist thought, particularly when considering the intellectual rivalry between naturalist Marxists and constructionist Marxists on the topic of “nature” – compounded by the fact that Marx’s own writings on nature were sparse (for a full summary of this see: Castree, 2000). In this sense, the continuation of the nature-society dualism is arguably more pervasive within Marxist political ecology than within some of the more poststructuralist forms of the field, however there is an acknowledgement of its problematic existence, particularly in the context of capitalist modernity, and how it serves to reproduce the status-quo, the ideological underpinnings of social, political, and economic structures, and the systems of power that emerge from them.

Poststructuralist political ecology and human geography are perhaps better equipped to directly challenge the nature-society dualism, given the fact that the critique of discursive binaries, formations, and their implications for power is of central concern

to poststructuralist theory, having drawn significant influence from both Jacques Derrida (1978, 2016) and Michel Foucault (2002a, 2002b). Poststructuralism turned its intellectual inquiry towards the nexus that exists between knowledge and power; the extent to which this relates to the nature-society dualism is significant, given that considerations on dualisms and binary thinking are fundamentally considerations on the role of knowledge, and when we observe the political dimensions of the operation of such dualisms, the conversation then inherently becomes one of power. In this sense, poststructuralist political ecology and human geography consider the question of how the nature-society binary is utilised as a form of intellectual and cultural dominance, and the socio-political stratification that occurs as a result. This critique has come in the form of challenges to science as a meta-theory of nature (Demeritt, 1994; Haraway, 1991; Papadopoulos, 2011), the issue of “Othering” non-human nature (Soper, 1998, 1995), and the role of taxonomies and labelling in organising and controlling the nature-society binary (Gerber, 1997), among others.

Within poststructuralist human geography, these discussions have emerged prominently in the subfield of more-than-human geographies. This broad subfield is directly concerned with the formulations of, and inherent power dynamics within, nature-society relations. As Panelli (2010) states, human geography’s perspectives on social enquiry, particularly around the power relations of *difference*, provide it with broad meta-questions of *being*, especially in the context of geographers’ “increased awareness of the complexity and interconnectivity of life” (Panelli, 2010 pp. 79). Early work in more-than-human geography stemmed from the relations between people and animals (see: Philo and Wolch; Wolch and Emel, 1998; Wilbert, 2000), with research emerging on relationships between humans and companion animals (Power, 2008), and ‘wild’ animals (Besio et al., 2008). This work sought to problematise the ways in which nature-society relationships work in the context of co-habitation, interaction, and engagement. However, more recently branches of more-than-human geographies have sought to directly challenge the nature-society dualism, drawing especially on Sarah Whatmore’s work (see: Whatmore, 2004; 2002; 1999). This work utilises actor-network theory in order to frame nature as an actor with fundamental agency, and disrupt conventional anthropocentric understandings of the philosophy of agency. Such work has considered how animals, gardens, and trees all maintain relational agency within the wider web of life (see: Hitchings, 2003; Cloke and Jones, 2004; Power, 2005).

Feminist scholars have also written extensively on the nature-society dualism. For feminist political ecology, the nature-society binary comes to operate as a gendered form of oppression which relies upon the framing of non-human nature as female (Merchant, 1990; Plumwood, 2002). In this sense, the conceptual separation and subsequent domination of nature becomes justified through a gendered and dualistic logic. Consequently, the exploitation and degradation of the planet becomes intricately intertwined with the exploitation of women. In the context of the nature-society dualism this is compounded by the hierarchical framework within which many such dualisms take place, and that by placing society over nature, the perceived closeness of women to nature also results in their subjugation to the rest of society (Warren, 1996). According to feminist political ecology, and aligning with the broader poststructuralist critique of science, this has been maintained by the universality and gendered structure of scientific knowledge, as well as the gendered character of scientific institutions (Rocheleau et al. 2013).

Perhaps most adamantly (and arguably problematically), the forms of political ecology which challenge the nature-society dualism are those which take up the mantle of biocentrism (or for some - ecocentrism). This branch of political ecology rose to prominence through the increase in scholarly attention to notions of environmental justice and ethics. Biocentric approaches within political ecology emerged from a branch of eco-philosophy that gained significant ground during the 1970s and 80s, around the time that the animal rights movement was also coming to greater prominence. Inspired by the writings of scholars such as Aldo Leopold (1968), Rachel Carson (2002), and Christopher Stone (2010), the guiding principles of this eco-philosophy sought to break with anthropocentric conceptualisations of value and their associated frameworks of morality, instead preferring *biocentric* approaches to philosophical and ethical issue. Rejecting ideas of human exceptionalism, they challenged the “shallow” ecologists who they believed to be preoccupied with humanity’s wellbeing (and in this sense the value that the environment held only in relation to humans’ use for it), and instead promoted the idea of intrinsic value held by everything within the web of life, regardless of humanity’s perception of, or interaction with it. In this sense, it was fundamentally grounded in particular notions of value; not economic value, but moral value.

Biocentric political ecology, then, has been most frequently concerned with issues of ethics in the context of the nature-society binary. Fundamentally, this is framed in the

context of the *emancipation* of nature (Eckersley, 1992); emancipation from anthropocentric worldviews that support and maintain the notion that non-human nature exists to be dominated by human beings for their (technological) advancement. While assertions within biocentric political ecology around the idea of ethical extension (particularly rights for nature, and the manner in which this can break down the nature-society dualism most coherently) has existed for some time (for example see: D’Arcy May, 1994; Eckersley, 1995; Nash, 1989), recent developments around the world (both related to national politics and the global climate crisis) have reignited this discussion, especially in the context of the challenge to anthropocentrism and binary thinking (see: Acosta, 2015; Acosta and Martínez, 2009; Crist, 2017; Galeano, 2009; Gudynas, 2011, 2010; Turnbull, 2018).

Biocentrism and biocentric political ecology have, however, received critique from across the social sciences. Issues of the romanticisation of nature and pre-industrialism (Newton, 2002), lack of a practical programme for change (Luke, 1988), the inherent gendering of the nature-society dualism and the subsequent challenge put to it (Salleh, 1984) have all been strongly voiced over previous decades. Furthermore, biocentric approaches to political ecology have also been accused of failing to break from the very form of binary thinking which they claim to address (Newton, 2002). Consequently, a recent push within biocentric political ecology has called for clarification as to what exactly is meant by biocentrism, and what the significance of this is for the conceptualisation of the nature-society relationship.

This thesis, however, takes a post-Marxist perspective on nature. Post-Marxist political ecology primarily draws on Marxist and poststructuralist political ecologies in order to interrogate how “nature” functions as a site of hegemony and counter-hegemony (see for example: Ekers, 2009; Karriem, 2009; Mann, 2009; Perkins, 2011). Instead of discussing this here, I dedicate a full section to it later in this chapter.

What is evident, therefore, is that the nature-society dualism has long been significant to discussions within political ecology and human geography, and has in some cases resulted in contentious relationships between particular camps within the broader field of scholarship. This thesis explicitly contributes to the critique of the problematic conceptualisations of biocentric ethics, and in particular how this manifests within social movements that espouse biocentric perspectives.

2.3.2 *Neoliberal Nature*

Thus far this chapter has discussed the ways in which social movements in Latin America, and specifically Ecuador, have engaged with the environment, as well as how the environment has been conceptualised in the sense of nature-society relations. As mentioned in the earlier section on social movements within this chapter, these movements have frequently regarded neoliberalism, or processes of neoliberalisation, as things to be resisted or changed. In the context of this thesis, much of the material presented and the subsequent arguments made are done so with the notion of perceived challenges to “neoliberal nature” in mind. By this I mean to what extent different actors within the rights of nature movement challenge and disrupt practices and ideologies which are embedded within a neoliberal perspective of nature, and to what extent they reinforce or reproduce such perspectives.

However, what does it mean to speak of neoliberal nature? Scholars from human geography and political ecology have dedicated significant academic enquiry to this question over recent years, and in particular have considered the complex nexus that exists between neoliberal capitalism and the web of life within which we as humans exist. As Harvey (2005) states, neoliberalism flourishes via the “commodification of everything”, within the context of nature and the natural world this is significant in as much as nature itself has increasingly become seen as a commodity, leading to higher levels of marketisation and ever deepening networks of consumption, be it via the exploitation of natural resources, enclosure, or privatisation (as noted by McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Peluso, 2012). This increasing commodification of nature and its subjugation to global market forces thereby sets the pretext to which our relationship with it is based, i.e. something for use and exploitation, detached from who we are as human beings in our specific spatial context - it becomes increasingly *disembedded*. As Peluso (2012) details, however, the commodification and marketisation of nature is nothing new, and it is certainly not a trait exclusive to neoliberalism. The pressing issue is that neoliberalism *accelerates* these processes, while simultaneously rolling back the institutions of authority that would seek to monitor and prevent their excessive development (Castree, 2008).

While these perspectives predominantly take an approach more concerned with the commodification of nature, others have been more concerned with the regulatory aspect of neoliberalism, and how this has also shaped specific nature-society relations.

Often this has been based upon a critique of the increase in bio-power that many states and institutions have witnessed under neoliberal ideologies (Grove, 1995; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; Hannah, 2000). Many re-regulations in the post-Keynesian era sought to marketise vast swathes of landscape and resources in order to protect them, thereby allowing market forces to determine what is and what is not worthy of conservation (Castree, 2008; Heynen and Robbins, 2005). However, at the same time massive *de*-regulation has also occurred under neoliberalism, drastically affecting the biophysical environment (Prudham, 2004; McCarthy, 2005, 2006), and enabling corporations and global economic interests to assert power over areas such as forests, waterways, and grasslands.

In this sense, the regulatory aspect of the relationship between neoliberalism and the biophysical world is fundamentally concerned with the *control* of this world, be it through private or public means. As Castree (2010) notes, our desire to restrain, contain, and dominate the wider web of life is exceptionally problematic, as for every attempt that proves successful, there are many that do not. Indeed, there is so much of the biophysical world that renders us helpless, such as hurricanes and floods, or the resources we use that we cannot produce ourselves (such as oil), that no matter how much we attempt to dominate it, we largely remain at its mercy (Castree, 2010).

Furthermore, and as highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, to speak of “nature” is to fill a term with symbolic significance which is both social and political in its essence, grounded in contentious conflicts of knowledge, culture, and complex ontologies. In this sense, neoliberal nature is fundamentally grounded in economic rationalities as well as “Western” epistemological positions which dominate ways-of-knowing around both the environment as well as our place within it (Bakker, 2010). Therefore, the notion of neoliberal nature is not only salient as regards the examination of our engagement with the rest of the biophysical world, but it is also exceptionally pertinent in the context of the engagement between peoples and cultures, especially when we consider the inherently political role of knowledge within wider power relations.

As Bakker (2010) notes, however, the majority of work written on the idea of “neoliberal nature” has maintained a political economic perspective which struggles to account for, thoroughly critique, or even move beyond the problematic nature-society dualism which remains pervasive in contemporary academic thought. For the purpose of

this thesis this is significant given the way in which regarding nature as a rights-bearing entity (and in this sense a legal actor) disrupts conventional anthropocentric perceptions of non-human nature. While I do not, for example, utilise biocentric methods within this research, the notion of challenging anthropocentrism and received neoliberal wisdom in the context of nature-society relations remains a central theme of this thesis.

2.3.3 Nature as a Site of (Counter-)Hegemony

In this section I focus on the idea of nature as a site of hegemony (and concurrently, counter-hegemony); that is to say a site, as well as a socially constructed phenomenon, which is integral to the assertion, and contestation of, dominant power. At this point in the chapter it is necessary to synthesise the broad conceptual themes which I have covered thus far - social movements and conceptualisations of nature – and I here do this through a theoretical lens drawing upon Gramscian and neo-Gramscian scholarship. In the context of this thesis the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony are significant as they pertain both to social movement activity as well as the politics of nature. Regarding social movements, notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony are important as these movements are most frequently mobilising against hegemonic actors, institutions or ideologies, in order to change their lived worlds for the better. As regards ideas around nature, the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony remain salient in the sense that, as previously highlighted in this chapter, conceptualisations of nature and the power dynamics that emerge around them (both in its biophysical and cultural senses) are fundamentally bound within relations of dominance, control, and exploitation. In this sense, the material and subsequent analysis put forward in this thesis are deeply concerned with notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Principally, the conceptual arguments made rest upon questions of how counter-hegemony operates and manifests, in often variegated forms, within the rights of nature movement.

First, then, it is necessary to provide a brief discussion of what exactly is meant when one invokes the term “hegemony”. At its core, hegemony is a concept of the power of ideas. Like Marx, Gramsci was acutely aware that the dominant ideas of a given age were those of the ruling class, however while Marx was satisfied with acknowledging this to be the inevitable result of processes emerging from the economic base, Gramsci was more interested in the nuances and complexities of the problem itself. How is such power

exercised? Which institutions and individuals are complicit in its maintenance? How can it be challenged in a meaningful way? Consequently “hegemony” is directly concerned with notions of ideology, as well as the symbolic and material power that emerges from the operationalisation and contextual formations of ideology which come to shape the world around us. For Gramsci, hegemony manifests through ideology via what he termed “conceptions of the world” and “common sense”; when a particular perspective is regarded as common sense (or is deemed to be axiomatic) within the social status-quo, then ideological hegemony is established, and is maintained through the consent of civil society. For example, as is evident from the previous section on neoliberal nature, the neoliberal “common sense” or hegemonic ideology of what nature is, remains predicated on things such as anthropocentrism, in the sense that humans are deemed to be the most important part of the wider web of life; and economic rationalities, in the sense that nature is regarded as something with an inherent monetary value which supersedes all other forms of value. This is then maintained through the consent of civil society who grow accustomed to the material benefits that come as a result of hyper-production and hyper-consumption (Brand and Wissen, 2013). However, once this consent is disrupted (as is the *modus operandi* of social movements, for example), counter-hegemony and counter-hegemonic political claims emerge. In this sense, I agree with and utilise Stuart Hall’s interpretation of hegemony. Hall (1988) asks “how already positioned subjects can be effectively detached from their points of application and effectively repositioned by a new set of discourses. This is precisely a historically specific level of application of the interpellative [sic] aspects of ideology [...]” (Hall, 1988, pp. 50). He then states that “the problem before us is [...] the question of how subjects could be induced to begin to enunciate their relation to the world quite different meaning or representational systems” (Hall, 1988).

In the context of social movements, Gramscian scholarship and the concepts of ideology and (counter-)hegemony have proved popular theoretical lenses to interrogate questions of power and resistance across a wide variety of geographical regions. While a full list is far too extensive to include here, see for example: Lipschutz (2000), Nicholls (2007), Munck (2007), and Carrol & Rattner (1994) for broad theoretical discussions of social movements and counter-hegemony. However, fundamentally social movements attempt to disrupt hegemonic social structures through contentious politics and by attempting to establish new forms of meaning (and subsequently “common sense”)

around political issues such as rights, the environment, and gender equality (Lipschutz, 2006; Korten et al. 2002). This is achieved by engaging in and also *producing* a form of civil society which is receptive to such issues, and by forming alliances such as those touched upon in the earlier sections of this chapter. However, hegemony, and therefore counter-hegemony, operate at different scales. For example, in many cases social movements attempt to disrupt the hegemony of the state, by seeking to challenge and critique its legitimacy through their new forms of meaning and their political positions within civil society. This has been evident in Latin America across many countries, but especially those which contained politically strong indigenous movements such as Ecuador, or those with well-organised agrarian movements such as Brazil (Vanden, 2007). In other cases, social movements have targeted international institutions that represent key figures in the neoliberal global political economy such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund (Stephen, 2011). However, it is important to note that these struggles are often not mutually exclusive, and that hegemony is inherently multi- and inter- scalar (Brand, 2012; Karriem, 2009).

Furthermore, the civil society within which social movements operate has become increasingly global (McIlwaine, 2007; Munck, 2007), and this is especially visible in the context of the environment and nature (McIlwaine, 2007). However, as has already been eluded to in earlier sections, this global civil society is fraught with divergent cultural politics and systems of value (particularly around the environment). This can often have negative repercussions for grassroots movements who feel misrepresented by organisations working within a global civil society that is often ideologically dominated by the global north (Batliwala, 2002). In this sense it is exceptionally important to pay attention to how these divergencies affect the functionality and power relations of hegemony and counter-hegemony, especially in the context of something which is as contested as the concept of “nature”.

Gramscian scholarship on the concept of “nature” and its interactions with hegemony is generally concerned with the ways in which hegemony and counter-hegemony form around nature-society relations, particularly in the context of global capitalism, neoliberalism, and the institutional forces which maintain the political economic status-quo. Indeed, as Brand and Wissen (2013, pp. 695) state, the particular nature-society relations which contextualise a society emerge both from international institutions (such as global economic organisations) as well national ones (such as the

state). This enables hegemony around nature-society relations to primarily operate around policy formations both at the national and international level, and the global economic networks which operate within such policies. However, it is important to note that national states, particularly in the global south, are often subjected to unequal power relations in the wider global political economy and are therefore subjected to administering policies “from above” which directly shape those countries’ nature-society relations (Brand and Wissen, 2013). In this sense, the cultural dynamics of hegemony around nature-society relations are tightly bound within the ideologies of those cultures that assert dominance over the political economic status-quo at the international level, and consequently remain akin to ideological imperialism (Brand, 2012).

So, then, it is upon this ground that social movements enter the fray over contested ideologies of nature, and the power relations that emerge as a result of them. Gramscian scholarship on social movements and nature has analysed and interrogated the contentious politics which emerge around mobilisations and knowledge claims predicated on the protection of the environment, across a variety of geographical scales. This has often taken the shape of resistance to “green neoliberalism” (Goldman, 2007), particularly in the context of international struggles over the environment.

For example, social movements have regularly targeted international institutions which have maintained a central role in the administration of sustainable development, such as the United Nations. Where social movements have seen the hitherto hegemonic discourse of “sustainability” as deficient, they mobilised within civil society to establish counter-organisations such as the World Social Forum, where alternative ideas of sustainability, globalisation, and development were produced and shared (Goodman and Salleh, 2013). This forum brought together subaltern groups and ideologies which were regarded as counter-hegemonic, including peasant groups, indigenous groups, and civil society organisations both from the global north and global south, in order to establish a new common sense within civil society around key political issues. Crucially, in the context of this thesis, the rights of nature were also discussed here in 2012, drawing on the Ecuadorian and Bolivian experiences of these rights, and how they might be utilised to disrupt hegemonic common sense around sustainability and development (Goodman and Salleh, 2013). In other cases, Gramscian scholars have noted how water policies predicated on privatisation have become hegemonic, and how social movement actors have again mobilised counter-hegemonic claims and political action at the international

meetings of key organisations through the occupying of public spaces and engaging in protests (Goldman, 2007). In this sense, social movements operating along environmental principles directly engage international institutions in order to contest hegemonic discourses and policy formations that seek to dictate nature-society relations both in national and international contexts, evocating the multi-scalar processes of counter-hegemony in the context of nature.

Furthermore, Gramscian scholars have also interrogated the dynamics between nature-society relations and hegemony in the context of social movements, the state, and corporations operating at national or local scales. For example, as Prudham (2008) illustrates through a case study of British Columbia's forest sector, social movements were constantly operating within a shifting counter-hegemonic political ecology as the bilateral relationship between the state and private capital was always evolving and changing. Furthermore, the restructuring that was occurring in the context of policy around British Columbia's forests was frequently aligning with the interests of global private capital and against the interests of local communities. For this reason, NGOs and activist groups mobilised their own knowledges of the forests in the context of sustainable logging and artisan forestry, in order to pressure local and governmental institutions, thereby attempting to operationalise a new common sense around what these forests signified (Prudham, 2008). In this sense, subaltern meanings are promoted in order to mobilise a counter-hegemonic struggle against local and national state institutions as well as the private capital interests with which they engage.

For the purpose of this thesis this all remains salient as the rights of nature movement positions itself as a counter-hegemonic force both within Ecuador and beyond. In the context of Ecuador, I illustrate this through an analysis and discussion of the functionality of this counter-hegemony within different geographical spaces and across geographical scale. However, I also discuss the ways in which divergent cultural politics within the movement make these forms of counter-hegemony also become divergent themselves. As I demonstrate, the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador, as well as the multi-scalar forms of resistance and counter-hegemony within which they are engaged, prove fruitful for better understanding how hegemony and counter-hegemony operate across geographical scale, but also how the contentious politics around "nature" subsequently inform and affect these politics of resistance. Thus far, research on the rights of nature has remained blind to these dynamics, and in this sense this thesis directly

contributes to not only conceptual discussions on the concept of nature-society relations and hegemony, but also offers an important critique of the power dynamics that operate within, and emerge from, the rights of nature movement itself, through their attempts to operationalise new forms of common sense in a counter-hegemonic context.

3.0 Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated the key themes which are crucial to the central arguments put forward in this thesis. I have covered social movements, their engagement with the environment, how they operate across and within geographical scale, and conceptualisations of nature within human geography and political ecology. Finally, I synthesised this with a discussion on how the concept of (counter-)hegemony binds these themes together. I have also demonstrated how the research and subsequent arguments put forward in this thesis contribute to the discussions within each one of these areas.

Fundamentally, I have shown that nature is a contested concept both within civil society and within the academic literature on the subject, and that this contestation takes highly complex and interrelated forms. For example, contestation does not just exist between environmental movements and global economic interests, but also between and within these environmental movements themselves. Furthermore, issues of scale remain highly problematic within the context of social movements, and the power dynamics that come about as a result of the variegated and uneven distribution of power and political resources across geographical scales.

Additionally, the divergent cultural politics that constitute social movements and their collective actors inform the contestation of key issues, for example nature. In this sense, the cultural political relations of social movements have a direct impact on the ways in which their resistance manifests, but also how their internal power structures operate and evolve.

Consequently, this thesis contributes to academic knowledge on the subject of the rights of nature, in both Ecuadorian and international contexts. Current literature on the rights of nature in Ecuador has been demonstrated to largely focus on the significance of these rights in as much as they mark a radical shift away from conventional methods of development, with scarce attention being paid to the forms of activism and varying cultural politics that exist at the forefront of the rights of nature issue. In this thesis I

analyse and discuss these processes of environmental activism which are predicated upon the promotion and defense of the rights of nature, particularly in the context of the dynamics between activists operating across and within different geographical scales.

In the context of hegemony and counter-hegemony, this thesis argues that for grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, these rights are conceptualised in relation to issues of security, political representation, territory, and human rights. This is embedded in the context of the extraction of natural resources and the state-society-extractivism nexus. Consequently, the character of counter-hegemony is fundamentally national in its scope. Whereas, when the rights of nature are “scaled-up” in a process that is dominated by international rights of nature activists, these rights are conceptualised in predominantly post-materialist value frameworks, where the intrinsic value of nature takes priority. This form of counter-hegemony is global in its scope and seeks to challenge the international political economic status-quo in an ideological manner. Importantly, I demonstrate that these two counter-hegemonies come maintain a problematic relationship, where the international comes to reproduce the national hegemony of the Ecuadorian state which is targeted by grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador. Therefore, I argue that there is a fragmentation of cultural-political values which exists within the rights of nature movement, which directly shapes divergent counter-hegemonies, with more localised values and perceptions often being ignored as the rights of nature are “scaled-up”. In this sense, the thesis contributes to academic knowledge on differing value systems and cultural politics within environmental social movements, as well as the representations of nature and nature-society relations inherent within them.

Chapter 3. Understanding the Rights of Nature in Ecuador: Histories, Politics, and Tensions

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the multifaceted history that culminated in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador. I argue that the emergence of these rights was both problematic and strategic, whilst also being embedded within complex cultural-political networks.

I begin by exploring the rights of nature as a “project”, in the sense that the constitutionalisation of these rights represented deliberate actions and interventions made by key figures within the international rights of nature movement. I trace the recent history of this project, and its associated movement, followed by a discussion of the cultural politics which underpin them. I turn to the Ecuadorian constitution for evidence of where particular facets of these cultural politics are embodied within the rights of nature articles as they are written within it. I then consider the political processes that occurred in Ecuador that enabled the production of the space within which a phenomenon such as the rights of nature could emerge, namely the indigenous social movements and allied environmentalist groups that united in order to progress the country’s cultural and political landscape to one where the rights of nature could find a metaphorical home. I finish by turning attention to the contemporary issues facing the rights of nature and rights of nature activists in Ecuador, demonstrating that these rights remain a contentious and problematic political issue.

3.2 Tracing the rights of nature project

While (as discussed later in this chapter) the idea of ‘rights for nature’ has been discussed within philosophical and ethical conversations for some time, the phenomenon to which I draw attention here is the recent manifestations of the rights of nature at the juridical and policy levels, thereby pertaining to their practical implementation in politics and law. The emergence of rights of nature in Ecuador is a key example of this, and also serves as a focal point for those actors who drive such a process forward. I refer to this phenomenon as the rights of nature “project”, due to the fact that it represents a deliberate agenda set by some within the (broadly conceived) rights of nature movement.

There is a clearly traceable journey of such a project, along which the emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador falls. Broadly speaking, this journey is that of “the rights of nature movement”, an international coalition of NGOs, academics, lawyers, and activists, who have come to drive forward the idea of legal rights for nature at various scales including the local, national, and international.

The journey of the rights of nature movement does not begin in Ecuador, rather it begins in Tamaqua Borough, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, USA. In 2006, two years before such rights would appear in Ecuador’s national constitution, the rights of nature were included at the municipal level through a municipal ordinance in Tamaqua. This was achieved through the work of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), an NGO that has since come to be at the forefront of the international rights of nature movement (Fitz-Henry, 2018; Rawson and Mansfield, 2018; Tanasescu, 2016b). This first elevation of “nature” as a rights-bearing entity within a juridical document provided the blueprint which other similar ordinances and laws would follow, both in the United States and beyond (Tanasescu, 2016a). The blueprint framework, as Espinosa (2015) notes, drew on discussions between a transnational network of environmental legal scholars, including CELDF, mainly from the USA, UK, Australia, and South Africa; these discussions (and the subsequent blueprint) were heavily influenced by the eco-philosophical standpoints of deep ecology, eco-feminism, and eco-theology (Espinosa, 2015).

Meanwhile, in Ecuador the recent election of Rafael Correa had led to the redrafting of the country’s constitution. The constituent assembly (the body responsible for the redrafting process) was led by Alberto Acosta, an Ecuadorian academic and politician whose earlier research had led him to become curious in the idea of rights for nature, particularly in the context of development (for in-depth discussions of Acosta’s role in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador see: Akchurin, 2015; Burdon, 2010; Espinosa, 2015; Tanasescu, 2015). Acosta saw the opportunity to include the rights of nature in the new iteration of the Ecuadorian constitution, so he and the Ecuadorian environmental NGO Fundación Pachamama contacted CELDF to help with the drafting of the relevant articles. As a result of this, the blueprint framework of the rights of nature that had been established in Pennsylvania was to be extrapolated to a national context, taken out of North America and placed in Latin America.

Drawing on their experience with the Tamaqua case (and their work on another municipal ordinance in Mahanoy Township, also in Schuylkill County) CELDF assisted in the writing of the articles concerning the rights of nature in the 2008 iteration of the Ecuadorian constitution. Much of the language that was used in the blueprint examples from Pennsylvania were included in Ecuador's new constitution, including notions such as the right to flourish, and for regenerative cycles to be protected (Burdon, 2010; Tanasescu, 2016b). In some cases certain language was altered, for example the use of the term "*Pachamama*" (an indigenous term for Mother Earth) is used alongside "*la naturaleza*" (nature). This occurs twice, once in the preamble to the constitution (Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008, pp. 21) and then once again in Article 71 (Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008, pp. 55). Throughout the rest of the constitution "*la naturaleza*" (nature) remains as the chosen terminology, and in no case does the term *Pachamama* replace the term "*la naturaleza*". Instead (where it is included) the indigenous term *Pachamama* is conveyed as a direct translation of "nature"; this is problematic as the two words are not necessarily synonymous (de la Cadena, 2010). In the eyes of many established rights of nature advocates, however, the terms were 'close enough' (Tanasescu, 2013), but this still remained as a visible point of contention between rights of nature advocates and indigenous groups (Tanasescu, 2016c).

This is significant as it reflects the universalist ethos that underpins this rights of nature project (that is to say, the networked and international manifestation of the rights of nature within which Ecuador is embedded). Fundamentally, the actors and organisations who were involved in the constitutionalisation process in Ecuador regarded the language utilised in the municipal ordinances in Pennsylvania to also be suitable for the Ecuadorian national context, despite the claimed linkages between the rights of nature and Ecuador's indigenous cultures (Akchurin, 2015; Tanasescu, 2015). This universalism (particularly in relation to the problematic associations between the rights of nature and indigenous groups) has been critiqued for being fundamentally grounded within Eurocentric and Western-centric philosophies both on people and the environment, and therefore representative of colonial and neo-colonial epistemological relations between the global north and the global south (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018).

Evidently, though, the journey that began in Pennsylvania in 2006 had now reached a crucial milestone; the move from local municipal ordinances to a national constitution meant that the rights of nature project (and its associated international

movement), as it was manifesting within these increasingly visible political-legal networks, was gaining traction and legitimacy.

Since the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador, and similar rights in Bolivia (for scholarly accounts that include the rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia see, for example: Fabricant, 2013; Gregor Barié, 2014; Gudynas, 2013; Lalander, 2014; Zimmerer, 2015), the international rights of nature movement has made a number of significant advances in furthering the rights of nature project. These include:

- The Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth (UDRME) which was drafted in 2010 and, in 2012, included in the Rio+20 outcome document entitled *The Future We Want* (United Nations, 2012).
- Incorporation into the United Nations Harmony with Nature project which began in 2011, and in 2014 placed the rights of nature as a central focus of their agenda.

Both of these cases (especially the United Nations Harmony with Nature project) are discussed in more depth in chapter 7, however for the purpose of the current chapter what they represent is the continued success of an international coalition of activists and organisations who have pushed forward an idea of “the rights of nature”, and the practical frameworks through which these might be implemented. Significantly, the movement has retained its universalist ethos (see Espinosa, 2014 for a discussion of this in relation to the UDRME, and chapter 7 of this thesis for a discussion of this in relation to the United Nations Harmony with Nature project), and the key organisations and actors within the movement primarily remain located in the global north. Therefore, what this thesis explores is to what extent the narratives utilised by this well-networked, international rights of nature movement are interconnected with less internationally-connected rights of nature activists operating in Ecuador.

3.3 The Cultural Politics of the Rights of Nature Project

Now that I have established the manner in which the rights of nature project emerged and developed, it is important to discuss the intellectual history, and the philosophical underpinnings, of the project. As I mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, and as illustrated by Rawson and Mansfield (2018), the rights of nature project is

heavily influenced by the eco-philosophical standpoint of deep ecology, as well as being predicated on the Western-liberal tradition of rights and universalism. Furthermore, given the fact that the framework through which these rights are articulated in legal documents and by key members of the international movement has remained relatively similar across time and place, it is necessary to consider the cultural-political underpinnings of this. Additionally, if the rights of nature project maintains an analogous blueprint across time and place, it seems reasonable to assert that the ideas and philosophies which underpin the expansion of such rights by key organisations and actors in the international movement remain similar too.

As Rawson and Mansfield (2018) illustrate, the international rights of nature movement is constituted by an epistemic community that is interconnected through a system of shared values, perspectives, and value frameworks. They demonstrate this through an analysis of the works of particular authors, philosophers, and scholars who are consistently cited by influential actors and organisations within the international rights of nature movement. Furthermore, some such works (for example, Christopher Stone's book '*Should Trees Have Standing*') were used by rights of nature advocates to demonstrate that the idea "has a history" (Tanasescu, 2016c) during the debates on the issue within the Ecuadorian constituent assembly. Evidently, then, the cultural-political value network which influenced the manifestations of the rights of nature in the United States also permeated the constitutional production of the rights of nature in Ecuador. Following on from Rawson and Mansfield's (2018) work, in this section I explore these epistemic linkages by discussing some of the key works which the rights of nature project draws upon, and then by indicating where in the Ecuadorian constitution we can see their influence.

Drawing on the work of Alvarez, Escobar, and Dagnino (Alvarez et al., 1998), I utilise the concept of cultural politics in social movements in order to explore these philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the rights of nature in more depth. The notion of cultural politics refers to the nexus that exists between culture and politics, not as two separate entities but instead as a fusion of the two (Alvarez et al., 1998). Consequently, the fusion becomes manifest through the ways in which ideologies, underpinned by shared systems of meaning, function within complex power relations and are embodied by those espousing them, both in an esoteric or normative sense, but also in a real and pragmatic sense (Alvarez et al., 1998). In this section of this chapter I turn

attention to the cultural politics which animate the rights of nature project, and which have also led to certain contentions in the context of the project's implementation in Ecuador.

3.3.1 Deep Ecology and Biocentrism: The Question of Ethical Extension

The notion of giving rights to nature is predicated on the idea of advancing and extending the liberal philosophy of protecting someone (or something's) ability to continue existing in a desirable manner, due to a perceived intrinsic value held within them, functionalised through a framework of rights (Nash, 1989). Over the years there have been numerous iterations of this ethical extension, such as extending rights unto women, slaves, and animals; each one representing a progressive shift in the ethical and philosophical consciousness of the societies that oversaw them.

Rights for the environment, be it in the context of what is conceptualised and referred to as "nature", or things such as rivers and trees, emerged from a branch of eco-philosophy that gained significant ground during the 1970s and 80s, around the time that the animal rights movement was also coming to greater prominence. Inspired by the writings of scholars such as Aldo Leopold (Leopold, 1968), Rachel Carson (Carson, 2002), and Arne Naess (Naess, 1973), the guiding principles of this eco-philosophy sought to challenge anthropocentric conceptualisations of value and their associated frameworks of morality, instead preferring *biocentric* or *ecocentric* approaches to philosophical and ethical issues.

While many movements emerged from the growth in popularity of biocentric ethics, one of the most successful was the "deep ecology" movement. Framing their position as one that was opposed to "shallow ecology", they stated that the notion of being "deep" came from a greater depth of critical inquiry and understanding of humanity's place in relation to all other living things, therefore representing a fundamentally non-anthropocentric view of the world (Naess, 1973). It was fundamentally grounded in particular notions of value; not economic value, but moral value. Rejecting ideas of human exceptionalism, they challenged the "shallow" ecologists who they believed to be preoccupied with humanity's wellbeing (and in this sense the value that the environment held only in relation to humans' use for it), and instead promoted the idea of intrinsic value held by everything within the web of life, regardless

of humanity's perception of, or interaction with it. Consequently, deep ecologists sought to break down the nature-society divide by embracing an eco-ethical holism. This holistic view of the nature-society relationship has been central to much of North American and Western European environmentalism for over a century, however it was the deep ecologists who popularised it in its most recent iteration (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018).

Significantly, the deep-ecological position (and the extent to which it represents a renewed iteration of traditional environmental holism in North America) is closely related to, and flourished from, the post-materialist trend in environmentalism among societies of highly industrialised economies after the Cold War (Eckersley, 1995b). The idea of post-materialism was first theorised by Ronald Inglehart (1989, 1995, 1997, 2005), when he argued that environmentalist attitudes in highly industrialised countries and economies, especially in Europe and North America were fundamentally predicated on a "post-materialist" condition, that is to say, where basic material human needs were already met. Consequently, many forms of environmentalism in these regions are deemed to be of a "post-materialist" character, and are more concerned with issues such as the intrinsic value of non-human nature, and the preservation of the environment for future generations (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 2013; Doyle and Chaturvedi, 2010). These forms of environmentalism are juxtaposed to those forms which are, as Martinez-Alier (2002) argues, more common in the global south, where environmental and ecological concerns are more intricately intertwined with issues of immediate survival, security, territory, and political representation. Importantly, it is the former (i.e. post-materialist) form of environmentalism that has maintained hegemonic status in the context of international environmental movements (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

3.3.2 Holism

Perhaps most influential to the deep ecology movement and to the latest rise of biocentric ethics in the global north was the work of Aldo Leopold, particularly his concept of the *Land Ethic* (Sessions, 1987). Leopold, the eminent North American author and conservationist, had written on the concept of ethical extension in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, first published in 1949. Whilst developing the concept of the *Land Ethic*, Leopold argues for a conceptual shift in society's understanding of the web of life, what he terms a "natural part of ecological evolution". In this sense, Leopold portrays the

issue of ethical extension to the environment as a core factor of humanity's progressive development, and while it is not necessarily predetermined nor inevitable, he saw it as a process that must occur if the broadly-conceptualised web of life were to continue existing.

For Leopold, the motivation for developing a 'Land Ethic' came from his dissatisfaction with the then current state of conservation and conservation ethics; he saw the dominant paradigm of conservationism to be preoccupied with (and determined by) economic self-interest. Leopold states that any logic of conservationism that is predicated on economics or individualism is fundamentally flawed, and that what was required was a conceptual and cultural shift that would establish an ecological consciousness, predicated on interdependency, interconnectivity, and equality between species (Leopold, 1968). Indeed, he posited this to be not just a necessary shift within conservationism, but also necessary throughout humanity as a whole. The conceptual and cultural shift to which Leopold alludes is one that replaces the relationship between humans and the environment as conqueror and conquered, to one where humans are instead seen as "biotic citizens", operating and existing within a broader circuit of energy that, when considered as a whole, represents one single living organism. In this sense, Leopold sought to break with the false binary between humans and the environment, and instead argued for a biocentric philosophy of oneness, or holism, that should guide life on earth.

We can see evidence of an eco-ethical holism in the Ecuadorian constitution (use of bold text is my own in order to highlight relevance):

"Celebrating nature, the Pachamama (Mother Earth), **of which we are part**, and which is vital to our existence."

(Preamble to the Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008, pp 21)

"Nature, or Pachamama, **where life is reproduced and occurs**, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes."

(Article 71, Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008, pp. 55)

The notion of holism is of great significance to the examination of the rights of nature project, not only due to its presence both within the international movement and in the Ecuadorian constitution, but also because it provided a key strategic cultural facet around which certain alliances were established during the constitutionalisation process.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, the linkages between the rights of nature and indigenous knowledges has been seen as problematic by scholars studying the emergence of these rights in Ecuador (see: Rawson and Mansfield, 2018; Tanasescu, 2013). However, the idea of holism was indeed one around which indigenous actors and rights of nature advocates were able to find relatively common ground (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018; Tanasescu, 2016c). While epistemologically distinct (Cullinan, 2011) the holistic approach to nature-society relations espoused by the already-existing rights of nature project synergised well with indigenous cosmologies mobilised by the indigenous movement in Ecuador. Consequently, this non-dualistic ontology was a key factor in the cultural-political framing of the rights of nature project. However, as Rawson and Mansfield (2018) argue, the indigenous perspective was used to *validate* the pre-existing values inherent within the rights of nature project, as opposed to fostering hybridity and new, liberating, or contextually relevant, forms of thinking. Therefore, it remains clear that the rights of nature project utilised, and to a certain extent *appropriated*, the indigenous perspective in order to reinforce the narrative and manifestation of the rights of nature which it had already established in accordance with a North American model.

3.3.3 From Holism to Rights

“How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation!”

(John Muir, 1867, cited in: Nash, 1989)

“Throughout legal history, each successive extension of rights to some new entity has been, theretofore, a bit unthinkable. We are inclined to suppose the rightlessness of rightless “things” to be a decree of Nature, not a legal convention

acting in support of sonic status quo. It is thus that we defer considering the choices involved in all their moral, social, and economic dimensions.”

(Stone, 2010, pp. 2)

Along with an ethical holism, the rights of nature are also fundamentally guided by an intellectual and philosophical history of exactly what they claim to be – *rights*. Rights-based frameworks have a long history in Western philosophy pertaining to issues such as personhood, property, citizenship, and representation; they have also been utilised extensively in the administration of colonial rule (Ibhawoh, 2008; Woo, 2011). In this sense, rights have historically played a crucial role in setting the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within societies, establishing the parameters of who, or what, is regarded as having the type of value that bestows upon them the allowance to be protected via limitations set upon others.

The earliest and most comprehensive piece of scholarly work offering a proposal of extending constitutional rights to the environment came from Christopher Stone in his book *Should Trees Have Standing?* (Stone, 1974). Stone, a professor of law, was fundamentally intrigued by what exactly the ethical extension of rights to the environment might look like, and how such a framework would be implemented in local, national, and global systems of law. However, prior to Stone’s work, philosophical discussions about the ethical dimensions of humanity’s relationship to the world around it had been occurring for decades (Nash, 1989).

For Stone, the issue of ethical extension and providing rights to the environment was one that sought to break from the human-environment relationship as one of owner and property. In contrast to Leopold, Stone’s ideas are grounded in an eco-philosophical question of *what constitutes* property, and how we can seek to move beyond treating “nature” solely as this. While this was indeed important for Leopold, his writings instead considered the overall philosophy of ecology, and where humanity exists in the wider web of life. The focus in Stone’s work, therefore, was narrower; hence why his work is often regarded as the first comprehensive book on *rights* for the environment, specifically. Fundamentally, Stone sought to explore how voiceless parts of the web of life may be given legal representation so as to further their protection.

As, for authors such as Leopold, the issue of ethical extension was ethically predicated on notions of intrinsic value, so too was it for Stone. While he was indeed focused on property relations, the idea of intrinsic (and fundamentally *biocentric*) value was central to Stone's thesis of formulating a framework of rights for the environment, as he states such a framework represents "a legally recognized worth and dignity in its own right, and not merely to serve as a means to benefit "us" (whoever the contemporary group of rights-holders may be)." (Stone, 2010, pp. 4).

Furthermore, Stone argues that frameworks of rights not only reflect but also produce a social and political status quo, and therefore carry with them a particular revolutionary and emancipatory form of power. For this reason, he makes use of the term "unthinkable" in reference to the ethical extension of rights to the environment in modern (and in this case North American) society. An argument put forward not just by Stone, but also by many high-profile rights of nature advocates (Tanasescu, 2016c), is that at any given point in time the idea of extending rights beyond their current limitations has been radical and in many ways "unthinkable" by the majority of the population.

In this sense, Stone posits that the benefit of a rights-based framework comes from the ability to transform the legal system from the inside, and that social mentalities would adjust accordingly. He believed that the language of rights was one that carried great power and influence, and that the attitudes that develop around such a language were different to ones accorded simply to "legal rules" (Stone, 2010). Therefore, Stone saw the legal system as one of the determinate factors in producing the ecological consciousness that Leopold referred to. In his own words:

"If my sense of these influences is correct, then a society in which it states, however vaguely, that "rivers have legal rights" would evolve a different legal system than one which did not employ that expression, even if the two of them had, at the start, the very same "legal rules" in other respects."

(Stone, 2010, pp. 23)

Once Stone established his position on the benefit of a rights-based framework, he laid out a *modus operandi* for the framework he saw as necessary. He argues for a system based on “guardianship”, similar to how animal rights cases are conducted; given that it is within a system produced by humans that rights exist and are defended, it must be humans who operate as the representatives of the object or area in question. The notion of guardianship, he argues, ensures that the wellbeing of the object or area is held as paramount, as opposed to current forms of environmental law that place the human plaintiff as the central focus and determinate factor of decision making (Stone, 2010).

As with the municipal ordinances in Pennsylvania, the approach of guardianship is also the one that was taken in the Ecuadorian constitution:

“All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature. To enforce and interpret these rights, the principles set forth in the Constitution shall be observed, as appropriate.”

(Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, Article 71, pp. 55)

However, the articulation of guardianship in the Ecuadorian constitution was contested by certain members of the constituent assembly. Some particularly dissenting voices came from many in the indigenous movement who were concerned that the framing of the rights of nature were going to instil the government with significant power over land and territory (Tanasescu, 2013). Significantly, though, the subject of guardianship is one that is also common within Andean indigenous cosmologies (Cadena, 2015; Ferry, 2016), and in this sense could have offered potentially fruitful intercultural dialogues pertaining to the interpretations of how *guardianship* might function. However, this did not come to pass and the protection of the rights of nature remained positioned as a fundamental responsibility and activity of the state (evident in the above excerpt from the constitution which places enforcement in the hands of public authorities).

Consequently, the framing of the rights of nature in the Ecuadorian constitution failed to take into account the nuances of the cultural-political context of the country within which they were being positioned. This reflects another problematic issue with the universalist, monolithic, and one-size-fits-all approach that the rights of nature project has come to adopt. This then opens up further questions regarding the cultural-political nexus of the rights of nature, both in their Ecuadorian context and beyond.

Importantly, this thesis explores the extent to which such a cultural-political framework is embodied by grassroots rights of nature activists operating in Ecuador, and the extent to which they instead forge their own subjectivities and interpretations of the rights of nature. Where, as demonstrated here, previous research on the cultural politics (particularly in the sense of the knowledge-politics interface) of the rights of nature has focused on the contentions between indigenous perspectives and Western perspectives, my research also considers the role of non-indigenous (or “*mestizo*”) Ecuadorians in forging particular cultural-political frameworks of the rights of nature.

3.4 The emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador

While the influence of individuals and organisations from the United States (and the global north more broadly) was clearly significant, it would be irresponsible and indeed inaccurate to treat the genealogy of the rights of nature project as entirely linear. Indeed, it is necessary to explore the contextual nuances of Ecuador that led to the formulation of the space within which the rights of nature could be established there. Following this line of enquiry, I here discuss the conditions that allowed the rights of nature to emerge in Ecuador, specifically the local and national political processes that acted as precursors to the phenomenon.

As mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis, social movements have played a crucial role in the shaping of Ecuadorian politics. In this section I discuss the histories of the two key social movements that were highly influential to the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador – the indigenous movement and the environmental movement. I then touch on the strategic alliance that has often existed between these two groups, and how this alliance functioned in the emergence of the rights of nature.

Furthermore, I also turn attention to the institutional-political dynamics that led to the writing of the 2008 constitution. I discuss the 2006 election and Rafael Correa’s rise to power, how the rights of nature fitted into a broader narrative of “postneoliberalism”, and the pragmatics of writing the rights of nature into the constitution particularly as regards the role of the aforementioned social movements.

3.4.1 The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador

While, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the extent to which indigenous knowledges were directly included in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador is contestable, the contribution that indigenous politics made to the production of the necessary political space is much clearer. Ecuador's indigenous social movements boast some of the most successful cases of rises to political prominence in the Andean region (M. Becker, 2010), and their ability to mobilise vast numbers of people has historically swayed elections and even enabled the ousting of presidents (Zamosc, 2007). I begin with an account of The Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), due to its prominence within the indigenous movement over the decades (M. Becker, 2010; Postero and Zamosc, 2006; Zamosc, 2007).

CONAIE is an umbrella group that was founded in 1986 and seeks to represent the interests of indigenous peoples in Ecuador (M. Becker, 2010), albeit whilst also suffering from internal fragmentations (Radcliffe, 1999). CONAIE has been instrumental in the mobilisation and organisation of acts of political resistance since its inception, orchestrating large-scale protests and marches throughout the country. CONAIE achieved recognition for enabling Ecuador to establish and maintain one of the most influential and powerful indigenous movements throughout Latin America. Central to CONAIE's political mobilisations have been claims for indigenous rights, land rights, control over natural resources, multicultural and bilingual education, and the creation of a plurinational state (Andolina, 2003; M. Becker, 2010). Ideologically, CONAIE's core framework has been one in favour of decolonisation, anti-imperialism, preservation of ethnicity and culture, and self-determination (Andolina, 2003). Furthermore, in its earlier years CONAIE maintained a staunchly anti-establishment and anti-systemic philosophy, however this would come to change in 1996 with the creation of a formal political branch of the indigenous movement (Van Cott, 2007).

In 1990 CONAIE fully established itself as a unified, national political force for indigenous interests when it orchestrated the National Indigenous Uprising that brought many cities in the country to a standstill. Indigenous social movements, led by CONAIE, set out a sixteen-point document that sought to address some of the most oppressive plights of indigenous peoples across the country. Key to these demands were protection from discrimination, resolutions to long-standing land conflicts, and control over bilingual education programs (Van Cott, 2007). As Van Cott states:

“The significance of the 1990 uprising cannot be overstated. [...] The uprising enabled CONAIE to link the diverse indigenous organizations in the country to the national organization and to inculcate a common identity as members of this organization and of a coordinated effort to pursue common goals as Indians. In addition, [...] CONAIE’s effective mobilization throughout much of the country stunned the political establishment.”

(Van Cott, 2007, pp. 111)

Throughout the early 1990s a series of similar protests and political mobilizations took place, organised and led by CONAIE. Many of these were in response to unfulfilled promises by the state, as well as in opposition to neoliberal reforms and their social and economic fallout (Van Cott, 2007; Zamosc, 2007). However, CONAIE and the indigenous social movements’ next great step would come in 1996 when they formally institutionalised their political influence by establishing their own political party, Pachakutik (loosely meaning “time of resurgence” in Kichwa).

Given the indigenous movement’s reputation as a highly dynamic and impactful force in opposing the state, the party attracted the attention of many other Ecuadorian social movements, particularly student groups, women’s rights groups, and labour unions (Beck and Mijeski, 2001). However, until the mid-nineties, CONAIE’s stance on political alliances had been one of relative isolation, choosing to make their operations exclusively focused on indigenous interests alone. It was in late 1995 when they would enter into an alliance with the Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales (CMS), an umbrella group of the country’s social movements which at that point CONAIE was *not* a member of. The purpose of the alliance was to combat a string of neoliberal policies that then president Sixto Durán had put to a referendum; as a result of the political alliance of the collective social movements all of the policies were defeated (Beck and Mijeski, 2001). From this success Pachakutik was formed, and henceforth would operate as the formal political arm of Ecuador’s indigenous social movements.

Pachakutik differed from CONAIE fundamentally in its formal political nature, and official involvement in the formal state structure accordingly. While CONAIE would continue to operate as the militant branch of the organised indigenous social movement, Pachakutik functioned as indigenous peoples’ representative in electoral politics and within the national assembly. From 1996 to 2006 Pachakutik’s electoral success would

vary between 6.5% and 10.7% of the total vote, demonstrating that the party's ability to capture much of the indigenous vote was present (Zamosc, 2006). Furthermore, the indigenous vote in Ecuador is particularly significant given the format of provincial and municipal level elections and their impact on the country's wider electoral landscape. Rural and more sparsely populated areas require fewer votes to win seats, and much of the indigenous population is settled in areas such as these. Consequently, the indigenous movement would use this advantage as an electoral tactic and important political resource; a strategy that was not available to other social movements that were not so widely geographically dispersed (Van Cott, 2007).

Evidently, then, the power of the indigenous movement has been a significant factor in Ecuadorian politics throughout recent decades, and has functioned both through radical and formal political avenues. As I discuss later in this chapter, the support of the indigenous movement (particularly CONAIE and Pachakutik) came to be instrumental in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador. Curiously, however, indigenous groups did not then go on to engage in the promotion and defense of the rights of nature in the same way that mestizo groups did. Indeed, confusion around what these rights offered their political struggles, when contrasted with other (more well-established) rights-based frameworks remained common, as well as persisting conflicts of interest with other indigenous rights, such as the right to land (Akchurin, 2015; Lalander 2014). For this reason, most indigenous groups in Ecuador have maintained a (broadly) supportive, yet distant relationship with the rights of nature and the activism(s) which focus on the promotion and defense of these rights. Significantly, this is reflected in my own research throughout this thesis, where I show that, despite the notions of indigenous knowledges and cultures constantly permeating discourses around the rights of nature, very few indigenous voices are actually involved in rights of nature activism when compared with their mestizo counterparts.

Next, I turn attention to the other key social movement which played a vital role in the process of constitutionalising the rights of nature in Ecuador, the environmental movement.

3.4.2 The Environmental Movement in Ecuador

One of the other key social movements to emerge in Ecuador around the 1980s was the environmental movement. The movement formed as a reaction to the expansion of the oil sector, largely driven by neoliberal economic policies involving the retreat of the state and the rise in foreign direct investment into natural resources (Fontaine, 2013; Lewis, 2016). Consisting predominantly of NGOs and small group organisations, Ecuador's environmental movement was first populated mainly by an educated demographic of urban dwelling professionals based in the country's capital, Quito (however this would eventually spread to other key cities such as Guayaquil). Furthermore, in the early years Ecuador's environmental movement and the key NGOs and groups that it consisted of were run by Ecuadorians themselves. While it is true that international NGOs existed on Ecuadorian soil from the 1960s, these were not based on the mainland and were instead based in the Galapagos Islands, choosing to keep their operations more internal. It would not be until the mainland environmental groups emerged and began to grow considerably that international bodies would take notice and begin to operate within the coast, *sierra*, and Amazonian regions, in attempts to partner with these local organisations (Lewis, 2016).

Ecuador's environmental movement has been fraught with divisions since its earliest years, with two key strands running parallel to one another, and often conflicting. These two strands consist of the radical groups and the more conservative groups. Radical groups, such as the organisation Acción Ecológica (founded in 1985), have been driven by ideologies of Marxism and eco-feminism, espousing anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-systemic philosophies throughout their work and activism, often with a focus on social issues just as much as ecological ones (Lewis, 2016). The conservative groups, such as (the earliest Ecuadorian environmental NGO, but now defunct) Fundación Natura, chose to ally with the private sector (both domestic and international) as well as Ecuador's governments, in order to pursue more systemically conventional and pragmatic methods of environmentalism (Lewis, 2016). These two strands of environmental groups would eventually come to be mediated by the umbrella group Comité Ecuatoriano para la Defensa de la Naturaleza y el Medio Ambiente (CEDENMA). With the creation of CEDENMA in 1987 the Ecuadorian environmental movement was able to act in a more unified manner and achieve key goals, despite its ongoing internal conflicts.

Throughout the late eighties and nineties the Ecuadorian environmental movement and its cluster of NGOs would grow considerably, with over one hundred new organisations emerging between 1987 and 1993 alone, mainly as a result of an influx of international funding from development and conservation organisations (Lewis, 2016). However, as a result of this deluge of funding from a variety of international bodies, a neoliberalisation of many sectors of the environmental movement also occurred throughout the nineties. Donors such as USAID required strict rules and regulations be adhered to, particularly where finances were concerned, consequently leading to processes of professionalisation among environmental workers and activists (Lewis, 2016), an issue which was common throughout the development sector (Escobar, 2011) and the indigenous movement (Laurie et al., 2005). Subsequently, many NGOs were forced to operate as businesses by minimising losses, maximising accountability, and conducting audits as well as operationalising their staff in structures that mirrored the private sector.

The section of the environmental movement that managed to avoid this issue were the radical left groups, often operating through volunteer labour or donations from private individuals. As Lewis (2016) states, these organisations were staunchly anti-imperialist and would always make absolutely clear to donors that they set their own agenda, and that their money would not be able to influence this. As a result, while the organisations that were funded by powerful international bodies with their own agendas were struggling for autonomy, the radical environmentalists were continuing to pursue those issues that were important to them and the areas/peoples they sought to represent. The instance where this became most evident was on the issue of natural resource extraction. Radical environmentalists were placing this on their agendas and pursuing projects based on the rejection of oil drilling and mining, as well as the economic model of extractivism that had come to define the country's eco-political economy. Consequently, it was with these radical environmentalists that the indigenous movement would find convenient allies, due to the fact that the issue of natural resource extraction was also intertwined with indigenous claims for territory and rights (Fontaine, 2013; Latorre et al., 2015; Schlosberg and Carruthers, 2010; Valladares and Boelens, 2017). Furthermore, given that it was on the back of oil development that Ecuador's economy and path towards "modernisation" rested, it would also be these two social movements that would often

bear the brunt of criticism from the state as well as the private sector when they were targeted as being “backwards” and “anti-development”.

The alliance between the indigenous movement and environmentalists has been a strategic one, founded on shared concerns for rural Andean and Amazonian lands under threat from the extraction of natural resources such as petroleum, minerals and metals. The relationship between these two movements came to a new level of prominence during the Chevron-Texaco oil case throughout the mid to late nineties. The ravaging of the northern Amazonian region by the oil giant, the multitude of spills and the contamination from waste that had affected the lives of thousands of both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in the region, eventually led to the filing of a class-action lawsuit against the corporation. The case would go on for over two decades but would also serve to consolidate the relationship between the radical left of Ecuador’s environmental movement and the indigenous movement. This relationship has been sustained by a continued mutual interest in fighting against oil extraction and mining, and the commodification of the environment that has become the hegemonic political economic ideology within which Ecuador is deeply intertwined (Valladares and Boelens, 2017).

Importantly, this alliance would come to not only be of vital importance to the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature, but it would also be tested as a result of the cultural-political mechanics upon which the constitutionalisation process rested. I have touched on this earlier in this chapter, and I return to it in the next section.

3.4.3 The 2006 Election and the Writing of a New Constitution

Rafael Correa’s entrance to the executive office was contextualised by decades of political turmoil in Ecuador. Prior to Correa’s presidency, the 2005 ousting of Lucio Gutiérrez (a populist claiming to battle corruption and embrace leftist politics, who instead turned on his mandate and embraced neoliberal economic policies) had been followed by a fragile caretaker government, headed by Alfredo Palacios. This government attempted to address some of the political, economic and social issues that generated such discontent within the Ecuadorian public; while it was largely unsuccessful in achieving these aims, it did serve to “catapult economy minister Rafael Correa into the public limelight” (Silva, 2009 pp. 191).

Correa ran for the presidency in 2006 and won with 56.7% of the vote against a conservative opponent (Silva, 2009). He campaigned on an overhaul of the political system itself and pledged to hold a referendum on a constituent assembly that would have the ability to dissolve congress and re-write the constitution. He based his rhetoric on an anti-neoliberal stance by asserting such promises as severing ties with the IMF and the World Bank, and rejecting free-trade agreements with the United States in favour of fostering partnerships with Latin American nations, evidently following trends from Chávez's Venezuela.

Correa travelled the country, asserting his presence and promoting his "citizen's revolution", moralising, dividing and depicting the election and the political playing field as "a contest between good and evil: the honest citizenry [...] confronting the *clase politica*" (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013). He ran "against the system itself" and called for an end to "the domination of the traditional parties" (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013); this rhetoric laid the groundwork for what would come to be the most significant overhaul of the Ecuadorian political system for decades. It is no surprise, then, that Correa's election sparked a political crisis of the establishment. Within hours of his inauguration Correa immediately set into action one of his campaign promises by calling a referendum for the proposed constituent assembly; this was, in Correa's view, his way to bypass the institutions that had previously destabilised Ecuadorian politics and destroyed other presidencies (Silva, 2009 pp. 193).

The political resistance that Correa met from within congress was outmatched by his support from the public; mass demonstrations occurred as a result of congress' attempt to block Correa's plans to dissolve congress and proceed to write a new constitution. The overwhelming support ensured that the referendum took place and passed with an 82% approval from the public, highlighting both the popularity for Correa himself as well as his mission. Correa's ability to mobilise mass support is evidently attributable to his successful populist approach – he had been able to obtain significant emotional investment from large sections of the population. Indeed, it was Correa's populism that ensured momentum was maintained; one of the often referenced lines that Correa used shortly after winning the election was "We won the elections, but not power. Power is controlled by economic interests, the banks, the *partidocracia*, and the media connected to the banks" (Conaghan, 2008 pp. 47). Likewise, his campaigning also achieved this mobilisation and emotional investment in the early stages of his political

journey, therefore when the time came for his support to rally in order to ensure that their “citizen’s revolution” would maintain momentum, they did not shy away. When it came to the forming of the constituent assembly, Correa’s newly formed Alianza País Party was incredibly successful, obtaining 80 of the 130 seats. Congress was then dissolved immediately, and the constitution abolished and re-written.

Correa often referred to “postneoliberalism” as the framework by which he and his government would operate; self-described postneoliberal experts even made up the core of his political circle (de la Torre, 2012). The fundamental issue which must be acknowledged here is that the very concept of “postneoliberalism” is in no way a coherent ideology, let alone an agenda for policy production and implementation. As has been discussed extensively by scholars such as Bakker and Yates (2013), and Grugel and Riggirozzi (2012), the concept of “postneoliberalism” as it exists currently is very much framed as an antithesis to neoliberalism, manifesting in various forms according to individual social and political contexts. By utilising this term so extensively combined with his unidirectional discursive relationship, Correa reinforces the conceptual construction that his “citizen’s revolution” represents the given alternative to the “dark neoliberal night”, thereby closing the intellectual and discursive space for other progressive alternatives.

We can see that Correa’s Alianza País party has come to dwarf all other parties of the Ecuadorian left, as well as demonise them, assorted social movements and the parties of the right through use of media (Conaghan 2008; de la Torre 2013; Weyland 2013). Correa’s relationship with all of the aforementioned bodies has been turbulent; all sources of opposition have found themselves under pressure from his government in various ways, from heavy fines and dissolving of organisations, to charges of terrorism and sabotage (Becker 2013; Conaghan 2008; de la Torre 2013).

Given the demonstrable role of social movements in the reshaping of Ecuadorian politics, Correa has struggled to maintain a healthy relationship with them. Notably, his agrarian policies have favoured large-scale economic development and his social programmes are fuelled with extraction-based capital, therefore causing processes of alienation with many of the rural communities from within which much of the resistance dynamics are based (Becker, 2013). Instead of mediating with them, Correa instead chooses to demonise them as “special interest groups” without legitimate grievances (de

la Torre, 2013 pp. 38). Given that it was under Correa that the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature took place, he certainly maintains a highly contradictory approach to the inclusion of these groups.

Both the indigenous movement and the environmental movement were instrumental in President Correa's rise to power (Gerlach, 2017). CONAIE in particular had not only orchestrated and led the popular revolt against his predecessor, Lucio Gutiérrez, but they also (along with ECUARUNARI) assisted in generating indigenous support for the writing of a new constitution, which was so crucial to Correa's mandate. However, from the outset the relationship was never a simple one. During Correa's campaign, indigenous support was not unanimous and was in fact often conflicted with scepticism. However, seeing an opportunity to make progress on the advancement of indigenous issues at the state level, it was the promise of re-writing the constitution that swayed indigenous support in Correa's favour (Webber, 2011).

Ecuador's new constitution spans 444 articles, and includes not just the rights of nature, but also the revolutionary development philosophy of the Buen Vivir, or Sumak Kawsay (living well). Again part of the proposed counter-hegemonic "postneoliberal movement", it was claimed by the constituent assembly (and later President Correa) that this approach to development was grounded in indigenous sensibilities and ways of knowing, however the extent to which this is true is debatable (see for example Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

The constituent assembly was headed by Alberto Acosta, an economist and environmentalist who, at the time, was a close ally of Rafael Correa and would go on to serve as his finance minister until the two parted ways due to ideological differences. Acosta was instrumental in achieving the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature and strategically fought throughout the period that the new constitution was being written for these rights to be included (for a full account of this see Tanasescu, 2013). The constitutionalisation process was complex and rights of nature advocates came up against significant resistance from other members of the constituent assembly, both from members who did not entirely understand the idea as well as from those who fundamentally disagreed with the proposal (Tanasescu, 2013). Eventually the influence of members of the constituent assembly belonging to Pachakutik would provide the indigenous pressure and support that would assist Acosta in convincing others of the

merit of the rights of nature. However, this support did not come easily; as I state earlier in this chapter, indigenous individuals and groups felt that the rights of nature could potentially end up as another way for the government to regulate and control indigenous lands, as well as attempt to represent an untranslatable conceptualisation of nature in a linear manner (Tanasescu, 2016c). In the end, it was the core principles of the rights of nature, and their shared affinity with both the indigenous movement and the environmental movement, particularly in the context of strengthening resistance to natural resource extraction (seen historically as vital to the alliance between these two movements) that enabled indigenous support on the issue.

As both Tanasescu (2013) and Espinosa (2015) illustrate, while actors within the environmental movement in Ecuador were responsible for bringing the idea of rights for nature to the discussions taking place during the re-writing of Ecuador's constitution, it was the support of the indigenous movement which proved instrumental to the success of the formalisation of these rights. However, the issue of conflicting value systems and cultural politics was salient even at this time, as indigenous groups viewed these rights as useful only in as much as they represented a tool for protecting indigenous rights, particularly around claims to land and territory (Espinosa, 2015, pp. 12). This contrasted with the environmentalists' stance, which promoted the rights of nature as a progressive and eco-philosophical advancement, particularly in the context of anti-extractivist economic development, thereby immediately binding the rights of nature with a "double personality" (Tanasescu, 2013, pp. 850).

Throughout this historical trajectory, then, we can see that the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador emerged from a specific and multifaceted historical process of resistance and contestation. The case of Ecuador would go on to spur a growing international movement based upon the establishing, promoting, and defending of these rights. However, the Ecuadorian case would also be revealed as a story both of successes and failures, with significant implications for the movement as it increasingly existed and operated within and across geographical scales.

3.5 The rights of nature in Ecuador: Contemporary issues

While the new constitution marked a significant shift in the Ecuadorian political and legal system, thus far implementation of the rights of nature has been problematic.

There have not only been significant discrepancies and inconsistencies in when, where, and how the rights of nature have been implemented (Daly, 2012; Kauffman and Martin, 2017; Kotzé and Calzadilla, 2017; Youatt, 2017), but the political environment within which activists seeking to promote and defend the rights of nature has become increasingly hostile (Appel, 2016; Humphreys, 2017). Here I discuss some of the contemporary issues that face not only the formal functionality of the rights of nature in Ecuador, but also those who strive to defend them against the state's extractivist political economic framework.

3.5.1 Implementation of the rights of nature

To date there have been 13 rights of nature cases considered in Ecuadorian courts, of which 8 have been filed by the state and 5 by civil society (Kauffman and Martin, 2017). Cases filed by the state boast a 100% success rate in winning the case (8 out of 8), whereas those brought by civil society have seen only a 40% success rate (2/5) (Kauffman and Martin, 2017). While these cases constitute the number which have been heard in court, there have been numerous others that have not made it to trial (Kotzé and Calzadilla, 2017). Research has shown that key issues facing the implementation of the rights of nature in Ecuador include: the over-politicisation of rights of nature issues, judges' lack of knowledge regarding the rights of nature, and a lack of will on behalf of the state in cases where it does not stand to benefit (Kauffman and Martin, 2017; Kotzé and Calzadilla, 2017; Valladares and Boelens, 2017; Youatt, 2017). Crucially, it has been when the state's extractivist agenda is challenged that rights of nature implementation has failed (Kauffman and Martin, 2017).

For example, high-profile rights of nature claims such as against the government's decision to allow the extraction of oil in the Yasuní National Park, and to allow large-scale open pit mining in the Zamora-Chinchiipe region, were unsuccessful despite significant pressure from civil society. These cases were mobilised by social movement actors in Ecuador, including environmental and indigenous rights groups, and resulted in significant criticism directed at the government due to supposed misrepresentations of the law (specifically the rights of nature) and underhanded tactics (Kauffman and Martin, 2017). In both cases the extraction of natural resources was deemed to be of greater benefit to the population than the protection of the rights of nature (Warnaars and

Bebbington, 2014; Kauffman and Martin, 2017). This reflects the tensions that exist between Ecuador's extractivist model of development and the promotion and defense of the rights of nature. Furthermore, as Kauffman and Martin (2017) argue, it also demonstrates the problem of civil society-driven cases being overly-politicised in national discourses and through the media.

Successful civil-society driven rights of nature cases were those which did not attract significant political attention or media coverage during the cases themselves, and which did not challenge the state's extractivist agenda. These cases consisted of one which was filed against local authorities attempting to expand a road which would damage the nearby Vilcabamba river, and another which was filed against local fishermen on the Galápagos Islands due to them fishing for sharks, which are a protected species. These are the two successful rights of nature cases that have been brought to court by civil society actors (from a total of five cases), including private individuals and local NGOs. Their relatively small-scale scope and lack of nationally-contentious political issues (compared to something such as mining or oil drilling) led to easier manageability and a higher chance of success (Kauffman and Martin, 2017).

However, to say that no successful rights of nature cases filed by the state (as opposed to civil society) were concerned with issues of natural resource extraction would be incorrect. One of the state's eight successful rights of nature cases was directly concerned with illegal (or "artisanal") mining in areas such as Esmeraldas and Zamora-Chinchipe. The government cited the protection of the rights of nature as its key motivation for the following actions, including the deployment of around 600 soldiers to seize illegal mining equipment in the affected areas (totalling around 200 pieces of equipment) (Daly, 2012; Kauffman and Martin, 2017). However, it is important to note that this implementation of the rights of nature came at the same time as the Ecuadorian government was itself expanding its own nationalised mining industry. This led some critics to claim that it was not the protection of the rights of nature that had driven the decision, but instead it was the protection of the state's own economic interests that had taken priority (Daly, 2012).

Consequently, while the rights of nature have indeed been implemented successfully in some cases, the discrepancy between when the state is the plaintiff versus when civil society is so remains problematic. Evidently, this discrepancy is two-fold – the

rate at which state-driven rights of nature cases are successful is significantly higher than when they are civil-society driven, and the extent to which rights of nature cases fail due to their challenging of the government's political and economic agenda. This is particularly salient due to the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador being, at least on the part of those most-involved, influenced by anti-extractivist ideas and rhetoric (Acosta, 2010; Acosta and Martínez, 2009; Gudynas, 2009, 2011b; Tanasescu, 2013). What the research presented in this thesis explores is how this state-society nexus affects the promotion and defense of the rights of nature outside of the courtroom, and the extent to which rights of nature activists in Ecuador no-longer trust the government and state institutions with the defense of such rights.

3.5.2 State pressure on activists

Furthermore, since the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador in 2008, the political landscape as regards environmentalism has changed significantly. Rights of nature activists, as well as environmentalists and indigenous rights activists more broadly, have faced increasing political pressure from the government, including imprisonment, harassment, and closure of their organisations (Appe, 2016; Becker, 2013; Dosh and Kligerman, 2009; Humphreys, 2017).

In March 2009 the Ecuadorian government of President Rafael Correa declared the legal status of Acción Ecológica (one of Ecuador's best-known environmental and indigenous rights NGOs) to be nullified. At that time, current Minister for Health Caroline Chang stated that such action was being taken due to Acción Ecológica not fulfilling its proposed mission as an NGO (to defend the rights of nature and the rights of indigenous peoples) (Acción Ecológica, 2009). In the period running up to its closure Acción Ecológica had been extremely vocal in its opposition to the government's newly proposed position on large-scale mining (President Correa had stated that he desired growth in the industry, and that in the future it should play a significant role in the country's economy), as well as planned drilling projects in the Yasuní National Park. However, the decision to dissolve Acción Ecológica was revoked after approximately two months, largely due to significant backlash from both domestic and international organisations (Dosh and Kligerman, 2009).

In December 2013 the offices of Fundación Pachamama (an environmental and indigenous rights NGO, and one of the organisations directly involved in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature) were raided by police. According to Fundación Pachamama, tensions had risen considerably between the organisation and the Ecuadorian government in the wake of the “XI Oil Round” – an auction of 16 oil blocks located in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Fundación Pachamama, 2013). President Rafael Correa had claimed that the organisation and its allies were guilty of inciting dissent and violence, and it was on these charges that Fundación Pachamama was demanded to dissolve, terminating its operation and license to function in the country (El Universo, 2013). However, under the current president (Lenín Moreno) Fundación Pachamama has once again been granted its ability to operate in Ecuador, after four years of extensive pressure from civil society actors both within the United States and Ecuador (Pachamama Alliance, 2017).

Furthermore, on the 4th of August 2015, a selection of government documents was leaked via the website *Ecuadortransparente.org* (Ecuadortransparente, 2015). These documents revealed the extensive surveillance of environmental activists, organisations, and key figures, that had been occurring since 2010. In-depth profiles had been developed on key environmental activist NGOs and their members, including Fundación Pachamama and Acción Ecológica, among others.

What these issues demonstrate is that the rights of nature as they manifest within Ecuador do-so in a highly contentious and problematic political environment. The activists who seek to promote and defend such rights have been faced with oppression at the hands of the same government that constitutionalised the rights of nature themselves. Consequently, the eco-political context within which these rights, and the activists who seek to uphold them, function and operate is both precarious and contradictory. What the research presented henceforth in this thesis explores is how this relationship between activists and the state contextualises social movement responses around the rights of nature. However, it also explores the way in which this relationship is portrayed by many rights of nature activists, who constitute key parts of the international rights of nature movement, in their efforts to scale-up these rights beyond their local and national contexts.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have illustrated the political and historical trajectory of the rights of nature as they exist as a particular cultural-political project. I have shown that the cultural politics of the rights of nature remain conflicted both in their conceptual underpinnings as well as in their practical implementations in Ecuador. While indeed aligning with indigenous perspectives and sensibilities, the constitutional articles remain more akin to the expressions of the rights of nature first articulated legally at the municipal level in the United States, and I have shown that the international rights of nature movement had extensive influence upon both of these formal manifestations of these rights.

However, I have also shown that (while the influence of particular actors and organisations from outside of Ecuador was indeed significant) the space within which the rights of nature were able to find a metaphorical home in Ecuador is highly attributable to the history of social movement struggle in the country's rich tapestry of culture and politics. This manifested through the power of the indigenous movement and its alliance with the environmental movement to fight for alternatives to the status-quo within the drafting of the 2008 constitution.

Finally, I have discussed the contemporary issues that face the functionality of the rights of nature in Ecuador, and the problematic political environment within which those who seek to promote and defend these rights must operate. This is most-clear when one turns their attention to the contentious relationship that exists between activists, extractive industries, and the state.

Fundamentally, what these combined issues signify is that the rights of nature in Ecuador remain contested, both at the level of knowledge and at the level of implementation. Throughout this thesis I illustrate how these contestations come to shape the articulations of the rights of nature made by social movement actors in Ecuador, but also how these contestations manifest when the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador is drawn upon by those operating within the international movement in efforts to "scale-up" these rights.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methods used throughout this project, and reflect upon their usefulness as well as their characteristics within the context of the project itself. I also turn attention to myself as the researcher, and what impact this had on the process of data collection and subsequent production of knowledge. First I outline the research context by providing details of where, and with whom, the research took place. This is followed by a discussion of the fundamental facets of an ethnographic approach to research, particularly in the sense of a *critical* ethnography. Then I go on to discuss the specific methods I utilised in order to obtain the data presented throughout this thesis, covering the topics of participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and discourse analysis. I then turn attention to issues around conducting research during times of political volatility. I finish by reflecting upon the importance of acknowledging one's positionality, and how my own positionality affected the manner in which this research was conducted.

The research presented in this thesis took place over a period of sixteen months in Ecuador, between June 2014 and December 2015. This time was split up into two periods, one of six months and one of ten months. The first six months were dedicated to in-country language training in Spanish, however during this time I was also exploring, experiencing, and learning from, the field. The ethnographic research in this project draws on twenty-seven semi-structured interviews, as well as many, many hours of "deep hanging out" (Geertz, 1998), participant observation, unstructured interviews, and informal conversations with activists who seek to promote and defend the rights of nature in Ecuador. The ethnographic data is accompanied by a discourse analysis of 108 documents released by the United Nations which make up the corpus of material that is publicly available on the United Nations Harmony with Nature project.

The key points that underly this section are the what, why, and how of the particular process which formed the research presented in this thesis. Consequently, I articulate not only the specifics of the methodological approaches I took, but I also present the fundamental justifications as to why I regard these approaches as the most

relevant for the research itself, informed by the core lines of inquiry outlined in Chapter 1.

4.2 Ethnography

The principle research approach utilised throughout this research was ethnography. Here I detail the conceptual underpinnings of the ethnographic process, discuss the facets that make an ethnography a *critical* ethnography, consider the role of ethnography in researching social movements, and then discuss the key methodological tools in ethnography such as participant observation as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

“In ethnography [...] you learn something (“collect some data”), then you try to make sense out of it (“analysis”), then you go back to see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience (“collect more data”), then you refine your interpretation (“more analysis”), and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear.”

(Agar, 1996:62).

The ethnographic process is predicated on the immersion of oneself within a particular culture or social setting for an extended period of time, utilising methods such as participant observation, interviews and focus groups in order to gain a well-rounded and multifaceted “thick description” of what is occurring on the ground. The researcher is tasked with observing and interpreting how the complexities and interrelated social processes of everyday life come to form, or inform, a particular phenomenon or given state of existence (Agar, 2004).

According to Thomas, at its most basic level and conceptualisation, ethnography is the “tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays meanings by interpretive means” (Thomas, 1993 pp. 3). It is therefore clear that ethnography is a hermeneutic method, relying on the researcher's interpretation of reality, where he or she operates as a mediator between what is perceived and what is communicated accordingly. In this sense, the inherent role of subjectivity is crucial to acknowledge in the ethnographic process and presents the necessity for a reflexive approach in order to obtain credible data. While this notion is clearly an issue for any form of social research, it can be particularly salient when discussing ethnography due to the popularity of utilising

unstructured and informal approaches to interviews, focus groups, and other forms of data collection.

However, while my research employed a broadly ethnographic framework, I specifically utilised a *critical* ethnographic approach. Critical ethnography was developed as a research approach by Jim Thomas (1993). According to Thomas, the term refers to “the reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgements of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity.” (Thomas, 1993 pp. 4); in other words, critical ethnography is ethnography with an emancipatory purpose – emancipation from dominant power structures of both physical and mental constrictions, resisting intellectual domestication. According to Thomas, points at which critical thinking can occur include ontology, topic selection, method, data analysis and interpretation, discourse, and reflection (Thomas, 1993 pp. 33). My research drew on this perspective due to the fundamental concern with the nature of power upon which my project focuses. This thesis draws attention to the ways in which social movements strive to challenge hegemonic power structures and institutions, and considers the ways in which activists exist within contested networks and relationships. Furthermore, it strives to represent the voices and experiences of individuals who have thus far remained unrepresented in discussions on the rights of nature. Consequently, it maintains a core ethos of challenging the status-quo, both in the context of what my participants themselves strive to achieve, as well as what the research itself contributes to the wider field of knowledge. Furthermore, I consider my ethnography to be a critical ethnography due to some of the research methods I employed. For example, parts of my participant observation involved me engaging directly in the activities that were being carried out by my participants. Furthermore, throughout the research I was increasingly “embedded” within the social and political networks maintained by my participants; this resulted in me becoming a (albeit small) part of the power struggles which they were mobilising. I reflect on this later in this chapter, drawing particular attention to the implications it had for my research.

Furthermore, acknowledging the role of reflexivity is crucial to the utilisation of critical ethnography, notably the assertion that ethnography is in itself a culture-studying culture (Thomas, 1993). Realising the role of the researcher and the power relationships inherent in the research process is of paramount importance to critical ethnography due to the desired focus on the cultural norms and value assertions that underpin the status-quo.

Along with this level of personal reflexivity, also comes the necessity to be reflexive about one's own culture, the culture they are operating in and the macro linkages between the two. For example, the historical role of colonialism in the relationships between specific societies establishes controversial conceptualisations of the notion of "research" (and particularly ethnography) as a process of generalisation and exploitation (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999); by acknowledging this problematic dynamic, a critical ethnographer is able to not only shape their research respectively in light of this, but also address the lingering issues that still arise as consequence. I engage with this process later in this chapter by reflecting on how my role as a researcher affected the dynamics of data collection and knowledge production.

4.3 Selecting Spaces for Research

Given that ethnography relies on observing the ways in which people behave in particular situations, especially in the sense of how cultural and political facets manifest within a group (Herbert, 2000), the spaces within which these manifestations emerge are crucial to consider when reflecting critically upon the ethnographic process. For the purpose of this research, the spaces I researched were "activist" spaces, or spaces of activism. The notion of an activist space is predicated on the idea that activist individuals and groups engage in particular spaces in order to make change, or contest political power structures (Juris, 2013).

The purpose of my ethnographic research is to examine social movement activism around the promotion and defense of the rights of nature in Ecuador, and is therefore predicated on collective (as opposed to individual) forms of activism. For this reason it is more concerned with *organised* collective action, comprising forms of activism performed by groups in designated moments and spaces (as opposed to *everyday* forms of activism). While I spent considerable time engaging with, observing, and learning from participants as part of the ethnographic process (the significance of this is discussed in more depth later in this chapter), the ethnographic data presented within this thesis was predominantly collected at particular moments of *organised* activism.

The fundamental question that informed my decisions as to which moments (and their associated spaces) I would analyse was "what are the key spaces in which my participants seek to promote and defend the rights of nature?". Importantly, the answers

to this question often emerged organically and in dialogue with my participants themselves. For example, participants would inform me when activities (such as discussions, protests, or group meetings) which would be concerned with the rights of nature as a theme were due to occur. Interestingly, in some cases this represented a separation between “rights of nature activism” and other “environmentalist” activities that participants might be carrying out, even though one might assume that they would be inextricably linked. However, due to the embedded nature of ethnography (particularly in the sense of “deep hanging out”) I was not limited to the moments which my participants regarded as relevant; instead I was also able to witness and experience some of the more informal and spontaneous forms of socialisation that my participants engaged in. These moments (such as sitting in parks, at people’s houses, or frequenting local bars and eateries together) helped to build connections and establish trusting relationships with participants, as well as bring to light other activities and interactions I might otherwise not have been aware of.

However, there were two types of primary sites selected for my ethnographic research. While both types of sites are discussed in greater depth within their associated chapters, I here give brief outlines of their significance for this research:

Protests	Protests took place in Quito and were staged as part of broader anti-government marches. The protests provided a key site of research due to them being the most large-scale mobilisations and forms of collective activism I witnessed throughout my research. Consequently, they also represented significant sites of physical unification of various rights of nature activists operating as parts of different groups.
Organised discussion groups	Organised discussion groups took place in numerous locations throughout the <i>Sierra</i> region (specific sites discussed further in

	chapter 6). They were organised by student groups and NGOs. These discussion groups provided key sites of research due to the ways in which they functioned as centralised spaces of knowledge production and sharing around the rights of nature.
--	--

Table 1: Types of primary research sites

4.4 Identifying participants

The fundamental question that I first had to consider when attempting to identify potential participants for the research was “what constitutes a rights of nature activist?”. I narrowed down the answers to this question to two core characteristics that aligned with my broad research objectives:

- Engagement with activism that seeks to promote and/or defend the rights of nature.
- A sense of being part of a movement that seeks to promote and/or defend the rights of nature.

While the first point is fairly clear and identifiable (organisations, groups, or individuals clearly stated that the rights of nature were of direct interest to their operations and activities), the second point is more problematic due to its subjective nature, and therefore must be clarified further.

The purpose of this research is to analyse the social movement dynamics of the rights of nature; consequently, notions of *collective* action are of crucial interest. However, at what point does action become collective? For the purpose of this research I regard the collective aspect of action to be rooted in one’s sense of connection to a broader movement. This is premised on notions of collective identity within social movements, where social movement actors are bound by a ‘shared definition of a group that derives from members’ (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). In this sense, collective action stems from social movement actors’ unification around a particular issue, which in the context of this research is the rights of nature. However, in addition to this it is important to state that the notion of “being a member of a movement” also pertains to individual actors’

subjectivities around what such a movement might be. Part of what this research seeks to illustrate is that the notion of a homogenous and monolithic “rights of nature movement” is problematic, and therefore the nuances behind what exactly constitutes a “movement” must be taken into account. Consequently, I do not regard the “sense of being part of a movement” as being contingent on identifying with “the” rights of nature movement (conceptualised as a singular, and fundamentally international, force by scholars such as Margil, 2014; Fitz-Henry, 2014; and Kauffman and Martin, 2017. For a deeper discussion of this please refer back to chapter 3). Instead, the idea of belonging to a “movement” could manifest in a variety of ways (of which the aforementioned articulation of the rights of nature movement is indeed one), such as a national political movement, or a student movement. Importantly, from my own experience conducting this research I found that these could often overlap, further highlighting the importance of acknowledging the nuanced nature of the subjectivities that underpin the sense of “belonging to a movement”.

These became the key criteria by which my recruitment practices would be guided, and were directly informed by the research objectives laid out in Chapter 1.

4.5 Recruiting Participants

Once I was aware of what some of the characteristics of potential participants might look like, I was able to begin the process of recruitment. The time I had assigned to beginning recruitment was during the first six months of my eighteen-month stay in Ecuador. However, this time was primarily dedicated to undertaking in-country language training in Spanish, and the process of initiating recruitment was to be carried out towards the end of this six-month period, and into my “formal” fieldwork period.

Initially, my research aimed to focus exclusively on NGOs and the activists that work within them. This was predicated on my understanding that the majority of activism around the rights of nature was predominantly located within NGOs and their networks. Admittedly, this had come from a preconceived notion of the dynamics and realities of the field, influenced primarily by the existing academic literature on the rights of nature in Ecuador. This was, however, one of the purposes of my language training to be conducted “in-country” – so as to dissolve these preconceptions and instead allow me

to explore and interpret the field in a way that would enable a research framework to be designed in accordance with the realities within which I would be existing.

As a result of this, over time my focus also came to include other activist groups, such as numerous student groups, who did not function as NGOs. Similarly, my research also came to include individuals who operated between NGOs or other organisations or groups, but did not formally identify as one of their workers or members (I regard these as “independent activists”. Access to many of these participants came from “snowballing” and “chain referral” sampling – techniques which are found to be particularly useful for sampling and recruitment in populations or groups that are not conventionally visible or easily accessed (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Heckathorn, 2002, 1997; Noy, 2008). These methods of sampling are especially beneficial when participant groups know each other well or are densely interconnected (Heckathorn, 2002), as was the case with the established NGO networks, as well as student groups which often functioned as an amorphous collection of individuals and sub-groups, dictated often (but certainly not exclusively) by friendship and university affiliation.

Below is a table of the categories of groups and organisations, followed by a table of participants, which formed the data sample for my research conducted in Ecuador:

<p>Student activist groups</p>	<p>The student activist groups featured in this research are comprised of individuals who attend (or recently graduated from) university. The groups predominantly include people between the ages of 18 to 25.</p> <p>While some student activist groups integrate and engage with other groups (NGOs and independent activist groups), they most often engage with other students/student groups.</p> <p>Student activist groups function as loose collectives of individuals who unite around particular issues (such as natural</p>
--------------------------------	---

	<p>resource extraction, the rights of nature, and human rights).</p> <p>Groups are not fixed nor static, and while students from (for example) university A most often convene with other students from university A, many students from university A also convene with students from universities B and C.</p>
<p>Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)</p>	<p>The NGOs featured in this research work on a variety of issues, however the most common are natural resource extraction, rights, water, and political representation. NGOs often work both horizontally (with other NGOs and civil society groups) as well as vertically (with government or businesses). However, some only work horizontally.</p> <p>Typical activities of these NGOs are things such as organising online campaigns to raise issue awareness, helping communities mobilise around rights issues or to gain greater political representation, helping communities to establish sustainable local economies.</p>
<p>Independent activists</p>	<p>Independent activists are not formally members of any groups or organisations listed here, however they do often engage with them in various capacities (such as assisting on work for projects/activities, or socialising). Therefore, while independent activists are not formal <i>members</i> of the other groups or organisations listed here,</p>

	<p>they do form parts of their wider networks.</p> <p>Independent activists come from many walks of life including: journalists, retail workers, bloggers, and artists.</p>
--	---

Table 2: Categories of participant groups and organisations

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Principal Status
1	Juan	Male	24	Student
2	Sonia	Female	20	Student
3	Francisco	Male	Unknown	Student
4	Martín	Male	21	Student
5	Paola	Female	23	Student
6	Fede	Male	23	Student
7	Sebastian	Male	25	Student
8	William	Male	Unknown	NGO worker
9	Esteban	Male	34	NGO worker
10	Vanessa	Female	Unknown	NGO worker
11	Ally	Male	22	Student
12	Laura	Female	36	NGO worker
13	Sandra	Female	23	NGO worker
14	Susan	Female	Mid-40s	NGO worker
15	Joselo	Male	28	NGO worker
16	Julia	Female	Unknown	NGO worker
17	Isabel	Female	26	NGO worker
18	Jessy	Female	Mid-30s	NGO worker
19	Patricio	Male	29	Blogger

20	Estefany	Female	31	Tourism Agent
21	Elodie	Female	33	Journalist
22	Henry	Male	19	Student
23	Ricardo	Male	49	NGO worker
24	Florence	Female	Unknown	Retail worker
25	Jeremy	Male	26	Bar worker
27	Anita	Female	Mid-20s	Unknown
28	Andrea	Female	Unknown	Retail worker
29	Michelle	Female	30	NGO volunteer
30	Samuel	Male	24	Student
31	Misha	Female	Unknown	Student
32	Lucas	Male	19	Student
33	Rose	Female	20	Unknown

Table 3: Table of participants

Furthermore, the process of “deep hanging out” (which I discuss in more depth in the next section) within my ethnographic approach enabled the aforementioned methods of sampling to succeed particularly well. For example, my presence in social and informal situations enabled those who may have initially been sceptical of my being there more at ease, as I was able to integrate and converse with people in environments which were more relaxed than, for example, a formal interview, or brief periods of participant observation. In this sense, participants were able to develop a sense of who I was, and what I was doing, over time, and could feel free to approach me at their own will if they so desired.

However, initial contact in order to begin recruitment was still necessary. This came in two forms, according to the organisation or group with which I was seeking to become involved. My two most crucial points of contact came from connecting with NGOs and with a small student group I met on one of the local university campuses. Initial contact with NGOs came exclusively from email communication and telephone conversations. I was also advised to attempt recruiting through Twitter, however this

avenue proved less fruitful for my recruitment when compared with the methods previously mentioned.

As I stated earlier, my ability to make “deep” contact with larger or more well-known NGOs was problematic, and often only resulted in interviews with official spokespeople, however this was not the case for all of these organisations, and was much less the case for smaller organisations that operated in a less formal manner (for example, smaller NGOs that were not officially registered with the government, and organisations that did not identify as NGOs at all, but saw themselves as more than merely “groups”).

From my experience whilst conducting this research, it is evident that the process of recruitment was very much an on-going activity, rather than an isolated period of the research which was separate to data collection. Indeed, the process of recruitment was often deeply interconnected with the period of data collection, with the two forming a mutually-constitutive relationship.

4.5.1 Reflections on “deep hanging out” as a method of recruitment

The notion of “deep hanging out” in ethnography refers to the extensive immersion of the researcher within a particular environment, often in an informal manner (Geertz, 1998). It is a form of participant observation which is used as a methodological tool in order to “understand acts and actors as much as possible from within their own frame of reference” (Yanow, 2007:409). While some have argued that the “hanging out” aspect of ethnography is only a small fraction of the method (for example, see (Jordan and Dalal 2006), Browne and McBride (2015) argue instead that the “deep hanging out” process is in fact much more than this. My experience of “deep hanging out” certainly supports Browne and McBride’s assertions, in the sense that it was through the process of hanging out with participants in informal circumstances that allowed me to gain deeper levels of access to my participant groups, as well as develop meaningful relationships with them, which in turn enabled me to collect data that may not have otherwise been available to me. In this sense, the process of “deep hanging out” is not just a method of data extraction, for me it was in fact the fundamental cornerstone of the ethnographic process and of my ethnographic experience. The experiences that I lived through from “hanging out” with my participants over the course of my fieldwork provided me with

more contacts, deeper relationships (hence, trust), and richer data than I might otherwise have been able to obtain.

This all was particularly pertinent given the precarious political environment that I was engaging in. As Browne and McBride (2015) state, researchers operating in politically sensitive contexts can easily be seen as suspicious and treated as such, blocking potential avenues of research and limiting data collection possibilities. For example, at the time that I arrived in Ecuador tensions were high between environmental groups and the state. Some environmental organisations had been forcibly closed down and others were facing the threat of similar sorts of repression. Upon initial contact with most potential participant organisations, I was most often offered only a cursory interview with the spokesperson of the group. However, this was not going to satisfy the aims of my research, in the sense that it would not provide enough depth as regards available data. Furthermore, I desired to speak to more than one person per organisation or group in order to obtain the perspectives of as many individuals as possible, so as to examine the nuances that existed between them. When I would state that I wished to spend considerable amounts of time within the organisation or group, over an extended time period, I was refused. In some cases, where organisations were more formal (i.e. NGOs), I would even offer to help out and work for free so that I would be able to contribute, and not simply “extract”. However the nature of my research and my desire to become deeply exposed to the inner workings of the groups proved to be working against me. Perhaps the extent of my naivety upon entering the field is reflected in the fact that I was expecting it to be easier than it was.

It was, however, through “deep hanging out” that I was able to establish myself initially within one group, but subsequently across a variety of groups and organisations. This snowballing effect was obviously useful, but it also demonstrated to me the necessity of this aspect of an ethnography not only as a process of data collection, but as a fundamental part of recruitment in some instances. For example, I was sitting in a bar with a pair of participants who I had come to know very well, while at the same time I was being introduced to one of their friends who would come to be another significant participant in the research. What intrigued me was the manner in which I was introduced and talked about between the individual parties, how they saw my research and my very presence there. In this context *I* was the point of discussion, but I was able to observe and absorb a variety of perspectives on an even wider variety of topics that were extremely

pertinent to my research, whilst also gaining new participants who were eager to be involved in the research.

Consequently, within the process of “deep hanging out” I was able to function in a multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic manner, in which any moment was defined by a complex tapestry of roles, both my own and those of the people I was with, be it researcher, participant, gatekeeper, acquaintance, even friend. In this sense, the complex hybridity and fluid nature of the ethnographic experience, (un)structured by the process of “deep hanging out”, was exemplified, and elucidated the nuanced nature of the process that is doing in-depth social research.

4.6 Participant observation

Participant observation is a key method within the broader ethnographic approach to research and refers to the process by which a researcher engages with participants during particular activities, rituals, or events (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010). Due to the “embedded” format of participant observation, it is better suited to reveal subtle social contexts, and enables a more complete portrait of nuanced social realities when compared with other qualitative methods (Li, 2008).

The ethnographic research presented in this thesis draws on two types of participant observation: active and passive participant observation. These were both conducted in accordance with the two key types of research spaces listed earlier (protests and discussion groups).

Active participant observation	Active participant observation is characterised by the researcher directly taking part in the activities that they are observing. This technique is useful not only for gaining acceptance, but also for acquiring deeper cultural and personal insights into the behaviours of groups as one embraces and performs a particular
--------------------------------	--

	activity (Johnson et al., 2006; Spradley, 2016).
Passive participant observation	Passive participant observation is characterised by the observer being present within the social situation they are observing, but not formally engaging in or taking part in the activities occurring around them. When conducting passive participant observation the researcher behaves as a spectator, attempting to take up an “observation post” from which they can study a situation or environment, and allow it to function with less interference compared to active participant observation (Spradley, 2016).

Table 4: Active and passive participant observation

I conducted active participant observation during protests, where as a researcher I directly engaged with some of the activities that my participants were taking part in; for example, I marched, carried placards, and chanted with participants. This was useful to the research process as it allowed me to gain greater acceptance with the groups taking part in the protests, and it also enabled me to become immersed in the highly emotional experiences that my participants themselves were engaging in. Furthermore, this style of participant observation seemed most suitable due to the physical practicalities of researching the protests. In order to conduct participant observation of protests it was necessary for me to, at the very least, march with the protesters so that one can study their activities and behaviours within the protest space. Consequently, even engaging in a more passive way would still lead to active participant observation due to directly involving oneself with the principal activity at hand.

I conducted passive participant observation during the discussion groups I attended, where I tried to disconnect myself as much as possible from the discussions that were taking place. I would often position myself in the corner of the room, or set just away from the group. While it was not possible for me to *entirely* disconnect myself from the situation (I was still present there), I did not engage verbally in the discussions and, as

stated, tried to place myself physically away while still being able to observe and hear what was happening. I regarded passive participant observation to be most suitable during these discussion groups due to the fact that I did not wish for the conversations to be affected by my input. Furthermore, contrary to the protests, passive participant observation was indeed possible in these contexts.

However, while my observation of the formal exchanges that took place during these discussion groups was indeed at a distance, there were points at which I *would* engage with attendees and organisers, such as during breaks as well as before and after each group took place. This was done for two reasons necessity and cordiality. Necessity in the sense that I had to ensure that all people in attendance were comfortable with my presence and were aware of what I was doing (this was often done formally during the introduction to a session, or where groups were smaller I would sometimes go around and ask people individually); and cordiality in the sense that people would often be interested to talk with me about my research. Consequently, it was during these breaks in formal participant observation of the discussion groups that I was able to have one-to-one chats with people, and in some cases conduct unstructured interviews (these are discussed in more depth later in the chapter) that were used to support the observational data I had obtained.

4.7 Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews

As well as data obtained through participant observation this research also relies on semi-structured and unstructured interviews in order to support the other data I collected. Interviews are often considered an important part of ethnographic methods in that they enable a different approach to engaging with participants and allow the researcher to target specific aspects of enquiry (Crang and Cook, 2007; Gobo, 2008).

The benefit of conducting semi-structured interviews in an ethnography is that they allow the researcher to focus on specific issues in a way that is not so accessible during participant observation. Consequently, the researcher is able to take certain themes or topics that they have witnessed or engaged with during participant observation, and explore them in a deeper manner in order to better understand them and their place in the research (Longhurst, 2016 in Clifford et al., 2016).

However, semi-structured interviews tend to take place in certain, often static, locations which may not be representative of participant's everyday lives or the specific topics in question (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). In this sense, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the data obtained through semi-structured interviews is very different in nature to that of data obtained through "deep hanging out". It is therefore important to treat these two methods of data collection as both complimentary and intertwined, as opposed to separate and isolated.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews also proved to be a useful tool for this research when "deeper" or more integrated forms of data collection were not available, for example with larger, more established organisations. I tended to find that the formality offered by the interview format made more established organisations and their spokespeople more comfortable with talking to me, and provided an environment of professionalism which they were more prepared to converse in.

Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, I would arrive with a specific set of topics (see an example of one of my interview schedules in appendix 1) that I wanted to cover, but I would not be deterred if the interviewee desired to steer the conversation in a different direction. As a result of this, new themes could potentially emerge from the interview, ones which I may not have considered prior to beginning the interview process.

In addition to semi-structured interviews I also utilised unstructured interviews. These types of interviews were most often used during periods of participant observation and "deep hanging out". Unstructured interviews are of significant use to the broader ethnographic process as they assist the researcher in accessing life on the "inside" and representing it accurately (Brewer, 2000). I also found that unstructured interviews were a useful way of complimenting data obtained through participant observation, as they enabled me to delve deeper into certain aspects of the environments or social processes I was witnessing.

Unstructured-interviews took the shape of informal conversations between participants and I, where we would speak in a spontaneous manner. Sometimes the conversations would be focused on the event we were attending at that time (such as a protest or discussion group), or in cases where the interview was not taking place at a specific even the topics of conversation would emerge dynamically, often guided by the

interviewee themselves. However, in most cases (and while the interviews indeed remained “unstructured”) these conversations were still ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984), in the sense that they were contextualised by a social relationship with me as a researcher who was interested in particular phenomena.

Overall I found that both semi-structured and unstructured interviews were of great value to my overall ethnographic enquiry, as they complimented the broader scope of participant observation and “deep hanging out”. Both types of interviews allowed in-depth data to be collected that was more pertinent to individuals operating as part of wider groups, where they might not have expressed certain opinions or viewpoints. Furthermore, the interviews and conversations allowed participants the freedom to talk at-length about topics that were important to them, as opposed to what was deemed as relevant in broader group contexts.

Interviews were predominantly done in Spanish, with the only exceptions being when a participant specifically stated that they wanted to conduct the interview in English. This exception could occur for numerous reasons – for example, the interviewee’s first language was not Spanish (as was the case with some NGO workers), or that they regarded their fluency in English as particularly high, and wanted to converse in it. Given that the vast majority of my participants were tertiary educated, financially comfortable, and culturally cosmopolitan, many spoke English to some degree, however I stressed that it was important for them to be able to express themselves as accurately and as comfortably as possible, so for this reason most interviews were conducted in Spanish. I touch on the use of Spanish, specifically in the context of translation, in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

4.8 Discourse Analysis

As well as data collected through ethnographic methods, this thesis (specifically chapter 7) also draws upon data collected through a critical discourse analysis of documents made publicly available by the United Nations, pertaining to the institution’s Harmony with Nature Project. The details of these documents are covered in more-depth in their relevant chapter, however I here wish to briefly touch on the methodological implications of using discourse analysis within qualitative methods, and my decision to include such an approach in addition to my ethnographic enquiry.

Firstly, the decision to include the analysis of United Nations documents came from the desire for my research to explore the “scaling-up” of the rights of nature. What these documents provide is an insight into how the rights of nature (and the case of Ecuador) have been scaled-up to the level of the United Nations by many key actors in “the” rights of nature movement – the international movement conceptualised in a monolithic sense by scholars such as (Margil, 2014; Fitz-Henry, 2012; Kauffman and Martin, 2017). Furthermore, the temporal nature of these meetings (held annually) meant that by analysing these documents I was able to pay attention to the ways in which the inclusion of the rights of nature had occurred over time, and the nuances that emerged in this longitudinal fashion. Consequently, I would not have been able to obtain the data that I did if I had conducted an ethnography of one or two meetings (this is all that would have been plausible in the timeframe of my research period). Therefore, a discourse analysis of all available documents from the United Nations Harmony with Nature Project seemed the most reasonable approach to take, given the methodological and practical considerations presented to me.

Discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with the power relations and power implications of the use of language, often either through spoken, textual, or semiotic means (Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Fairclough 1992). Consequently, discourse analysis does not merely consider texts to be independent artefacts that exist outside of the realm of problematic power relations, meaning that documents, utterances, and the words that constitute them must be regarded as contextually-based fragments of wider social structures (Van Dijk, 1993).

For the purpose of this research I was primarily looking at *representations* within the texts (how the rights of nature are represented, and how Ecuador is represented). The processes and mechanics of representation are crucial to a discourse analysis that is concerned with power and power relations. Fundamentally, issues such as who is represented by whom, and what the categories are by which such representation takes place, are of significant interest to research that utilises a discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 2013). This approach to representation allowed the discourse analysis I conducted to function fruitfully alongside the ethnographic data I had collected, due to the fact that I could critically assess the representations made within the United Nations Harmony with Nature Project. I did this by comparing such representations to the lived

realities of the rights of nature activists I spoke with who were operating in Ecuador, and by critiquing the extent to which these representations reflected their experiences.

The discourse analysis conducted was focused exclusively on written texts, which were written by individuals as part of their contributions to the United Nations Harmony with Nature Project. These included speeches, letters, and emails made available by the United Nations; therefore, all data collected in this manner was done so through access to secondary sources. While the use of secondary sources is convenient due to the often greater wealth of material available, there can also be problems with ensuring that data sets are complete or have not been tampered with (Clark, 2005). Furthermore, some of the documents (particularly speeches) were submitted in text-form to the United Nations, and were not direct transcripts of what was said at the meetings; therefore, it is possible that the actual words spoken varied from what had been initially submitted. However, while I acknowledge the limitations of secondary sources, particularly in the sense of the extent to which they are truly accurate representations of what occurred, I still regard these documents as the best way to conduct an analysis of these meetings when considering the resources available to me.

4.9 Data Analysis: Coding and Writing

Once I returned from the field I was faced with the challenge of getting to grips with the vast array of qualitative data I had obtained, including field notes, interview recordings, and notes taken during conversations with participants. First, I had to transcribe any remaining audio recordings that I had (these were few as most data collection relied on taking written notes, which is discussed later in this chapter), as well as convert any remaining field notes from written form to a word-processed format onto the computer. This involved translating everything written or recorded in Spanish to English, and I performed all translation myself. This placed a significant amount of responsibility upon myself both as a researcher and translator due to the power dynamics that inherently exist within the translation process. Indeed, translation is not a neutral activity due to the power of representation and interpretation that exist within it (Temple and Young, 2004); for this reason I ensured that all translations were as close to the original form as possible, and I had no major problems with comprehension. Whenever there was a word that I did not understand, I asked the participant to clarify the term at the point of data collection.

Pinpointing the exact beginning of the analytical process is problematic, due to the fact that whilst I was in the field I was beginning to consider the embryonic forms of particular themes that would later form key parts of this thesis, despite not “formally” analysing such things in any structured way. Likewise, translation, transcription and word-processing of data also allowed me to become immersed within the material I had collected, where I could further develop potential thoughts and themes related to the words and language I was dealing with. This is what Braun and Clarke (2006) regard as “familiarising” oneself with the data, which constitutes an important part of the research process. Consequently, I regard the time leading up to “formal” analysis (i.e. coding and beyond) to be crucial to the overall analytical process behind the research.

Once all my data had been processed I began coding the material using NVivo, a computer program used as a tool for qualitative data analysis. I decided to use what Crang and Cook (2007) refer to as ‘Emic’ and ‘Etic’ categories to guide the coding process. ‘Emic’ categories are those which were derived from the language and terminologies used by my participants themselves, whereas ‘Etic’ categories were derived from my own prior knowledge, particularly in the sense of theory and social science conceptual frameworks. Consequently, the coding process took the shape of both an open-ended coding strategy (where codes and themes are generated *inductively* from the research) as well as an assigned coding strategy (where codes and themes are attributed *deductively* upon the research). By utilising these types of categories I was able to draw relationships between what was being said within the data, and broader theoretical approaches and assertions within Human Geography and Political Ecology.

It is important to note that in some cases these categories were not mutually exclusive, due to the fact that participants would sometimes speak in terms that were mirrored in the academic literature. The clearest example of this was in the use of words such as “*biocentrico*” (biocentric), “*ecocentrico*” (ecocentric), and “*antropocentrico*” (anthropocentric); these are what I would consider to be technical terms, and the ways in which they were being used often reflected the academic debates that utilise them in the context of nature-society relations. Therefore, in such cases certain ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ categories could become blurred, as they were not clearly exclusive from one another.

Finally, as with pinpointing the *beginning* of analysis, the *end* of analysis is equally problematic to fully discern. I regard my process of analysis to have continued

throughout the time that I was writing the chapters of this thesis, as I would often go back to revisit the data while formulating and expanding upon key arguments. I did this not only to ensure that the themes and arguments I was presenting were as robust as possible, but also in order to continue drawing out relationships and nuances that I may not have seen before. Consequently, I consider the process of data analysis to have been a fluid and dynamic period throughout the writing of this thesis.

4.10 Ethical Considerations of Doing Research in Politically Sensitive Environments

My research was conducted under relatively precarious political circumstances, principally regarding the relationship between my participants and the state. This came to affect the ways in which the research transpired and evolved over time, not least resulting in many problematic situations during pivotal moments in the research process. For example, one of the most crucial points at which this came to pass was when a series of government documents were leaked, showing that the Ecuadorian government had been conducting surveillance on certain groups of environmental activists. This resulted in a number of participants temporarily withdrawing from the research, as they felt it presented a risk not only to themselves, but also to me. While after a relatively short period of time most of these participants decided to return to the research, some did not, resulting not only in destroyed data, but also in me feeling concerned about the effects that my research might have on participant's lives. Furthermore, it forced me to reflect on my own safety and wellbeing in the context of the research process and any activities associated with it. In order to maintain and ensure my own safety I made sure to follow university regulations and guidelines, as well as guidance from supervisors.

From the beginning of the fieldwork period, participants were always made aware that their involvement in the research was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and if they chose to do so that their data would not be used and would instead be destroyed. While this is a routine process for many researchers, I had not anticipated that it would come to impact upon my own project. The pivotal moment involving the leaked government documents resulted in a shift in approach to data collection. Specific steps were taken in order to ensure that participants were, upon becoming re-involved in the research, comfortable with the methods and tools used in accordance with the changing political/security situation. These were:

- Using written notes instead of a Dictaphone for interviews.
- In some cases, contact to be made via mobile phones that were *not* their “official” personal devices.
- Email contact not to be used.

These changes were made in cooperation with participants, both those who chose to return to the research, as well as those who did not decide to leave. I made the decision to implement the above changes across the research project in its entirety (some participants were seemingly not worried about the unfolding political events) as I felt it was the most responsible and ethical action to take. I could have, for example, only initiated these changes in data collection with the participants who specifically stated they desired them, and then not have made these changes with others who were perfectly happy to continue as we had before. It is notable that there were some participants who felt that making these changes demonstrated a fear of the state, and that this was an undesirable position to take. However, I felt that it was my responsibility as the researcher to take the initiative in implementing these changes across the board, in order to ensure the safety and security of my participants and their data.

While these events and the subsequent changes to data collection and contact with participants presented a disruption in the research, they also provided an important moment to reflect on the situation within which I was operating. Whilst these problems were unfolding, I was initially tempted to think that my research was falling apart, and that I would not be able to continue with the project. However, after a short period of time I came to realise that what was occurring was in fact a vital part of my research, and that I instead had to learn to adapt to the changing political climate in order to better understand it and function within it. In this sense, my embeddedness as a researcher was demonstrated, further consolidating the notion that the researcher themselves are not separate from the object of research, and that in fact our role is vital to understand and reflect upon when considering our presence in a research environment, and the impact this has at the point of knowledge production.

Finally, given the precarious environment within which my research was taking place, it was also necessary to utilise strict procedures of anonymisation throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and writing. While the anonymisation of data

(particularly through the use of pseudonyms for participants) is a common practice in social science research (Nespor, 2000; Saunders et al., 2015) the levels to which anonymisation takes place can vary. For example, while the anonymisation of participants' names is conventional, sometimes it is also necessary to anonymise names of groups, organisations, communities, or locations (Wiles et al., 2008). As Nespor (2000) notes, in some cases this can lead to a de-contextualisation of qualitative data, and risks leaving certain aspects feeling disconnected or decoupled from the realities from which they originated.

For the purpose of this research I chose to anonymise names of individuals and organisations due to the political implications of the activities that many participants were engaging in (both inside and outside of the research). In regards to locations, I never specified the exact names or sites of private dwellings or community spaces and instead left the descriptions as general as possible, often only stating the city within which they existed. The exception to this was with data pertaining to specific sites where protests were held in the city of Quito, as the protests themselves were covered extensively throughout Ecuadorian media and were attended by many thousands of people, therefore they were not "hidden" events.

While the research presented in this thesis was indeed conducted during a time of political volatility in Ecuador, specifically in the context of the relationship between activists and the government, I do not believe that the data I collected was compromised as a result of this. However, and as I have illustrated here, the issues that were presented did have methodological implications for the research, and therefore had to be acknowledged and overcome in order for the project to be carried out in a way that remained practically and ethically responsible.

4.11 Forging Personal Relationships in the Field: Reflections on objectivity and the Insider/Outsider dichotomy

Given the amount of time that I spent in the field and with many of my participants, it is unsurprising that I came to develop friendships and caring relationships with some of them. This often came down to having certain things in common, such as similar ideologies and beliefs, as well as shared interests and social habits. Therefore, it is important to consider the extent to which this impacted my research.

Developing friendships or caring relationships with participants is not uncommon when researchers become deeply embedded in their research environment (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006; Ellis, 2007); indeed, in some cases it can seem almost unthinkable not to (Ellis, 2007). While the idea of developing such relationships with participants has sometimes been discouraged (Glesne, 1999), in some cases it can lead to the obtaining of data that might not otherwise have been available (Phillion, 2002).

From my experience with conducting this research, I found that in some cases this forging of relationships was in fact necessary to achieve in order to gain access to particular groups. For example, some of the student groups I engaged with would only allow me access to their activities if they thought of me as a friend. They often stated that this was due to their general distrust of outsiders, particularly in the context of the problematic relationship between activists and the government. Consequently, it was only through developing these relationships that I was able to obtain the data that I did in those instances.

When spending time socialising with some of my participants we debated political issues, compared things such as university life within Ecuador and the United Kingdom, we enjoyed similar music and even shared libraries of songs. For a while, I saw this as both a positive and a negative. On the one hand, I was pleased that I was able to develop meaningful relationships with my research participants, but on the other I worried that I was losing my ability to be “objective”. However, after speaking with colleagues and supervisors, I came to realise that these personal connections were not a bad thing, they were not to be shied away from, and they were most certainly nothing to be ashamed of. I realised that these relationships and my ability to develop and sustain them was something that provided my research with a particular sort of value, as well as a particular sort of character. Furthermore, the idea that the researcher is able to remain as an objective outsider is highly problematic from the outset. As Kim England asserts:

“Neopositivist empiricism specifies a strict dichotomy between object and subject as a prerequisite for objectivity. Such an epistemology is supported by methods that position the researcher as an omnipotent expert in control of both passive research subjects and the research process. Years of positivist-inspired training have taught us that impersonal, neutral detachment is an important criterion for good research. In these discussions of detachment, distance, and impartiality, the

personal is reduced to a mere nuisance or a possible threat to objectivity. This threat is easily dealt with. The neopositivist's professional armor includes a carefully constructed public self as a mysterious, impartial outsider, an observer freed of personality and bias."

(England, 1994:243)

I had no ability to claim that I could be a "mysterious, impartial outsider" or "an observer freed of personality and bias." Indeed, it was my ability to reject this that enabled me to build meaningful relationships with the people I was dealing with. However, at the same time it was important not to lose my sense of being *critical* during my fieldwork. In this sense I had a responsibility toward my research process to ensure that the data I obtained and the manner in which I represented it were not blind to any problematic realities or phenomena that I witnessed. Furthermore, it was also necessary not to prioritise the viewpoints and experiences of those who I was personally closer with compared to those with whom I was not.

Consequently, I regard the issue of forging friendships or caring relationships with some participants as an overall benefit to my research, albeit one that had to be considered and reflected upon sufficiently so as to acknowledge the ways in which it shaped parts of the research process and outcomes.

Finally, it is important to state that all research which involves establishing connections with other people bestows a responsibility upon the researcher to communicate their results or findings to those who were involved throughout the process of data collection. This is embedded in the idea that as researchers we are not neutral actors who have no effect on the places within which we operate personally and professionally (Desai and Potter, 2007; Bazeley, 2006). Rather, as I have discussed throughout this section and continue in the next, the researcher plays a key role in the process of data collection and research as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and act upon this duty of responsibility through the dissemination of research findings to participants when and where this is possible.

In line with this process of ethical thinking and engagement, I shall disseminate my research findings to relevant participants in a format which is suitable for their uses and interests. This will involve producing a summary, in Spanish, of my thesis and the key arguments I have made. I will then send this summary to as many organisations and

individuals who were involved in the research as possible, while also maintaining the key ethical responsibilities I have outlined in the previous section. This will be aimed at two primary audiences:

- 1) Grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador.
- 2) Convenors of the United Nations Harmony with Nature project.

Through doing this, I hope to provide my research participants with a resource they can use to enhance, and reflect upon, their efforts to promote and defend the rights of nature in their own social and political spaces. Furthermore, I hope to foster greater dialogue between grassroots rights of nature activists and more elite, internationally-networked activists.

4.12 Reflections on Positionality: The political production of knowledge and acknowledging one's limitations

“Positionalities may include aspects of identity – race, class, gender, age, sexuality, disability – as well as personal experience of research such as research training, previous projects worked on and the philosophical persuasion of the researcher.”

(Hopkins, 2007:391)

The necessity to acknowledge one's 'position' within a research context is of significant importance in order to consider reflexively the dynamics of power that come in to play when conducting research and producing knowledge (Jackson, 1993; Smith, 1993; Rose, 1997). Questions such as “who am I and how does this affect my research?” can enable us to better reflect upon our role within the research process, how this impacts the data we acquire, and how we engage with said data. In so doing, as researchers we challenge the notion that we exist separately from the research(ed), and that in fact our presence within moments of knowledge exchange and production has a direct impact on the manner in which such knowledge is formulated. In this sense, acknowledging one's positionality also respects the notion that the makers and communicators of knowledge dictate the shape which such knowledge takes (Rose, 1997), and that within this process

there are deep and problematic power relations between the individuals and groups involved.

Furthermore, it is through positioning and situating knowledge that the idea of universality can be challenged. This is derived from realising and acknowledging the subjectivities (attributable to one's positionality) which guide knowledge production and formation. Donna Haraway highlights the problematic nature of supposedly universal knowledge when she states:

“the eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity - honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy - to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power . . . but of course that view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god-trick”

(Haraway, 1991: 188-89)

Consequently, belief in a universally applicable knowledge rejects the notion of multiple knowledges as well as the subjective nature of knowledge production. The power that lies within a narrative of supposedly universal knowledge enables those within positions of power to monopolise the idea of what is “true”, and what “truth” *should* be. As Haraway states, this is inseparable from the capitalist political economic system, as well as the myriad of socio-political relations that have been dictated by it. In this sense, critical knowledge and critical enquiry does not simply involve looking *out* at the world, but is in fact a dialectic between the world and the self, realising the mutually constitutive relationship between the two and acknowledging the impact this has upon the production of knowledge. Therefore, when one reflects critically on one's positionality, the narrative becomes not one of “knowledge” as a monolithic, objective, homogenous entity, but instead one of “my” knowledge, and how this interacts relationally with other knowledges of other people.

However, as Rose (1997) argues, the idea of being able to accurately identify one's own positionality requires an impossible self-knowledge. Given the dialectical and relational manner in which one's positionality emerges and functions, the assumption that a person can ever truly know their positionality (or *positionalities*) and the subsequent impacts upon the research is both hubristic and problematic. However, acknowledging

the fact that these facets exist, attempting to identify them reflexively, and critically engage with their effects on the research at hand, is certainly preferable to not doing so at all.

For example, I am a European, white, straight, tertiary educated male in his mid-to-late twenties. Each of these facets of my personality came to affect my research in some way, be it through my perspective on the world, the manner in which I would engage with participants, or the manner in which they would engage with (or perceive) me.

As I discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the notion of an Insider/Outsider dichotomy can in some cases be problematic, particularly as one may gradually move between those categories over the duration of the research period. However, I feel confident in saying that at the beginning of my fieldwork I was most certainly an outsider (and no doubt remained as such in the eyes of some participants). I was not from Ecuador, nor from Latin America, and was what most would consider a “gringo” (foreigner). While I did not sense that this had a negative impact on my research, it does not change the possibility that the same research might look different if it were done by, say, an Ecuadorian. Likewise, had the research been conducted by someone who was already a member of one of the groups I was engaged with, again it may look different to mine. Consequently, it is important for me to recognise that the knowledge that I produce, and that which it presented within this thesis, is done so from my own personal standpoint, with data obtained through my own interpretations of the world, experiences, and events.

One particular aspect of my positionality that I wish to comment on is specifically related to me not being from Ecuador, and this is my position as a non-native speaker of Spanish, especially in the sense of Latin American, Ecuadorian, or indeed “Quiteño” Spanish. By this I refer to the use of informal language, and colloquialisms or ‘slang’ by some of my participants, which was very common. Not being a native Spanish speaker meant that initially the language I was using was quite formal, even in informal situations. Sometimes this would result in my participants finding my use of language amusing, often resulting in laughter and light-hearted jokes. However, over time I began to become very familiar with the colloquialisms and generally less-formal forms of the Spanish language that my participants were using, even using them myself (and I still do to this

day). This resulted in many participants commenting on how I now spoke “like a Quiteño” (someone from Quito), or “like an Ecuadorian”. Whilst conducting my research I became very aware that my use of language (particularly in informal situations) significantly affected the ways in which some participants would engage with me, for example becoming more relaxed around me; one group even commented jokingly that I was “now one of them” the first time that I used the phrase “super chevere” (really great) whilst in their company. This reflects the way that things such as language could impact the relationship between myself and my participants and can also play a significant role in the way that I was perceived and treated by them, which also had subsequent effects on the nature of the data I obtained.

Overall I feel that I was able to successfully negotiate my position as an insider/outsider within the research process, and that while my own positionality has indeed led to a particular character of data, much of this was difficult or impossible to separate myself from. However, it does serve as a reminder that further research by authors from many different positions should still be done on this topic, particularly those from already-existing Latin-American activist contexts.

4.13 Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined the methods utilised in this research project. I have paid attention to the specific methodological tools and approaches that were used to obtain the data, as well as the effects these had on the research process. I have illustrated the conceptual and mechanical aspects of my own ethnographic enquiry into this topic, and I have justified why I feel that such an approach and the decisions behind it are relevant and credible. I have also reflected upon the importance of one’s positionality within the research process, and how my own positionality came to impact upon the research project as a whole.

Crucially, I maintain that the significant lesson that I learned throughout conducting this research is that the different facets that make up the phases of fieldwork as well as analysis are not static, mutually exclusive, nor temporally linear. Rather, many phases can be working in tandem, such as recruitment and data collection, or analysis and writing. Therefore, I posit that it is important to embrace the fluidity, and the interconnected and dynamic nature of the research process. As a researcher this enabled

me to be flexible in the field, which resulted in access to a wider range of participants; and it allowed me to be flexible throughout the analysis and writing periods of the research, which enabled a dialectical relationship between my data, the concepts I was drawing on, and the arguments I present throughout this thesis.

Chapter 5. From the courtroom to the streets: The radicalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore how the rights of nature movement in Ecuador has become increasingly radicalised since the rights of nature themselves were formally written into the country's constitution. I demonstrate examples of where and how this radicalisation has taken place, and has resulted in a spatial shift wherein civil-society rights of nature activism is more commonly fought for in informal spaces such as street protests, as opposed to formal ones such as court rooms and government meetings. This builds upon the findings of Kauffman and Martin (2017) who show that civil-society-driven rights of nature claims in Ecuador have seen significantly lower levels of success within formal institutional spaces when compared with state-driven claims. Therefore, this chapter begins to explore the processes through which civil-society grassroots rights of nature activism engages in, and the cultural politics which underpin this.

I argue that the aforementioned radicalisation, and subsequent spatial shift, have a direct impact on how the rights of nature exist and function in Ecuador; that is to say, how they are conceptualised and used by rights of nature activists in their efforts to promote and defend these rights. In this sense, I posit that grassroots activists invoke the rights of nature as a method of challenging the state (particularly in the context of extractivism), and resort to increasingly radical methods of activism in order to do so. Concurrently, the counter-hegemonic narrative that emerges from these grassroots rights of nature activists is one of national counter-hegemony and power, targeting the state, and especially the government, in order to mobilise and promote their particular cultural politics around the rights of nature. These cultural politics are fundamentally grounded in an ethos of anti-extractivism, mobilising against the extraction of natural resources in the country, an activity of which they regard the government to be the primary vanguard.

I first consider what it means to be a grassroots rights of nature activist, and how this shapes one's cultural politics. I then discuss the significance of the protest space within political activism, and how this radical form of activism impacts one's activist identity, and relationship with the state. I then go on to give an account of two protests, and certain key moments of the time period in between them, in order to discuss the ways

in which grassroots rights of nature activists promote and defend the rights of nature in radical activist spaces in an effort to mobilise a counter-hegemonic movement against the Ecuadorian state, embedded within the state-civil-society-extractivism nexus.

5.1.1 Notes on the Data

The data presented within this chapter was primarily collected through active participant observation during two protests which took place in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador. The first protest took place on the 19th of March 2015 and the second took place on the 13th of August 2015. I also attended another protest in between these two, on the 2nd of July 2015, however while I do not provide a direct account of it within this chapter for the sake of brevity, I do in some places make reference to the event. The principal moments which I analyse are the first and final protest, as well as key occurrences which took place in between them. I give more detail as to the specific spatial and temporal contexts of these protests within each of the accounts that I give later in this chapter.

All protests involved a march which finished in the Centro Histórico (Historical Centre/Old Town) of Quito, where the Carondelet Palace (the seat of government in Ecuador) is located. Below is a map of Quito, with the Centro Histórico marked:

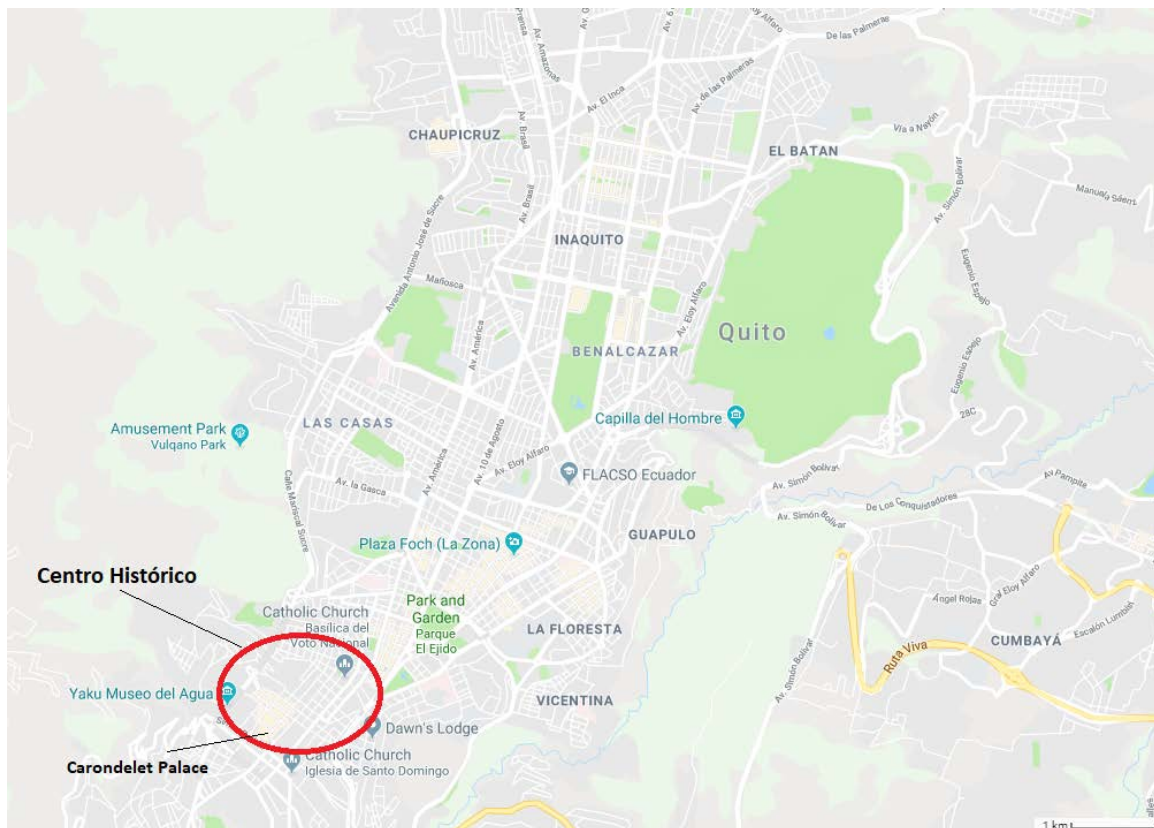


Fig. 3: Map of zones in Quito (source: Google Maps)

It is also important to note that many of the participants who feature in this chapter are students and can be classed as “young people” (between the ages of 18 and 25). This was not a specific methodological choice, but rather an organically occurring general demographic of rights of nature activists attending these protests. Student movements have been well-documented as dynamic forces within political activism, particularly in the context of social justice issues (Boren, 2001; Rhoads, 1998). This remains true across Latin America, where student movements have often contributed to power struggles from below, especially regarding the targeting of governments (Pensado, 2013; Scott, 1968). In addition to people who are currently studying at university, other participants whose voices feature in this chapter include recent graduates as well as NGO workers.

Below is a biographical table of the main participants who are included in this chapter:

Name	Biography
Juan	Juan is originally from Otavalo, but has lived in Quito for just under 10 years. He studies anthropology at university. His family are a mixture of Otavaleño and Quiteño, and are proud of the indigenous heritage on his father’s side. He says his activism is closely connected to his indigenous heritage, and that he regards oil drilling and mining as the greatest threats to wellbeing in Ecuador.
Sonia	Sonia is from Quito and studies architecture at university. She is also affiliated with the Yasunidos movement. She says that the Yasuní case was the catalyst for her engaging in environmental activism, particularly regarding the people living there who would be displaced by oil drilling.
Francisco	Francisco is a masters student studying economics. He also works part-time in retail. He is from Quito. He has been interested in activism of many kinds (worker’s rights, indigenous rights, environmental) since he first went to university. He is also affiliated with the Yasunidos movement.
Martín	Martín was born in Cuenca but has lived in Quito for most of his life. He studies political science at university and says that it was

	through his course that he became interested in the rights of nature. He believes that the rights of nature are currently the single most important issue in Ecuadorian politics.
Paola	Paola is from Quito and studies sociology at university. She first became interested in activism when she saw that the rights of nature were not being respected in Ecuador, and when she realised it was necessary for people to stand up for these rights, regardless of their constitutional status.
Fede	Fede is from Quito and studies anthropology at university. He says his older brother, who is staunchly anti-President Correa, got him interested in political activism.
Sebastian	Sebastian is a masters student studying biology. He has only recently got involved in political activism and says that the government's mining and oil drilling policies are the cause of his new interest in environmentalism.
William	William is an NGO worker who lives in Quito but his work takes him all around the country, especially in the Amazon region. He is from the United States but has lived and worked in Ecuador for 12 years. He says his desire to protect the Amazon from oil drilling is what originally brought him to Ecuador, however he has become increasingly focused on anti-mining and anti-deforestation work over recent years.
Esteban	Esteban is an NGO worker who was born in Chile, but has lived in Ecuador for around 20 years. He primarily works on issues regarding water rights for indigenous and campesino groups. For Esteban, the rights of nature represent the most radical change in recent Ecuadorian political history, and offer the best opportunity to move the country away from an extractivist economy.
Vanessa	Vanessa is an NGO worker who is from Guayaquil, but now lives in Quito. Most of her work is focused on assisting communities affected by the extraction of natural resources to obtain political representation.

Ally	Ally is a recently graduated student who studied sociology at university. He is from Quito. Ally is currently deciding whether he wants to study for a masters in Ecuador or abroad, possibly in sociology or political science. He says he has been interested in environmental activism for a long time as his parents have always been very politically active and have encouraged him to be the same.
------	---

Table 5: Biographical table of key participants in chapter 5

The narratives and subsequent analysis I offer within this chapter are provided in order to illustrate a specific process which has taken place around the rights of nature, namely the process of radicalisation of these rights, moving from their initial position as a formal, institutional, and state-sponsored discourse to a radical one. Concurrently, I argue that for grassroots rights of nature activists these rights have become intricately linked with their relationship to the state. As I illustrate, the contentious relationship between the state and these rights of nature activists has explicit implications for the ways in which these activists mobilise and enact their forms of resistance.

It is important here to address why these specific protests were chosen to be attended by my participants. These protests occurred during a period of time when Ecuador was dealing with a considerable level of civil and political unrest (this continued throughout a considerable portion of the year 2015). Mass protests were being organised by trade unions and indigenous organisations, mobilising and protesting for a vast array of issues, from indigenous rights, to workers' rights, and against tax rises, as well as Rafael Correa's proposal for indefinite re-election. In this sense, these protests provided a vehicle through which social movements, political organisations, and interest groups could unite together in order to march against the government and engage in demonstrations of civil unrest.

My participants organised to attend these protests often via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The three protests I draw on here were, to my knowledge, the only marches of this series which my participants attended as organised groups during the period of which I was in Ecuador. For many of them, going to the marches was reliant on organising around other responsibilities such as work, family, and school. Additionally, more individuals seemed inclined to attend when they knew that more people from their networks were also attending. In this sense, key members were

often fundamental to the organisation of attending these marches, either through bringing people together via social media, or bringing them together physically by hosting gatherings on the day, prior to the protests themselves.

Throughout this chapter I detail, through a series of narratives and excerpts from conversations, my ethnographic account of these protests. Furthermore, each narrative that I utilise seeks to highlight the most significant moment(s) of each one in relation to the wider subject of this chapter. I demonstrate that over the course of these protests taking place, members of the rights of nature movement who were present resorted to increasingly radical forms of demonstration, articulation of ideas, and political narratives. From the outset, it is important to state that some of the activities that I come to refer to (such as damage to property and clashing with police) occurred at all of these marches; however, the involvement of rights of nature proponents in these activities was initially zero, but came to increase over the course of the series of protests. Furthermore, the chronological ordering of the accounts also lends itself to accurately reflect my level of involvement with certain groups of participants. Each one reflects my gradually increased involvement with participant groups and individuals, as well as my shifting identity from outsider to insider, and the effect this had upon the way in which I came to personally experience, first-hand, the process of radicalisation surrounding the rights of nature.

5.2 Being a Grassroots Rights of Nature Activist in Ecuador

Throughout this thesis I make specific reference to grassroots rights of nature activists, however it is important to clarify what this term signifies. As I explore throughout this chapter and within chapter 6, I posit that grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is fundamentally bound by place-based narratives pertaining to Ecuadorian socio-environmental and political contexts. Consequently, I find these activists to be individuals whose resources and activist identities are concentrated primarily on the Ecuadorian context, functioning as resistance “from below” as they challenge national structures of power.

Much has been written on local activist groups and organisations who are engaged with broader, often global or transnational, movements (see: Christens and Collura, 2012; Doherty and Doyle, 2006; Keck and Sikkink, 2014; Rootes, 2007; Saunders, 2007; Soyez,

2001). Much of this research finds that while local activist networks are fundamental to the functions and operations of the transnational networks within which they operate, there are often salient fragmentations and divergences when one compares local activist groups' cultural politics and agendas with those of the international groups and organisations. Local activists are predominantly found to be concerned with the setting of local (and in some cases national) agendas, with a fundamentally place-based politics and vision, which draws on the significance of their locality (Rootes, 2007; Soyez, 2001). While this remains true for grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, the sentiment is often further extended to their country. By this I mean that in many cases, grassroots rights of nature activists advocate for rights of nature issues that are not necessarily on their doorstep, for example, groups in Quito advocating for rights of nature cases in the Amazon, or elsewhere. Furthermore, given the constitutional form of the rights of nature (i.e. they are a set of rights written into the constitution), in many cases rights of nature activists mobilise in order for these rights to be realised and respected in the country as a whole. In this sense, some rights of nature activism which takes place at the local level is not contingent on a specific, material case being contested; rather it is the symbolism of what these rights represent, accompanied by an understanding that they are being violated in *many* different places across the country.

While part of the loose collective of groups that operate within the international rights of nature movement (in as much as they all work to promote and defend the idea of the rights of nature), grassroots rights of nature activists here engage in activism which is fundamentally focused on setting agendas specifically within Ecuador. In this sense, their conceptualisations of, and engagements with, the rights of nature remain firmly planted within their national context, addressing issues such as oil drilling and mining – activities which they fundamentally disagree with, and mobilise against. Therefore, the targets of their resistance are ones which are central to the national political economic order, such as the state and extractive corporations operating within Ecuador. Furthermore, the spaces within which these grassroots activists operate are, unsurprisingly, localised sites (although in some cases with national significance, such as the capital city Quito). Within these mobilisations a counter-hegemonic narrative is produced, embodied, and performed, which remains critical of national institutions and organisations.

Finally, throughout this thesis I make consistent reference to “the state” as a force against which the rights of nature are positioned, or are negotiated. However, it is

important to assert how the state is conceptualised within this thesis, particularly regarding the contextual specificities of Ecuador. Broadly speaking, I conceptualise the state to exist as separate from civil-society, and to be constituted by a core apparatus through which it functions and exerts its (physical and ideological) power; including things such as the military, the police, the education system, and the government (Clark and Dear, 1984). However, in the context of Ecuador (and many other Andean countries), the state is also inextricably bound with the issue of natural resource extraction, in the sense that it functions as the vanguard of extractive industries (Hill and Fernández-Salvador, 2017; Arsel et al., 2016), often putting such interests ahead of marginalised portions of the population who are negatively impacted by extractivism. Furthermore, the extractivist state reaps significant economic benefits which are attributable to the extraction of natural resources, either through the nationalisation of extractive companies, or simply through taxation. Consequently, in the context of Ecuador, extractivism is a fundamental tool upon which the state relies in order to both support and exert its power upon civil society.

5.3 The Significance of the Protest Space

This chapter utilises ethnographic data obtained during two specific protests, as well as a series of moments that took place in between these protests, but which pertain to the protests themselves. Protesting is a well-known form of radical activism – to clarify, in using the term “radical” I follow scholars such as Mallory (2006) and Doherty et al. (2007) who refer to this as activism which favours direct action (i.e. outside of bureaucratic or formal institutions), often with activists physically putting their bodies on the line in order to achieve political goals. Furthermore, protests have often been ‘where space has been reclaimed, transformed and subverted’ (Begg, 2000, pp. 198), with multiple activist identities and ideologies manifesting both in cooperation and contention (Featherstone, 2003). Protests have also remained as significant sites and forms of mobilisation, used in order to enact and enable counter-hegemonic politics over material and ideological struggles (Chatterton et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2010; Mullis et al., 2016).

In Ecuador, the role of protests has been exceptionally significant in recent decades, both in terms of social movement mobilisations, as well as the shaping of the country’s domestic politics (Becker, 2008; Korovkin, 2000). They have contributed to

the ousting of presidents, mobilising support for new candidates (including Rafael Correa) and advancing the agendas of various social movements within the country (Becker, 2013). In this sense, protests have historically been a core, and successful, aspect of social groups' challenges against the national hegemonic order.

Furthermore, protesters are aware of the significance that these protests hold, as regards collective civil power to initiate political change in Ecuador. As one rights of nature activist put it during an anti-government march I attended:

“We come to these protests because we know they can work. In the past they have worked, and in this moment it is no different.”

(Juan, 24, student activist, during a protest in Quito on 19th March 2015).

Another rights of nature activist I spoke with shortly before we were due to attend the second of these three protests echoed Juan's sentiment:

Sonia: *“We are Ecuadorians! Hahaha. It's in our blood to protest! But, truthfully, we need something to change. Either the president changes his actions, his policies, his selling of our beautiful country to the Chinese – the selling of **our futures** to the Chinese.... Or we change the president. And how do we do that? We protest.”*

Stefan: *“And if a new president arrives, and does not acknowledge the rights of nature?”*

Sonia: *“Well, that is also why we protest. When people protest it is a collection of ideas that become seen. If we didn't protest in favour of the rights of nature then, like, it wouldn't be a clear political issue. When we do this, the political class can see that it is something they must notice.”*

(Sonia, 20, student activist, during a pre-protest gathering at a house, Quito, 2nd July 2015)

For Sonia and Juan, then, the act of protesting in favour of the rights of nature is to produce a political change at the state level via pressure from civil society. However, for Sonia, it is also a matter of ensuring that these ideas are present within this space of political pressure. For her, this is of great importance in as much as it offers protection to

the rights of nature idea and its constitutional status. Furthermore, she refers to the protest space as a site within which ideas are collected and become noticed. In this sense, for Sonia, the protest space functions as an enabler of ideological assertion and dissemination.

It is no wonder, then, that President Correa has increasingly cracked down on acts of political protest (despite the fact that the 2008 constitution states that citizens have an inalienable right to take part in collective political mobilisation). It is therefore evident that the Ecuadorian state is also fully aware of the threat posed by such protests, and by the groups that partake in, and organise them. In this sense, within the context of Ecuador, the protest space is an even more significant and problematic site of activism, given the manner in which the social movements who organise and partake in them have become increasingly treated as criminals since Rafael Correa's rise to power.

The peculiar situation within Ecuador, then, is that while much environmental activism is responded to by the state as legally questionable (Saavedra, 2013; Shade, 2015), in many cases it is not actually breaking any laws – on the contrary, in the case of activism based around the rights of nature it is in fact seeking to *defend* and *strengthen* the law. This produces a contradictory and highly volatile environment within which rights of nature proponents must operate and live their lives. Consequently, the promotion and defense of the rights of nature within local contexts in Ecuador become increasingly anti-state and evoked within radical, criminal, or pseudo-criminal spaces.

Additionally, protests have often allowed activists from disparate groups to forge alliances and further their own agendas through uniting around a broader cause; albeit in some cases this is not without problems, owing to contested ideologies and identities (Featherstone, 2003). In this context of forging alliances, the protest space enables rights of nature activists to interact with with other organised groups such as labour unions, indigenous rights groups, and other environmentalists in order to expand and solidify collective power which is then exercised through the marches themselves. Consequently, rights of nature proponents seek to unify with other, nationally-focused, groups who channel their resources on changing Ecuadorian national political structures.

Francisco, an activist who was present at the same event as Sonia maintained this sentiment when he said:

Francisco: *“For us, a protest is a chance to talk about ideas between ourselves but also with other people who are worried about the situation in the country.... I mean, political situation. It is also a space where people listen to each other. I mean, someone who is there... I could approach them on the street on a different day and they wouldn’t care. But at a protest, we are all there to be active.”*

Stefan: *“Yeah, I understand. So they listen, and do you think they act on it?”*

Francisco: *“Do they keep it in mind, do you mean?”*

Stefan: *“Yes. Do they keep it in mind, and do you think they think differently because of it?”*

Francisco: *“Well, it depends on the person. But I would like to think that yes, they take the issue more seriously because of a conversation I have with them..... I mean, for example, I am not facing unemployment, but if I speak with a man who is unemployed and he tells me about the problems he has, I would then think more deeply about that, and I would reflect on that.”*

Francisco, graduate and retail worker, said during a pre-protest gathering at a house,
Quito, 2nd July 2015

As we can see, these rights of nature activists utilise the protest space to promote these rights among people who share their ideological leanings, and among those who may not. This is evident in the conversations immediately above, but also in the actions taken by the group during the first protest. The context of these protests that occurred in Quito offered a particular opportunity in order to do this, as the reasons for the marches were multi-dimensional; broad anti-government marches which included groups espousing issues such as worker’s rights, indigenous rights, taxes, anti-corruption, among others. Consequently, these rights of nature activists are able to capitalise on a moment of political crisis in a way that is offered only by the characteristics of these protests. The opportunities that arise enable crucial moments of subversive knowledge sharing that stand to further their agenda beyond groups who would simply agree with them. In this sense, the multifaceted protest space becomes an important site within which a counter-hegemonic narrative can be shaped in a communal, reciprocal manner.

Evidently, then, the protest space is one within which activists are able to mobilise in order to expand and deepen their networks, promote their specific agendas, and

challenge state power. Importantly though, under the presidency of Rafael Correa this form of mobilisation has increasingly been met with violence and criminalisation (Becker, 2013). In the next section, I detail how these processes have been engaged with by members of the rights of nature movement in Ecuador, and how they interconnect, producing a counter-hegemonic narrative that remains national in its focus.

5.4 Mobilising Against the Extractivist State: The Functions of Legitimacy

On the 19th of March 2015 a protest organised by the Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT) and the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) took place in Quito. Similar protests occurred across the country, including the cities of Cuenca, Machala, Loja, and Guayaquil. The marches were fundamentally anti-government, espousing messages such as the right to free speech, against indefinite re-election of the president, indigenous rights, workers' rights, anti-extractivism, among others. The simple message was that the people were not happy, and President Correa was the target. The protest came at the time of a dwindling economy, contentious decisions regarding oil drilling and mining, and heightened tensions between the government and CONAIE. From what I saw, the character of the environmentalist presence here was one firmly based upon an anti-extractivist ethos, with an eye on the government as the primary target of their grievances.

The protest took place during the early stages of my fieldwork, and at this point my contacts were minimal. However, I was aware that there was going to be an environmentalist presence, so I decided to attend of my own accord. I went primarily to see if I could find people to speak to, but also to better understand the nature of these mobilisations – some of the largest since president Correa came to power. At the time, however, I was extremely nervous. I was aware of the rising political tensions between social movements and the government, and the consequences this had brought to the policing of political marches. Furthermore, President Correa had frequently stated that foreigners were becoming more involved with environmentalist and indigenous rights groups in order to foment political instability in the country. As a “gringo” myself, I couldn't escape the inherent worry that I might get picked up if things took a turn for the worse. It is this exact worry, however, that many activists who I would come to know must deal with not only during political demonstrations, but often on a day to day basis.

As is common among hard-line members of social movements, in many cases this worry in fact comes to play a significant part in one's personal motivation and mobilisation (Jasper, 1997). The idea that one can be detained for defending, *against* the government, what is written in the constitution and what is supposedly morally right, provides an emotive narrative of martyrdom.

As stated, many of the rights of nature activists I spoke to at this march were attending in order to protest against the government's extraction policies, in as much as they were viewed to be in direct violation of the rights laid out in the constitution. Three participants stated:

"We are here to defend the constitution against the extractivist government. The rights of nature are not safe in Rafael Correa's hands."

(Martín, 21, during a protest in Quito on 19th March 2015).

"The government's decision to exploit oil in the Yasuní shows that the rights of the Pachamama aren't important to them at all. That is to say, the rights are written.... They are official, but the government doesn't care about the constitution! It's not just the case of these rights, it's many other things as well."

(Paola, 23, during a protest in Quito on 19th March 2015).

"For the environment, Rafael Correa and his criminal administration do not care. He steps on the law and nobody punishes him, so we are here to punish him. And when we are here to protect the law and our constitution?... He steps on us."

(Fede, 23, during a protest in Quito on 19th March 2015).

For Martín, Paola and Fede, the issue of protesting in favour of the defense of the rights of nature is one which is directly framed within anti-government sentiment, particularly in the context of the extraction of natural resources. This attitude was repeated continuously across each of my participants who were present at these protests. In recent years prior to the Correa administration, when issues around extraction have

been being protested, it has often been the companies themselves (as well as the state) which have been the targets of protesters' anger, such as during the Chevron-Texaco protests during the 2000s (Sawyer, 2002, 2001), and echoed by the large amount of graffiti that has appeared around the country's capital Quito over the years regarding the Chevron-Texaco issue (Koivurova, 2014). However, as has been touched on by Morley (2017) and Becker (2013), the decisions to drill in the Yasuní National Park, and to conduct large-scale open pit mining in parts of the country, have turned environmentalists against President Correa.

Furthermore, within this anti-state narrative (both within these quotes and in the rest of the relevant data presented in this chapter) the issue of legitimacy becomes an important facet which is utilised and positioned specifically in the contextualisation of the relationship between activists and the state. The notion of legitimacy is significant for social movements and their individual actors for many reasons, be it setting an agenda or discourse that attempts to impact the legitimacy of a target government, institution, or corporation; or through seeking to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the movement itself (Ekers, 2009; Stevenson, 2014; Wilson and Curnow, 2013). Furthermore, this sense of personal legitimacy can often be directly impacted by the relationship between the activists and the state, in the sense of how the state (particularly the government) chooses to represent said activists and their associated movements (Stevenson, 2014). As I illustrate throughout this chapter, for these rights of nature activists the issue of legitimacy manifests in both of these sentiments, through a critique of the state's legitimacy, as well as through attempts to formulate, establish, and secure their own sense of legitimacy.

5.4.1 Account and analysis of first protest

On the afternoon of the 19th of March I walked towards the meeting point of the protest (in front of the Instituto Ecuatoriano de Seguridad Social – IESS). As I approached the area I could hear the drums and musical instruments from numerous streets away. The rhythm was strong, organised, and intimidating; characteristic of the march itself. When I arrived I noticed that the march had already begun to move, and there were thousands of attendees. It was quickly apparent just how multi-dimensional this protest was, banners and placards espousing a multitude of causes were everywhere.

The police presence was heavy, although seemingly only as monitors of the situation – they did not appear as if they wanted to get involved, merely to assert their (heavily armed) presence. I was determined to find any groups who were marching for environmental issues, so for the time being I remained on the side-lines and watched as the multi-coloured sea of protesters flowed past me. “Fuera Correa, fuera!”.

A group of young people passed by with a Yasunidos banner, so I seized the opportunity and jumped into the meandering movement of bodies. The group numbered approximately twelve, aged roughly from eighteen to twenty-five. As well as the group with the Yasunidos banner there were others holding placards with slogans such as “Dile no a la minería!” (Say no to mining!), “Vida o petróleo!” (Life or oil!), “Mujeres contra el patriarcado, extractivista y criminal!” (Women against the extractivist and criminal patriarchy!). I struck up a conversation with a young man close to me (Martín), he told me that they were all students of one of the local universities, and were marching against the government’s extractive policies, not only in the Yasuní, but also large-scale mining that had been proposed in numerous areas across the country. After a while of introductory talk between myself and some others in the group as we weaved through the streets towards the Centro Histórico, we began to speak about the rights of nature. One girl laughed as she told me “they don’t mean anything”, and that they were merely a part of Correa’s populist agenda to get into power. One friend nodded in agreement. However, this evidently was not the opinion shared by many others in the group, as they began to debate amongst themselves. Martín told me that these rights were revolutionary, and that they “represent every aspect of why we are here today, marching for *la naturaleza* (nature).”, a sentiment seemingly shared by the majority of his friends. Throughout my period in Ecuador, however, I would hear the argument that the rights of nature were merely a part of Correa’s manipulation of the masses many times; mistrust in the administration signified mistrust in the constitution that was redrafted on its watch. However, the more common narrative that I would encounter was one of positivity, and one that starkly separated the president and the government from the rights of nature. However, this moment marked an important point of realisation for me in my research – that not all environmentalists I would come across were rights of nature activists.

At approximately four o’clock it began to rain heavily. The storm had been forecast and President Correa had stated that the march would most likely be minimised as a result of it. On the contrary, people were not discouraged, and in fact what occurred

was a truly inspirational moment. As the rain drops began to fall, each individual took out an umbrella, the chanting and the rhythm from the drums got louder, and the swelling, snaking mass of bodies seemed even more determined than before. For context, this was extremely heavy rain, thunder and lightning, streams of water lining the streets an inch or so deep. The umbrellas are a significant prop in this case for two reasons: firstly, they reflected the individual and collective will of the people not to be perturbed from marching (from a few people I spoke to, the comments made by President Correa had spurred this on even more); secondly, the imagery that arose from the umbrellas was unparalleled in its effect. Each umbrella was differently coloured and almost everyone had one, they created a roughly tessellated roof over the march, offering unified protection from the elements. Furthermore, they obscured the faces of the individual marchers, yet exuded personality due to their individual styles, colours and patterns – this certainly made for an air of intimidation for anyone looking at the oncoming flow of bobbing and weaving shells making their approach, all the while to the rhythm of their drums. The below photograph, taken as the march moved through the Centro Histórico, illustrates this well:



Fig. 4: Photo of anti-government protest marching through the Centro Histórico 19/3/15
(Source: DECOIN)

As the march approached the main plaza, my new associates had begun talking with others around them. Commenting on the weather and how well prepared everyone was, gradually led on to exchanging reasons for attending the demonstration. Martín and two others were talking with a small group of men and women from a local labour union, others were talking with another group of students nearby. Contact details were exchanged and Paola told me that her and the other students were going to arrange a meeting, with the hope of organising a seminar at university that would discuss the rights of nature, human rights, and resource extraction.

As the crowd began to dissipate, it was evident that some people separate from our group were looking for violence. The police had begun to close in on certain areas and arguments between them and some of the protesters were starting. Small pockets of people in particular stood out, some espousing anarchist symbols and slogans. Our group decided to leave. Paola and Martín said that things were definitely going to get violent, they just hoped that it would not get too bad, as the more violent things turned, the less legitimacy protesters could claim.

Throughout this first protest the attitudes and atmosphere were largely positive among my group of participants. The forms of activism that I witnessed were peaceful, focused on building alliances, and exchanging knowledge and information. Primarily, alliances were attempted to be forged based along lines of concern for the environment, however this was obviously easier when two individuals or groups shared a common opinion on this subject. For example, when Martín was talking to the protesters from the FUT, they largely bonded over a distrust of President Correa and his administration. However, as I overheard, they all also shared concern for the Yasuní case, although for the FUT members this, according to Martín, came across as a concern over the role of Chinese business in the country.

It was in these moments of alliance building and knowledge exchange that the role of my participants as activist intellectuals in a wider network of national resistance became most apparent. Their ability to find common ground with other protesters, as well as to facilitate the spread of knowledge between groups, enabled them to make connections between causes while also promoting their own agenda across ideological boundaries. For example, the discussion group and seminar that Paola helped to organise

went ahead approximately a month after this protest, the outcome of which enabled their group to grow, and recruit many more young people to their network of contacts.

Within this network the establishing and performance of legitimacy remained crucial, particularly in the sense of the *constitutional* legitimacy imbued within the rights of nature. As one member of the group put it, in the context of speaking with other groups and movements at protests:

“Being able to speak about the rights of nature as a part of our constitution helps a lot. It allows us to speak about these things next to problems like human rights, labour rights, and everything else that exists in the law. It gives us legitimacy and shows that these ideas should be taken seriously.”

(Sebastian, student activist, 25, conversation in Quito, 21st March 2015.

In this sense, the issue of constitutionality is one that plays a crucial role for these rights of nature activists when discussing the legitimacy of these rights. Furthermore, at this point in the research when these activists spoke of legitimacy, they were often doing so in a sense of lawfulness (be it in the sense of constitutionality, or regarding the president as a criminal for violating the rights of nature). During this protest, this also manifested as a desire to follow lawful methods of the promotion and defense of the rights of nature. This was very much evident in the group’s desire to leave the protest as soon as the mood started turning darker, with all of them claiming, or agreeing upon, the idea that legitimacy, is not achieved through illegality or violence. Ideas such as this permeated the group I was with, as chants and shouts including messages along the lines of “we are not criminals!” and “you are the criminal, Mr. President!” regularly featured in their repertoire.

Evidently, then, this protest demonstrated three key issues. The first is that these rights of nature activists were mobilising as a means to contest the issue of extractivism in the country; the issue of oil drilling was the one most commonly vocalised, however mining was often mentioned too. The second key issue is that the government was the primary target of their anger, fundamentally because these activists saw the violation of the rights of nature as something which was due to a lack of responsibility on behalf of the government, particularly in the context of its complicity in the aforementioned

problem of extractivism. Consequently, they engaged in an activist space which was fundamentally anti-government, and established networks with other groups operating in this space. Finally, the third key issue is that of legitimacy. These rights of nature activists frequently utilised discourses of legitimacy both in the sense of their own legitimacy (particularly regarding legality and lawfulness), as well as the perceived lack of legitimacy held by president Correa and his government, namely in the sense of his perceived inability to defend what is written in the constitution regarding the rights of nature. In this sense, we are able to see how these issues are intricately interconnected, and shape the forms of activism and discourses which these activists were engaged in.

5.5 Negotiating the Contentious Relationship with the State: Re-Contextualising Activist Identities

I here detail a crucial moment in time which resulted in a fundamental shift in the activist identities of many of my participants. By this I refer to the shift of identities focused on the establishing and maintaining of legitimacy and lawfulness (in the sense of abiding by the law), to ones of criminality and illegality. This manifested not only through their actions (as we shall see in section 3.3) but also through the discourses they utilised in order to describe their activist methods of promoting and defending the rights of nature. In this sense, this section speaks to the process of the recontextualization of the relationship between these activists and the state. As I have highlighted earlier in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis (see chapters 2 and 3), for many years the relationship between the Ecuadorian state and environmentalists has been problematic and contentious. However, the process that I detail here represents the personal internalisation of these contentions as they occurred for my participants in a specific moment. In this sense, while the counter-hegemonic narrative my participants articulate is still firmly grounded in an anti-state sentiment, the complex and interconnected relationship with the state shifts when compared with that which we saw at the end of section 3.1 of this chapter. Importantly, it remains a centrally contextualising factor of their activism. This aligns with what Barnard-Wills (2012) and Sbicca and Perdue (2014) posit when they states that activists' identities are significantly contextualised by their relationship to the state, and that the continuous process of action and reaction between both sets of actors comes to repeatedly re-contextualise these activist identities (Barnard-Wills, 2012).

On the 5th of August 2015 I received a phone call from one of my participants, William (an NGO worker from the United States, living and working in Ecuador), from a phone number that I did not recognise as his own. His voice was panicked and he was speaking very quickly. “They’ve been monitoring us.” He said. “More than we thought. Don’t call me on my other number, it’s not safe. They have a lot, and I don’t know how they’ve got it.” The fear with which he spoke was palpable, which was surprising as this man was known for keeping a level head in even the most unstable of situations. As it turned out, a large number of classified government documents had been leaked online via the website *Ecuadortransparente* (<https://ecuadortransparente.org>), or “transparent Ecuador”, a site which I had heard described as the “Ecuadorian Wikileaks”. What had been leaked were extensive profiles on a number of environmental activists and activist organisations. As I looked through the files I feared not only for my participants but also for myself; the detail to which communication and political activity had been monitored was astonishing. I felt intimidated and isolated – I knew that I should not call any of my participants as the phone lines were not safe, nor were our lines of email conversation. Would they contact me just like William had? What did this mean for my research and for my future in Ecuador? What did it mean for the people I had become involved with, many of which I had come to regard as close friends? Questions were racing through my mind, to which, in that moment, there were no clear answers. So, I sat. I sat and I waited.

This moment marked a turning point in the tone of my experience in Ecuador. While, as William mentioned in our phone conversation, activists had been aware that a certain level of surveillance had been occurring, the extent to which this had been happening was previously unknown, and left to speculation. While the leaked documents focused on many aspects of people’s lives and interconnections, one common and reoccurring theme was protest. Photos of activists and organisation leaders attending protests had been taken by government agents, many from high-up vantage points, seemingly rooftops; and the likelihood of individuals to partake in protests, or to play a role in organising them, was discussed. While the act of protest, especially in the context of environmentalism or indigenous rights, has been facing steadily increasing levels of criminalisation in Ecuador over recent years, these documents stood as a new, and revealing, layer of proof. I was able to speak to William in person after he had called me. We spoke about what this revelation meant for him:

William: *“We knew it was happening. But this is something different. This level of surveillance can’t be legal... I mean, I’m from the U.S. And this is like the NSA! The thing is, it shows how afraid of us they are ... They genuinely think that we are destabilising the country. It’s like, we’re not terrorists man, but holy shit, if you treat people like this... what do you think is gonna happen? We’re not just gonna disappear. We are gonna fight you. We are used to pressure from governments. We’ll deal with it. However, this certainly is disturbing.”*

Stefan: *“So, how is this going to affect how you do your work?”*

William: *“Man, we carry on. I mean, look, I’m here to help indigenous groups when they struggle against the government. I’m here to protect human rights and the rights of nature against this government. This changes nothing of that.... This is actually exactly why I’m here. I’m not just gonna run back to the States and do my work from there, like some others have. We carry on, we continue. We might have to do some things a bit..... below board, I guess? At least for the time being anyway.”*

Stefan: *“Below board? What do you mean by that?”*

William: *“Hahaha, nothing crazy! I just mean things like communication and organisation.”*

(Phone conversation with William, NGO worker, 5th August 2015)

As we can see here, William makes specific note to keeping things “below board”, namely communication and organisation. This is highly revealing of the increased environment of criminalisation that was appearing – William, the NGO he worked for, and his contacts would have to use clandestine methods of communication and interaction when discussing personal, or politically sensitive information regarding their activism. In this sense, activism around the rights of nature had been relegated to the metaphorical “underground”. In the eyes of the government, the people engaging in these activities were a threat to the state. As William himself said, they are not terrorists, but were indeed being treated as such, in the sense that they were being monitored by the state, to the extent that one would expect of a suspected terrorist group, and that they would have

to alter their behaviour accordingly. In this sense, the criminalisation would become internalised and embodied.

I spoke to Martín on the 7th of August, shortly after my conversation with William. We met at his house where I was greeted by Martín's mother, and then went upstairs to his room.

"She's afraid I'll be arrested." He said.

When I asked whether or not she was afraid before, he told me that she had not previously mentioned it. Martín's demeanour was a peculiar mixture of subdued and defiant; he told me that he was only slightly worried for his own safety, but that he was mainly worried about the precedent that this set for the context within which environmentalists must now operate in the country. He told me of how he wanted to get a job in the development sector once he finished his degree, but that he was mindful of what a criminal record might mean for his job prospects. In this sense, Martín too was now internalising the notion of being a criminal for the activism that he took part in, as was his mother. We spoke of the plans for the student activist group that he was a member of, and how they would react to what had been unfolding over the past few days. He told me that they were hoping to organise a group talk to discuss these issues, but that all focus for the time being was on the upcoming march scheduled for the 13th of August. When I asked him if the recent revelations regarding surveillance would affect the mood of the activists at the protest, he told me that they would indeed set the tone.

The protest that was due to take place on the 13th of August was on the minds of many of my participants at this point in time. As Martín had done, many of them expressed the feeling that the protest was going to transpire with altered attitudes to the previous ones, especially as a result of the surveillance leaks.

As these three participants stated:

"People are angry. Lots of those people who are being watched are our friends, and people who help us day to day. We now have proof that the government has been abusing its power in this sense, so, I just feel that people are going to react negatively when they are given this opportunity."

(Esteban, 34, NGO worker, conversation in a park in Quito, 8th August 2015).

“We have not been treated this badly under any other president. Left, right, it does not matter. On Thursday [the day of the protest] Mr. Correa will know that we are done. It is enough, and right now is the time.

(Vanessa, NGO worker, conversation in a café in Quito, 9th August 2015).

“If they want, they can watch us. They can watch us when we close the city – that makes me happy. We will march as if they are watching.”

(Sonia, student activist, conversation in a café in Quito, 7th August 2015).

This process of changing their activist identities, therefore, also spills over into the re-contextualisation of the activist space of the protest, and aligns with what Sbicca and Perdue (2014) state when they illustrate that activist spaces, such as protests, are deeply embedded within complex spatio-temporal networks of power that exist between activist groups and the state. In this sense, for these rights of nature activists, their activism is directly affected, and shaped by, the increased level of criminalisation which they feel is occurring by the hands of the state. This idea will be demonstrated further in the following section of this chapter.

5.6 Mobilising Against the Extractivist State II: Internalising and Experiencing Criminality

This section details the third protest of the three that I attended. Importantly, it represents the internalisation of the discourses of criminality which had now come to contextualise the relationship between these rights of nature activists and the state, as discussed previously in section 3.2. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the process of alliance-building remains significant in the sense of engaging with, and conceptualising the purpose of, the protest space. Finally, this section and the data presented here shows that the key target of these rights of nature activists continues to be the extractivist government and the wider state apparatus within which it exists.

The march to which this section refers was an exceptionally significant one – an indigenous rights protest that had been making its way across the country, from the

Amazonian province of Zamora Chinchipe (located far to the south, close to the border with Peru), to finally culminate in the capital, Quito. The march was being heralded as one of the largest indigenous uprisings since President Correa came to power, and in the wake of the recent series of protests to hit the country, and the recently leaked surveillance documents, the tensions were high.

It was expected that many different groups of environmentalists and indigenous rights activists (significantly, the two groups targeted by the surveillance operations) would be present. Many of my participants told me that they were apprehensive about how the event was going to transpire, and to expect a heavy police presence. The issue, they told me, was that it was fundamentally an indigenous rights march, and that the government would be even more heavy handed than normal as a result of this. I did not doubt that this would be the case as the government was acutely aware of the threat that the organised indigenous movement can pose to state power (Becker, 2013).

Martín told me that this specific protest would be a very good opportunity to actively mobilise in favour of the rights of nature, given that the environmentalist presence would be so strong. Similarly, many of the indigenous rights groups would be protesting on the basis of water issues, anti-mining, and anti-oil drilling.

“This protest will be one that challenges the idea of extractivism, more than any of the other protests we have been to.” He told me. (Conversation with Martín at his house, 7th August 2015)

For Martín, while many of the other protests had been about building alliances with other groups, many of which might not have been environmentally minded themselves, this protest was one where likeminded movements would be coming together and asserting their collective power over a similar set of issues. In essence, the make-up of the different protests caused them to function in different capacities. While the other protests served as an opportunity to disseminate ideology, and to attempt to collaboratively develop a wide-reaching counter-hegemonic agenda across different groups, this protest was one at which a more unified and focused ideology could be asserted. When I asked how this would manifest in terms of his actions and activism, he told me:

“At the other protests we were there to tell people about the rights of nature, and make people more aware of them. At this protest, we are there to defend these rights.”

Evident here, then, is that Martín drawing a stark distinction between the *promotion* and the *defense* of the rights of nature. For him, while the rights of nature fit within counter-hegemonic spaces of activism, disparate ideologies lead to the necessity to negotiate and compromise across their boundaries, with activists operating as mediators; whereas within groups that are already ideologically united, activists are able to angle their efforts in a more direct manner. In this sense, the rights of nature come to operate as a supporting mechanism within a wider counter-hegemonic movement; in this case it is the indigenous rights movement(s). Within this structure, the rights of nature movement has already established alliances, and is now able to operationalise and capitalise on these connections.

On this topic Paola told me:

“Our cause is very connected to the indigenous movement. We want the same things as them... and they want what we want. Many of our closest partners when we do activism are people who are involved with, or interested in, indigenous rights. Yes, we try to build connections everywhere, but it is difficult to totally separate us from the indigenous social movements.” (Conversation with Paola at a café in Quito, 8th of August 2015)

The genealogy of this alliance, as regards the formal constitutionalisation process, can be traced to the discussions that occurred within the constituent assembly in 2008 (see chapter 3). The issue of the rights of nature and their ability to serve the public interest through their official constitutionalisation was frequently measured against their ability to serve indigenous rights (Tanasescu, 2013). What we can see here within Paola and Martín’s comments are the characteristics of this bond being acted upon. However, it is not in an overtly constitutional sense (as was initially imagined and conducted within the constituent assembly); but rather it is, in this case, within the activist space of the protest that this manifests.

On the 13th of August 2015, indigenous social movements and labour unions once again united in order to march against the Correa administration; this time however the context was different. On the 2nd of August an indigenous mobilisation led by members of CONAIE and ECUARUNARI left the region of Zamora Chinchipe in the southern part of the country, on the edge of the Amazon basin, embarking on a march that would traverse the country and finish in Quito. Upon arrival in Quito, the indigenous march would then join with labour unions and initiate a national shutdown, or *paro nacional* – the collective act of striking, or giving up one’s day to day labour in favour of engaging in contentious political activity that disrupts the functioning of key sites, such as cities. This was a tactic that proved highly successful for the indigenous movement in earlier decades (Zamosc, 1994). When the march reached the capital, the protesters would also set up road blockades in an effort to further bring the city to a standstill; again, a technique commonly used by indigenous social movements during their protests (Zamosc, 1994; Becker, 2008). Their actions succeeded, with much transport in and out of the city facing severe disruption, and the Panamerican Highway also being blocked.

These final narratives detail two parts of this protest. The first is the moment that I met up with the student activist group, and the second is a series of moments that transpired later in the evening. These ethnographic narratives serve to demonstrate the shift in activist identity of this rights of nature activist group, as well as to show the dangerous, and increasingly radical and criminal environment within which these activists were operating. In this sense, these following narratives illustrate how this precarious political context, came to shape their activism in that moment.

5.6.1 Account and analysis of final protest

Thursday afternoon: As I walked down the street to meet the student activists I was highly aware of the precarious state that was beginning to emerge. The police presence was more than I had seen at any of the others I had attended, and the military had also been deployed. Small pockets of violence where protesters clashed with police had been breaking out across the city throughout the day, and the smell of tyre smoke from the fires hung thick in the air. As I walked to meet Martín, Paola, Ally and their group, I was filled with nerves and apprehension about what might happen at this protest. Much talk among people who I knew were attending had been about avoiding arrest but

causing as much disturbance as possible in order to achieve the highest impact from the numbers present.

I met with the student activist group on the corner of the Centro Histórico as they prepared to join the main march further into this section of the city. As I approached the corner, the first thing that struck me was that each member already present (seven in total) was covering their face, either with items of clothing or bandanas. They looked intimidating, much more-so than at either of the others marches. I asked what the purpose of this was:

“For the gases.” Ally told me.

Evidently they were expecting tear gas to be used in order to disburse the protesters. This was a justified concern, given the heavy police and military presence, however I couldn’t escape the fact that they reminded me of those individuals who were present at the first protest and who were responsible for the small outbreaks of violence that had occurred. While I knew that the situation was arguably different (police crackdowns were deemed to be heavier on indigenous rights protests), the image still stuck with me.

As more members of the group joined us (many with their faces covered as well) I noticed that some of the placards stood out from the rest. While there were still similar ones to before, espousing messages to do with the Yasuní, oil drilling, mining, water, and the constitution, there were also some new ones: “*Spying on me? I hope you see this.*” And “*Spy on terrorists, not environmentalists!*”.

I asked the girl holding the “*Spy on terrorists, not environmentalists!*” placard how she felt about the documents leak, she told me that it was another sign of the criminalisation of environmentalism in the country, and that the president had clearly broken the law when he conducted the surveillance on peaceful citizens. Just as she was about to finish she added:

“It’s also why I am covering my face.”

Thursday evening: We were in a street in the Centro Histórico and the protest had fragmented into different groups and locations. The sky was black and all around us we could hear shouting between protesters and police. Clashes had been ongoing but steadily worsening, and the fires around the streets were burning strong. I was with Martín, Sebastian and a few others – the group had been split up shortly before as some members had gone to combat police and others had stayed further up the road. Sebastian had injured his leg earlier on after slipping off of a curb and Martín was looking after him. We looked on as a line of protesters clashed with a line of police. Missiles were being thrown by the protesters, and some were striking the police with makeshift weapons. The state forces, operating as a fortified, black-clad mass were retaliating in sporadic surges forward, followed by a flurry of batons emerging from behind their riot shields.

“It’s a good thing. We came here to close the city and that’s exactly what we did.” Martín said to me when I asked him what he thought to the scene in front of us.

“We can break this city if we need to. The government has no choice but to listen now. Do you think they want this happening every month, every week?”.

Shortly afterwards Paola and another girl from the group came running up to us from a side, street they were panicked and out of breath.

“He’s been arrested!” She panted.

It turned out that one of the members of the group, who had been with Paola, Ally, and several others, had been taken by police. Paola was saying that the others had stayed behind and were trying to negotiate with the police to let him go. The police claimed that he had thrown a Molotov cocktail bomb (as had been occurring where Paola et. al. were at the time), but the group maintained that he was completely innocent saying that he would never do such a thing.

Martín and the others, minus Sebastian who returned home in a taxi, went to the location of where this had been happening. I knew that I could not go as the danger was too high, so I decided to leave. I could hear the clattering of police horses in the distance, and the scene that we had been observing further up the road had turned to utter chaos. Fires had been turned over and covered the road, while protesters and police continued to fight around the flames.

I spoke to Paola the next day. Two members of the group (including Ally) had been arrested, but then set free the same night. Federico however (the activist who had been arrested in the situation that caused Paola and her friend to come to us), had been formally detained. She told me that the group had got into a confrontation with police regarding his arrest, and that some members (namely the ones who were then briefly arrested afterward) became violent and unruly.

When I spoke to Martín, he told me that the situation had spiralled out of control and that the police had taken advantage of them being younger than the average protester there, and deemed them easy to deal with. As to whether or not this is true, I cannot attest, but another participant specifically commented on the police indiscriminately targeting people of any age. She stated that she had seen police on horses hitting people of all ages and genders. This claim was later repeated by another participant, a lady who worked for a local environmental NGO and did not know the first participant. As regards the accusation that Federico had thrown a Molotov cocktail bomb, in the end there has been no proof that he had in fact done this.

This final protest marked a significant moment in the process of the radicalisation of the protest space within which rights of nature activists seek to operationalise part of their counter-hegemonic movement. There are three fundamental (and interconnected) factors at play here: state oppression, internalisation of the criminalisation of one's actions and beliefs, and state surveillance. While police oppression and the internalisation of processes of criminalisation have been present since after the first protest, the issue of surveillance is one that was newly introduced to this particular protest moment. As we saw in the earlier dialogues with Martín, Esteban, Vanessa and Sonia, the revelations regarding government surveillance provided them with a specific motivation that would characterise the ways in which they protested. We saw that this then became the case for other protesters, who arrived with placards commenting on the topic of spying. Similarly, it was also the reason for one protester to cover her face (not for the purpose of protecting against tear gas, as had been mentioned by Ally). During my conversations with other protesters at the time, many said that it was indeed to protect from tear gas, but that anonymity was also a benefit – while most did not however specifically mention the issue of surveillance, three did.

At this point we begin to see how the internalisation of wider processes of criminalisation of environmentalism and of protest manifest. Previously, anonymity was not an issue held as particularly important by these rights of nature activists, and while some of them did make specific reference to the issue of surveillance, many did not. Anonymity was a benefit in and of itself, but for what purpose? The issue here is that the protest itself was, as Martín mentioned, deemed to be a criminal space. Policing was heavier than before, and the military was present. In this sense, those who were entering into the protest were doing so knowing that their activities were, now even more so than before, regarded as criminal by the government, and for that reason they should exercise anonymity. This notion is further confirmed by the issue of surveillance, as the government had already set a precedent for the criminalisation of environmentalist protesters.

For myself, the decision taken by my participants to cover their faces was reminiscent of the group of violent, radical activists who we saw at the first protest – activists who Martín and Paola directly juxtaposed themselves, their group, and their methods of activism against. In this sense, it had become evident to me that, while obviously not ‘becoming’ those other activists, my group of participants had indeed shifted their personal characteristics and manifestations of activism to a more radical, contentious, and controversial standpoint.

This then became even more clear throughout the course of the evening, as clashing with police was generally not seen as something to be avoided, but in many cases something to be sought after. When coupled with the issue of surveillance, state oppression became a way in which these rights of nature activists would define themselves and their methods of activism within the protest space. Members of this group would use police oppression and state surveillance in order to justify their more violent, potentially illegal, and radical forms of activism, which simultaneously allows the state to react accordingly, either through discourse or direct action. Furthermore, discourses of legitimacy, particularly in the context of the constitution and defending the law, were far less common among these activists during this final protest. Evidently, then, the forms of activism and activist identities embodied by these rights of nature protesters remain contextualised by their relationship with the state. These manifest within the constant cycle of action and reaction both within the micro and immediate

context of the protest space itself, as well as the national political context, shaped by moments such as the surveillance leaks.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun to illustrate the key cultural politics and activist identities of grassroots rights of nature activism. Crucially, these politics and identities manifest through the complex spatio-temporal relationship between activists and the state, principally by activists attempting to mobilise a fundamentally anti-extractivist ethos of environmentalism against an extractivist state. Furthermore, I have shown how this relationship with the state contributes to a radicalisation of the rights of nature and of the activists that seek to promote and defend them. This aligns with the arguments of scholars such as Barnard-Wills (2012) and Sbicca (2014), who assert that forms of activism and activist identities are heavily contextualised by the process of action and reaction that occurs between activists and state institutions.

I have also shown that for these activists, the rights of nature are most commonly utilised, conceptualised, and invoked within local and national contexts and agendas. Therefore, these activists regard the protest space as meaningful and significant because it provides a vehicle through which a counter-hegemonic national agenda can be mobilised. Furthermore, this agenda is enhanced within the protest space by establishing and engaging in political alliances with other, nationally-focused, social movements operating in the country. Consequently, I have demonstrated that the protest space remains highly significant for Ecuadorian social movements in their efforts to subvert hegemonic power structures through the occupation of public space. This reinforces earlier work by Leon Zamosc (2008, 1994), and Marc Becker (2013, 2010).

Therefore, what is evident within the connections of these dynamics is that, for grassroots rights of nature activists, radical activism has become the primary way that the rights of nature should be promoted and defended currently within Ecuador. This critiques the institutional approaches taken by other scholars writing on the rights of nature such as Rühls and Jones (2016), Tanasescu (2016), and Youatt (2017), in the sense that there is a key difference between the *institutionalised* form of the rights of nature, and the *activist* form of the rights of nature in Ecuador, and that for this reason they should not be treated as a homogenous or monolithic entity. In this same vein, I build

upon the work of Kauffman and Martin (2017) who indicate that there has become a gulf between state-driven and civil-society-driven rights of nature claims. I have built upon their work by exploring the new avenues being taken by grassroots civil-society activists in their efforts to promote and defend the rights of nature, given that institutional processes have increasingly failed them.

In the context of environmental activism in its broad sense (i.e. beyond Ecuador and Latin America), the notion that radical activism remains the primary way that activist groups perceive as instigating change echoes the findings of scholars such as Szasz (1994) and Dowie (1995), who have both shown this to be the case for certain environmental activist groups operating in the United States. Fundamentally, this emerges as the state is shown to be inseparable from the industries targeted by the activist groups themselves, which has also been demonstrated to be the case in the material and subsequent arguments I have made within this chapter.

Chapter 6. The Rights of Nature as Activist Knowledge(s): Conceptualisations and Subjectivities

6.1 Introduction

This chapter develops builds upon the arguments put forward in the previous chapter, but also serves to illustrate the divergent cultural politics which exist between grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador. As the previous chapter demonstrated, grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador promote the rights of nature as a tool with which an anti-state form of counter-hegemony can be materialised. This is realised through a fight for political representation, security, legitimacy, and direct action in the form of radical, non-institutional, and contentious political activity, for example in the shape of anti-government protests. What this chapter shows further is how activist collectives and organisations seek to promote the rights of nature through other means – principally through meetings and discussion groups which aim to foster debate on, and familiarity with, the rights of nature in Ecuador. I find that the process of holding events based on knowledge production, sharing, and dissemination is something that is common among a variety of grassroots groups and organisations who seek to promote and defend the rights of nature in Ecuador.

What this chapter illustrates is that rights of nature activism in Ecuador remains critical of the state as an institution as regards its ability to defend the rights of nature, and therefore reinforces the findings of the previous chapter. However, this chapter also serves to show the intricacies of the cultural politics elucidated and mobilised by a range of grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, from NGO workers to independent activists. Consequently, what I demonstrate is that (while often maintaining a common focus on challenging the state) conceptualisations of the rights of nature, and indeed notions of “environmentalism”, are not totally homogenous across grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador. I analyse different perspectives on the rights of nature, and how these perspectives materialise within spaces of knowledge production, sharing, and dissemination. I do this by drawing on data obtained from seven meetings and discussion groups held by different organisations and collectives of rights of nature activists held during the year 2015. The purpose of this is to illustrate the nuances and complexities that exist within grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador.

I begin by clarifying the nature of the data I analyse, how it was obtained and who the individuals and groups are that feature throughout this chapter. Afterwards I discuss the role of knowledge production and dissemination within social movements, drawing on De Sousa Santos' (2014) idea of the ecologies of knowledges – a concept I utilise in order to elucidate the ways in which activists' conceptualisations and subjectivities around the rights of nature are part of a broader network of contested knowledge interactions. From there I identify and analyse two key themes within the rights of nature discourses and agendas that are espoused by these meetings and discussion groups, and draw attention to the different cultural political lines which emerge within them. These key themes are:

- Decommodification of nature.
- Decolonisation of knowledge and territory.

I finish by considering what these discussion groups signify in terms of the counter-hegemonic efforts of grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, and what the implications are for how a “rights of nature movement” in Ecuador may be conceptualised.

6.1.1 Notes on the Data

The data presented in this chapter was collected during seven meetings/discussion groups that I attended during the year 2015, as well as from conversations with the organisers and attendees outside of the events themselves. The discussion groups were organised by various organisations and groups (primarily NGOs and activist collectives), often individually but sometimes in collaboration with one another. As regards geographical location, three of the discussion groups took place in Quito, and the other three took place Ambato, Riobamba and Otavalo.

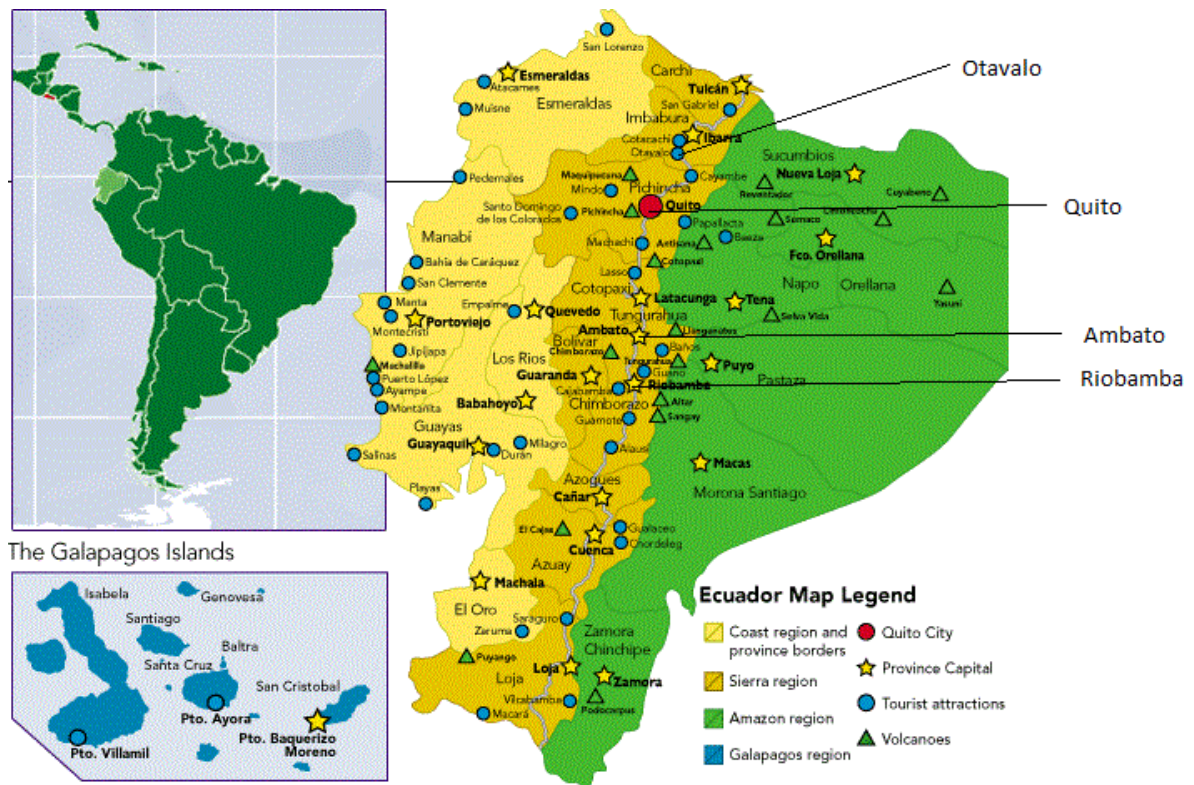


Fig. 5: Map of Ecuador with cities (source: Lonely Planet)

Quito: The capital city of Ecuador, located in the province of Pichincha. With a population of around 1.6 million people it is the second most populous city in the country.

Otavalo: Located to the north of Quito, in the province of Imbabura, Otavalo has a population of around 40,000 people. Otavalo is well-known for its indigenous market, its textiles, and is a popular tourist destination.

Ambato: Located in the central *Sierra*, in the province of Tungurahua, Ambato has a population of around 165,000 people. The city’s economy is primarily driven by industries such as transport and leather tanning. Due to its central location, Ambato serves as a key transport hub in Ecuador.

Riobamba: Located south of Ambato, but in the province of Chimborazo, Riobamba has a population of around 157,000 people. The city’s economy is primarily based around the agriculture of the surrounding areas, and also plays a key role in the cattle ranching industry in Ecuador. Riobamba is also well-known for its indigenous market.

The purpose of these events was to foster knowledge and action regarding the promotion and defense of the rights of nature in Ecuador. The notion held by each of the groups who were organising the meetings and discussion groups was that many people in Ecuador needed to know more about the rights of nature, as information on these rights was not widely available. Indeed, there was a frustration amongst many of these rights of nature activists that there were plenty of people in Ecuador who were not even aware that the rights of nature had been written into the country’s constitution. Furthermore, the events were also designed to be spaces where people who were already knowledgeable on the rights of nature could come to discuss the future of these rights in Ecuador, and what could be done to further their essence as a legitimate political and legal project.

Each meeting followed a similar format. Primarily advertised through Facebook and other social media, they would draw an average of ten to fifteen attendees, with anywhere between one and four discussion leaders present. Each one primarily relied on discussion as the main medium of knowledge dissemination and production, but some would also choose to include short documentary films in order to foster the dialogue.

Below are two tables that show the background information to the key participant individuals and organisations that feature throughout this chapter. Within these tables I list only the participant organisations and individuals who played a role in organising and running the meetings, and not those who came to the meetings only as attendees, due to the biographical data of attendees being more difficult to obtain.

Organisation	Background and Information
NGO 1	NGO 1 is a non-governmental organisation based in Quito. Its primary concerns are environmental protection and the protection of indigenous peoples and their rights, particularly in the context of land, water, and political representation. They strive to raise awareness of these problems (most often through online campaigns), and to help affected communities obtain and mobilise

	<p>resources in order to protect both themselves and the environment around them.</p> <p>NGO 1's activities are predominantly focused on Ecuador, particularly in the <i>Sierra</i> and the Amazon, however they also do some work in the country's coastal regions.</p>
NGO 2	<p>NGO 2 is a non-governmental organisation based in Quito. Its primary concern in Ecuador is fighting against mining, oil drilling, and deforestation. They strive to raise awareness of these problems (most often through online campaigns), and also offer advisory services to communities, businesses, and activist groups in order to promote environmental responsibility and sustainability.</p> <p>While the majority of NGO 2's activities are in Ecuador (in the <i>Sierra</i>, the Amazon, and the Coast), they also engage with struggles in other countries in Latin America such as Peru and Brazil.</p>
NGO 3	<p>NGO 3 is a non-governmental organisation based in Riobamba. Its primary concern is the protection of water rights for indigenous groups in the area, as well as the promotion and defense of indigenous identity and cultural heritage.</p>

	<p>NGO 3's activities are purely focused on cases and situations in Ecuador. They mainly operate in Riobamba and throughout the province of Chimborazo, however they sometimes also do work in other areas throughout the <i>Sierra</i> region.</p>
<p>Student Group</p>	<p>The student group is a loosely-connected collection of students and graduates from various universities based throughout the <i>Sierra</i> of Ecuador. Predominantly these individuals and their universities are based in Quito, however other students in the group are from (and attend university in) cities such as Riobamba, Ambato, and Otavalo.</p> <p>While activism conducted by individual members of the group is varied and diverse (including issues such as mining, oil drilling, deforestation, conservation, pollution, water rights, indigenous rights, and political representation), the key focus of the group's activism is the defense of the rights of nature. This is most often conducted in urban centres, and includes activities such as protests, discussions and seminars held on university campuses, and film screenings.</p>
<p>Independent Activists</p>	<p>The independent activists are those activists with no strict organisational affiliation, but work with different groups/organisations at different times, as well as driving their own independent</p>

	forms of activism. Their vocations include things such as journalism, independent research, and film.
--	---

Table 6: Table of organisations and groups in chapter 6

Name	Organisation	Biography
Laura	NGO 1	Laura is from Quito and has worked at NGO 1 for 7 years. She previously worked for one of Ecuador's large telecommunications companies. She now runs most of NGO 1's outreach projects and engages extensively with communities affected by natural resource extraction.
Sandra	NGO 1	Sandra is from Quito has worked at NGO 1 for almost 2 years. She graduated university with a degree in sociology and began working for NGO 1 straight away. Currently she helps to develop and improve the organisation's social media presence.
Susan	NGO 1	Susan is from Guayaquil, but has lived in Quito for most of her life. She has worked at NGO 1 for 16 years and is one of their longest-serving employees. She co-ordinates many of the organisation's projects and promotes their work at regional and international conferences.
Joselo	NGO 2	Joselo is from Manta and has worked at NGO 2 for 5 years. He graduated university with a degree in biology and began working at NGO 2 shortly after. He helps to run anti-mining campaigns, mainly focused on Ecuador but is currently also working on a project with an NGO in Peru.
Julia	NGO 2	Julia is from Quito. She is one of NGO 2's founding members and has worked in the NGO sector in Ecuador for over 20 years. She went to university in the United States and graduated with a degree in law. Currently she advises local and national businesses on sustainability, and

		helps local communities develop self-sustaining economies through agriculture and tourism.
Isabel	NGO 2	Isabel is from Ambato and has worked at NGO 2 for almost a year. She works part-time due to childcare. This job is her first in the NGO and environmental sector. Previously she worked in various bars and restaurants, but says that her activism has always been the defining part of her life. She is currently working closely with Joselo on the projects he manages.
Jessy	NGO 2	Jessy is from Guayaquil and has worked at NGO 2 for 8 years. She went to university in the United States and graduated with a degree in journalism and media. She coordinates the majority of the organisation's social media and online projects, often consisting of e-leaflets, and Facebook and Twitter posts regarding the environment in Ecuador.
Patricio	Independent Activist	Patricio is from Cuenca and has lived in Quito for 5 years. He is a blogger who writes on eco-tourism in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America. He gives talks at universities on eco-tourism and how it can help to fight against oil drilling in the Amazon.
Estefany	Independent Activist	Estefany is from Quito and works at a local tourism company. She went to university in Canada, where she lived for 5 years before returning to Quito.
Elodie	Independent Activist	Elodie is from Quito and is an independent journalist who writes for local magazines and newspapers in Quito, Loja, Guayaquil, and Cuenca. She writes on a wide variety of topics including national politics, Ecuador's economy (especially in the context of extractivism), feminism, and indigenous rights.
Henry	Student Activist	Henry is from Quito and studies political science at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. He has been an activist since beginning his studies at university, fighting

		for causes related to the environment and indigenous rights. He says that he favours direct action as a form of activism over other forms, but will take part in whatever he can to try and make a difference.
Paola	Student Activist	Paola is from Quito and studies sociology at the Universidad de las Américas. She first became interested in activism when she saw that the rights of nature were not being respected in Ecuador, and when she realised it was necessary for people to stand up for these rights, regardless of their constitutional status.
Juan	Student Activist	Juan is originally from Otavalo, but has lived in Quito for just under 10 years. He studies anthropology at the Universidad de las Américas. His family are a mixture of Otavaleño and Quiteño, and are proud of the indigenous heritage on his father's side. He says his activism is closely connected to his indigenous heritage, and that he regards oil drilling and mining as the greatest threats to wellbeing in Ecuador.
Ricardo	NGO 3	Ricardo is from Riobamba and is one of the founding members of NGO 3. He currently works on settling water disputes between indigenous and settler groups in the province of Chimborazo, but is also passionate about furthering the constitutional rights of nature as a legal and political system in Ecuador.

Table 7: Biographical table of key participants in chapter 6

6.1.2 Spatial and Temporal Context of the Meetings

These public meetings and discussion groups were held during a period of significant tensions between activist groups and the Ecuadorian state (as explored in the previous chapter). Therefore, many of these events took place discretely, organised internally by NGOs and activist collectives, and promoted through private Facebook groups, Whatsapp groups, and through word of mouth. However, I do still refer to them as “public” meetings due to the fact that there were no strictly imposed limits on who may

attend. Rather, the preference was that state bodies would not become aware of these events happening, due to the risk of those groups and individuals involved in their organisation being targeted for surveillance, or even dissolution or arrest. Therefore, these events generally took place in locations such as private dwellings, businesses after-hours, or community centres.

Below I include two vignettes adapted from my fieldwork diary in order to describe two of the meetings, one held in a house in Quito and the other in a community centre in Riobamba.

Vignette 1.

Saturday, 11th April 2015.

There are 13 of us sat in the front room of a house in the south of Quito. It is the late afternoon and the organisers (Laura, Sandra, and Susan all from NGO 1) have prepared this discussion group as an opportunity for them to bring people together who they know are interested in the rights of nature, and who are eager to share their opinions/expertise on the subject in the hope of fostering greater action in the future.

Everyone is either getting to know one another, or they are catching up with each other. Most people are sat on the sofas and chairs that are available and a few are milling around standing, moving from group to group.

The front room is decorated in bright colours, and the thing that strikes me the most is the extremely large bookshelf on one side of the room that looms over the rest of the space. Amongst the books (both English and Spanish) are anthologies of poems, philosophy, history, and assorted novels. There are also paintings hanging up, picturing things such as rolling

hills, Cotopaxi volcano, farmers, and alpacas. Each one seems very much a tribute to the campesino and indigenous cultures of the *Sierra*.

Most of the people present are female. Other than myself I count three males.

The smell of freshly made empanadas fills the air as the owner of the house finishes preparing a set of snacks for the other attendees, these are then distributed by her daughters (who don't seem particularly interested in what is going on at all!).

The first 45 minutes is spent talking socially, eating, laughing, and smiling. Then Laura puts down her coffee cup, claps her hands, and the mood becomes serious. She has set up a presentation by connecting a laptop to the TV screen in the room, and the first key point to be addressed is "Los derechos de la naturaleza en Ecuador – ahora qué?" (The rights of nature in Ecuador – what now?).

Vignette 2.

Sunday, 3rd May 2015.

There are 15 of us in a community centre in Riobamba. It is a cold, rainy afternoon with heavy fog and cloud settling around the city. This meeting has been organised by people from NGO 2 and NGO 3. Ricardo from NGO 3 has been able to get permission for us to use the community centre, as we were originally going to be using his home, but numbers ended up being higher than anticipated.

The community centre is in a state of disrepair with some broken windows and many holes in the roof, and a thick feeling/smell of damp throughout the main room (where we are).

The discussion begins (led by Ricardo) not by mentioning the rights of nature, but instead by a 15-minute introduction on President Correa and how he is fundamentally corrupt, both politically and morally. The attendees frequently vocalise their distrust in the president with shouts of “Corrupto!” (corrupt) and “Criminal!” (criminal) echoing around the cinder-block hall within which we are sat.

Afterwards, Ricardo and Julia lead a discussion on how oil drilling and mining have fostered state corruption in Ecuador. This discussion then leads on to the topic of how the government is “selling the country” to the Chinese. Within this, the rights of nature are listed as one of the fundamental tools that can be used to help fight these issues, through rights-based regulation on the extraction of natural resources.

What these vignettes reflect is that these rights of nature discussion groups were conducted in a variety of locations (some more comfortable than others), and that while organised by different organisations they often followed a similar format. That is to say, with opening presentations from discussion leaders, followed by open dialogues amongst the group. The events were then often closed by some concluding remarks from one of the organisers.

6.2 Ecologies of Knowledge within Social Movements

Fundamentally, social movements are located within a complex and contested web of knowledge/power relations (Routledge, 1996). It is therefore important to understand a particular movement’s (and indeed the individual groups that make up such a movement) place within these webs. Social movements can be the carriers of knowledge, the producers of knowledge, and the disseminators of knowledge, frequently

all at the same time (Frickel and Gross, 2005), and the use of knowledge as strategy is one that has remained central to the ways in which social movements challenge existing power structures and the institutions which support such structures (Conway, 2013; Escobar, 2004, 1998; Hardt and Reyes, 2012; Laurie et al., 2005; Routledge, 1996).

Furthermore, the role of knowledge in as much as it pertains to the power of social movements is significant due to the fact that social movements are frequently regarded as bearers of alternative forms of knowledge (Escobar, 1992a, 1992b, 1998; Goodman et al., 2012; McFarlane, 2009). Therefore, social movements' efforts to destabilise hegemonic power structures both in material and ideological forms are predicated upon challenges to conventional ways of *knowing* or *doing*, and at the same time are intricately bound within struggles over identity, representation, and meaning (Escobar, 1992a).

However, it is important not to treat the idea of knowledge as a static or monolithic entity in the social world. Knowledge itself is amorphous and contested, while simultaneously existing within genealogies of culture, power, ideology, and hybridity (Bhabha, 2012; de Sousa Santos, 2014, 2009; Jazeel, 2014; Walsh, 2012). In order to elaborate on this point I draw upon the concept of "ecologies of knowledges" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, 2011, 2009) and consider what significance it has for issues around divergent cultural politics within social movements, and specifically those which operate within both the global north and the global south.

The notion of an ecology of knowledges refers to the ways in which knowledges interact with one another, through cooperation, conflict, and hybridity (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Primarily, de Sousa Santos argues, when considering the relationship between knowledges located in the global north and knowledges located in the global south, the interaction is one of conflict. This is predicated on the postcolonial cultural hierarchy that exists between the global north and the global south, where one (the global north) is inherently regarded as superior, and the other (the global south) is regarded as inferior (de Sousa Santos, 2014; de Sousa Santos, 2011).

However, the concept of an ecology of knowledges also refers to the ways in which epistemic conflicts occur not only between the global north and the global south, but also within cultures themselves. For example:

“Each way of knowing knows more and better about itself than about the others. This asymmetry I term epistemological difference. It occurs among ways of knowing within the same culture and more intensely among ways of knowing existing in different cultures. It is also complex because, even though it is an epistemological asymmetry, as regards the praxis of relations among ways of knowing, it does not manifest itself simply as an epistemological question. Actually, it is experienced predominantly as a political question. That is to say, the asymmetry of ways of knowing overlaps the asymmetry of powers.”

(de Sousa Santos, 2009, pp. 116)

Here de Sousa Santos also reminds us that the question of conflictual relationships in the realm of knowledge are not limited solely to questions of epistemology, but instead manifest as *political* considerations, and therefore also within praxis itself. As a result of this bleeding over into the realm of praxis, material spaces emerge within which conflictual knowledge ecologies come to shape the social relations which they themselves are bound within. As I explore later in this chapter, this has direct implications for the manner in which the production and dissemination of knowledge shapes social movement relations both within and across geographical scales.

Furthermore, this ecology of knowledges is significant in the context of international social movements when one considers the prevalence of divergent cultural politics within them. As has been demonstrated by scholars such as Dwivedi (2001), Martinez-Alier (2002), and Muradian et al. (2003), international and transnational environmental social movements can vary significantly in their cultural politics as regards perspectives on the environment and “environmentalism”, where global north perspectives remain hegemonic in the international sphere (for an in-depth discussion of this please refer to chapter 2). Most commonly this manifests as a supposed divide between material and post-material perspectives on the environment, or anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives on ecology and environmental ethics (Dwivedi, 2001; Martinez-Alier, 2002).

Therefore, if we are to analyse how these divergent cultural politics intertwine with the concept of an ecology of knowledges, it is fruitful to consider the extent to which such an ecology contextualises and affects the process of knowledge production and

dissemination carried out by environmental social movement actors. Within this chapter I do this by analysing and discussing the series of meetings and discussion groups held by these rights of nature activists in Ecuador during the year 2015. I argue that, while the debate of environmental perspectives between global north and global south remains relevant, there simultaneously exists an ecology of knowledges that disrupts conventional (and perhaps overly-simplistic) notions of north versus south, where groups, regions, and countries are treated as monolithic cultural political entities. I illustrate how this ecology of knowledges enables both conflict and hybridity in the context of perspectives on the rights of nature, and subsequently on the notion of “environmentalism” itself.

6.3 Decommodifying Nature

The notion that we must “*desmercantizar la naturaleza*” (decommodify nature) was present within each one of the rights of nature discussion groups I attended. However, the manner in which this was approached varied. I identify two key trends within the ways in which the idea of decommodifying nature was discussed, these were fundamentally based along the lines of biocentric environmental ethics and anthropocentric environmental ethics, however in a small minority of cases this could more accurately be described as post-materialist and materialist perspectives on the environment and environmentalism. Crucially, though, these perspectives often intersect with one another in order to form new and contested meanings around the rights of nature, nature-society relations, and the eco-ethical imperatives surrounding a broadly conceptualised “environmentalism”. Take, for example, this quote from Julia:

“One of the things we try to talk about a lot here is that nature isn’t something just to be used, it’s not our property to do whatever we want with. We need to respect it because it has its own meaning no matter what we as human beings think of it. When we respect nature we also respect ourselves and the human beings around us. For example, to defend the rights of nature against a mining project means that those communities who would be affected by the project are also defended. Refusing to abuse and use nature in this way that damages the earth and the people that live from the earth – which is all of us! – means that protection of our communities can be achieved. Human rights are not enough, because human rights are interconnected with the rights of nature, but both need

each other so that they can function correctly. The main problem is that when one has to defend these rights against the government that granted them.... Well it's not easy. "

Julia, discussion leader, Riobamba, 3rd May 2015

I draw on this quote from Julia to begin this section as it encompasses the fluid and fundamentally blurred lines of how the rights of nature are discursively produced by many rights of nature activists in Ecuador. Here Julia shows how biocentrism and anthropocentrism can be blended together - sometimes termed "weak anthropocentrism" (Barrett and Grizzle, 1998) – reflecting how these categories do not exist in an isolated or mutually-exclusive relationship. She does this by stating her belief in the inherent value of nature irrespective of human beings (biocentric), but then immediately equating the protection and respect for nature as a means to an end of protecting human beings (anthropocentric). Furthermore, she then goes on to assert that it is the problematic relationship with the state which jeopardises the functionality of the rights of nature in Ecuador. While Julia's quote is not necessarily representative of the majority of rights of nature activists I spoke to (most perspectives I encountered were more concerned with, on average, two of these three themes instead of all three at once), it does reflect the key forms I saw rights of nature discussions take, and how different subjectivities around the rights of nature can integrate with one another.

As I demonstrate further in this chapter, the different eco-ethical priorities and subjectivities given to the rights of nature vary significantly within these discussion groups, and while some particular perspectives are espoused far more often than others, the spectrum of (and almost infinite potential for) interaction and contestation is clear.

6.3.1 Decommodification of Nature Within a Broader Anti-State Discourse

I wish to begin this section by establishing where this chapter picks up from the last – with the rights of nature being produced as an anti-state (and most conventionally anti-government) discourse through which activists challenge the status-quo of state-society(-nature) relations in Ecuador. However, whereas the previous chapter explored this theme in a general manner and focused on the role of the protest space as a site of

radical activism, I here explore how this anti-state rhetoric also permeates the notion of the *rights of nature as knowledge*. By this I refer to the ways in which knowledge around the rights of nature is contextualised, produced, and articulated, and subsequently how anti-state discourses are intertwined with these processes.

The idea of “decommodifying nature”, as it pertains to the rights of nature in Ecuador, must be seen as grounded in the country’s extractive model of development (Acosta, 2015), and the corresponding history of exploitation, environmental damage and rights abuses that are related to extractive industries in Latin America (for broad discussions of these issues see for example: Bebbington et al., 2008; Kröger and Lalander, 2016; McNeish, 2018).

It is understandable then, that when attempting to formulate, discuss, and share knowledge around the rights of nature, activists make specific reference to extractive activities when searching for nationally-relevant and pertinent examples regarding the commodification/decommodification of nature. For example, during most of the discussion groups at which I was present, parts of the talks were frequently focused on the government’s oil drilling plans for the Yasuní national park. When I asked one of the discussion leaders why she chose this example so frequently she told me:

“The Yasuní is symbolic for a lot of people in our country. It shows some of the worst that the president has committed himself to in his desire for oil money.”

Sandra, discussion leader, said to me during a break in a discussion group, Quito, 12 June 2015.

Evidently, if the long-running Chevron-Texaco dispute had once been the country’s symbol of anti-extractivist environmentalism (Bernal, 2011; Sawyer, 2001), it would seem that the Yasuní issue had now come to sit closely alongside it.

Many of the discussions featured this particular image:



Fig. 6: “*La Mano Sucia de Chevron*” Photo of President Correa in Sucumbíos (source: El Universo)

The photo depicts President Correa on a trip to the province of Sucumbíos in the Amazon, one of the regions heavily affected by Chevron-Texaco’s oil spills, in order to show the lingering impact of the firm’s business in Ecuador. Taken in August 2013 and entitled “*La Mano Sucia de Chevron*” (The Dirty Hand of Chevron), the image had become famous both in Ecuador and across the world as a symbol of the country’s fight against Chevron-Texaco (for a discussion of the history of this and its implications for environmentalism in Ecuador please see chapter 2). However, when it was being used in these rights of nature discussion groups it was instead being termed “*La Mano Sucia de Rafael Correa*” (The Dirty Hand of Rafael Correa) – a phrase that had become popular among many of my participants to make reference to President Correa’s supposed corruption, disingenuous nature as regards the environment, and connections with the oil and mining industries.

On the subject of the photo itself, two participants told me:

“This photo represents the propaganda that the government used for so long to try to show that the President cared about the people and the environment. And you know what? This photo was taken the same year that he sold the Yasuní. So we use it against him. His hands are still dirty and we are not going to forget. What we need to do to protect the Yasuní and our other megabiodiverse areas is to stop selling them like they were bread at the market.”

Jessy, discussion leader, said during her presentation to a discussion group, Quito,
12th June 2015

“For a long time Correa lied to a lot of people, saying that he was an environmentalist. Some of us believed him, some of us didn’t. Then he showed us exactly who he is by selling the Yasuní to the oil companies. [The photo] symbolises that lie... and instead of showing that he wants to fight against the catastrophes of the oil industry, it shows us that his own hands are dirty from his commitment to oil.”

Paola, discussion leader, said to me after a discussion group, Quito, 31st May 2015

However, it was not just anti-oil rhetoric that contextualised these discussions on the rights of nature; anti-mining was also frequently on the agenda. The case most frequently mentioned was that of the Intag valley in the province of Imbabura (for in-depth discussions on mining in Intag see: Avci, 2015; Buchanan, 2013; Davidov, 2014). While often present already, the case of Intag came to feature more significantly in these discussions after April 2015 when local activist Javier Ramírez was sentenced to 10 months in prison for fighting against armed police attempting to enter the community of Junín in Intag. Below is one of the images that was used in two of the discussions on anti-mining and the rights of nature, and one that became closely associated with the Libertad por Javier (Freedom for Javier) movement.



Fig. 7: “Today tomorrow and forever I will defend our territory” Photo of Javier Ramírez (source: El Comercio)

On the issue of the Intag Valley, three participants stated:

“Intag and the people of Junín are currently at the front of the fight against mining in Ecuador and against the criminal government and the police, and the military, who try to displace people for the sake of money and corporations, and that only wants to open the veins of our land, while giving nothing back.”

Henry, discussion leader, said during his presentation to a discussion group, Quito, 31st May 2015

“What is happening in the valley of Intag.... It is a region that is not just suffering now, but has been suffering for decades at the hands of numerous governments. They have all wanted to give the valley to the mining corporations, with no care for the environment or the people living there. Mining is a curse on our country and our people, and we now have two forms of rights to fight back against it, human rights and the rights of nature. Hopefully each one can help the other.”

Joselo, discussion leader, said during a discussion group conversation, Ambato, 19th September 2015

“Intag is a place of immense beauty... beautiful people and beautiful views. The government does not care about the place of Intag nor the people of Intag. If people like us do not try to fight the miners then no one will.” [Here Patricio was speaking in the context of a trip he took to Intag to help in the anti-mining efforts there].

Patricio, independent activist assisting in the leading of a discussion group, said during a discussion group conversation, Otavalo, 18th October 2015

These examples represent the broad context within which these conversations were set, and what the given examples themselves serve to show, from the Yasuní, to Chevron-Texaco, to Intag is how this context was fundamentally constituted by an anti-state discourse. However, it is also crucial to highlight that this anti-state discourse exists in tandem with a broader anti-extractivist agenda; indeed, the two work together as one, as the state is portrayed as inseparable from the extractive industry itself. Consequently, the discussions on the rights of nature taking place here speak to a range of issues that encompass a broad “environmentalism”, such as human rights, environmental protection, anti-mining, and anti-oil drilling, where the state is often seen as the primary nexus through which these issues are linked.

Finally, this anti-state-anti-extractivist discourse is also underpinned by a narrative of decommodifying nature, where the notion of such (de)commodification is directly associated with extractive industries. However in different capacities and forms. For example, two participants stated:

“When we talk about the rights of nature, what we are talking about is something as revolutionary as giving rights to slaves. It means we acknowledge the intrinsic values of nature and recognise that, at the end of the day, we are not different. We need to stop selling our earth as if it were a slave, and stop those who try to treat it like this. The oil companies – both of the state and of foreign countries – need to be shown that what they are doing is morally wrong, just as we know the slave trade was morally wrong. Mother Earth cannot be treated like this and we need to fight for her.”

Susan, discussion leader, said during a discussion group conversation, Riobamba, 3rd May 2015.

“To treat the environment as if it only exists to be bought and sold is wrong. But this government, just as those that were before it, will continue to do this because it’s how they see the world. This government of capitalists will kill us just to get their money. They sell nature and we suffer, communities suffer.”

Isabel, discussion leader, said during a discussion group conversation, Quito, 12th June 2015

These two quotes represent examples of the two broad eco-ethical perspectives that were displayed on the subject of the decommodification of nature throughout these discussion groups. Susan’s statement is identifiable as aligning with a biocentric perspective, specifically mentioning “the intrinsic values of nature”, whereas Isabel’s aligns more-so with an anthropocentric perspective, concerning herself primarily with the preservation of human beings. Importantly, these are both mentioned in the context of the decommodification of nature, a subject which is conventionally expressed within, and associated with, biocentric environmental perspectives (Koons, 2008; Oksanen, 1997). However what we see here, as we saw with Julia’s quote at the beginning of this section, is that the decommodification of nature can be, and evidently *is* spoken about across a spectrum of “environmentalisms”. I build upon this in the next section of this chapter.

6.3.2 Decommodification of Nature: Contestation within an Ecology of Knowledges

I here wish to discuss how the notion of the decommodification of nature, and by extension the rights of nature, exist as cultural-political artefacts that function within complex webs of social movement interaction that constitute a wider, and contested, ecology of knowledges. It is impossible to consider how the rights of nature are promoted, defended, and conceptualised, without paying due attention to the ways in which they, as knowledge, are embodied and contextualised by the actors and networks through which they travel.

I begin by highlighting two particular excerpts that were used in presentations during four of the seven discussion groups:

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us.
When we see land as a community to which we belong,
we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

(Leopold, 1968)

“We see quite clearly that what happens
to the nonhuman happens to the human.
What happens to the outer world
happens to the inner world.
If the outer world is diminished in its grandeur
then the emotional, imaginative,
intellectual, and spiritual life of the human
is diminished or extinguished.
Without the soaring birds, the great forests,
the sounds and coloration of the insects,
the free-flowing streams, the flowering fields,
the sight of the clouds by day
and the stars at night, we become impoverished
in all that makes us human.”

(Berry, 2011)

As discussed in chapter 3, Aldo Leopold and Thomas Berry were significant influences on the North American environmental movement, particularly in the areas of earth jurisprudence, biocentrism, deep ecology, and most recently the rights of nature. The fact that they were being used in some of these discussion groups is perhaps the starkest demonstration of the rights of nature existing within a broader epistemic community. However, it is the ways in which these quotes were used that can open a further discussion on the contested nature of the ecology of knowledges to which I refer.

Samples of text from these North American writers were used in a variety of ways. For example, in one presentation given by Julia in Riobamba, she drew on the

above quote by Aldo Leopold to support her statements on utilising the rights of nature as a way to foster decommodification, in order to protect local communities from the impacts of oil drilling (broadly identifiable as an anthropocentric approach), whereas in a contribution from Elodie during a discussion group in Quito, she utilised the same quote to support her statements on how the rights of nature are fundamental to realising the inherent value of non-human nature and that using the earth only to fuel a marketised economy was morally wrong (broadly identifiable as a biocentric perspective). Consequently, what we can see is that these quotes, operating as artefacts of knowledge, were being used to support different interpretations of what the rights of nature represent ethically and politically.

However, when I saw quotes such as these being used as points of reference for conversations on the rights of nature I was surprised. Admittedly, I expected the material being used to be primarily from Latin American contexts, for example the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, or writings on the rights of nature from Latin American authors such as Eduardo Gudynas and Alberto Acosta. While references to these materials did indeed exist (and more-so than their North American counterparts), the fact that the North American influence was frequently present was indicative of the sharing of knowledge between activists based in both locations (be it in an active and deliberate manner, or a passive one).

On this subject many participants told me that the internet and independent research was the key factor here, as opposed to deliberate knowledge sharing activities between different activist groups. For example, Elodie and Julia told me:

“I first heard about people like Thomas Berry and Christopher Stone when I looked on Google to find out more about the history of the rights of nature. I didn’t read much of their writings but some of the quotes that I found I really liked!”

Elodie, personal conversation after a discussion group, Ambato, 19th September
2015

“Looking on lots of other [Rights of Nature] group’s websites you see a lot of things. I started reading about Aldo Leopold and Thomas Berry because you see their names in lots of places to do with the rights of nature, especially in the United States.”

Julia, personal conversation after a discussion group, Riobamba, 3rd May 2015

Importantly, the impression that I got from many participants was that the works of these North American authors were often included in the discussion groups due to the fact that people felt they *should be* included, as opposed to any particular dedication to promoting a specifically biocentric philosophy (the issue that such works are centred on). However, it is necessary to mention one particular discussion group, where the idea of *ecocentrism* did indeed dominate the conversation for a considerable amount of time, but as an example it also serves to reinforce the central point I posit here.

Whilst attending a discussion group in Quito there was visible frustration among many of the attendees when the relevance of what was being discussed (bio/ecocentrism in relation to anthropocentrism) was left at the level of the conceptual, and had guided conversation away from the material reality of what was occurring in Ecuador, particularly around the security of affected communities and activists. As a result of this, the conversation was gradually directed back to a more grounded focus. However, two participants voiced the following views on what they had seen:

“We need to talk about this, as it is something that is very, very important for what the rights of nature mean. The problem is that some people are not interested, because it does not physically affect them or the people they care about. Ecocentric? Anthropocentric? Why should people care about these words when there are people being displaced from their homes because of the mining companies? I don’t know... It’s just difficult sometimes. And as well, most of the people who want to talk about this stuff are not activists. They don’t do things, they just think.”

Joselo, personal conversation after a discussion group, Quito, 12 June 2015

“It’s difficult to talk about eco-centrism in a way that can make people think “yes, that is something that I can see making a difference in my life, in this moment.”

Some people come to these meetings and really like to talk about it..... but it's certainly not for everyone. At the end of the day, different people take different things from the talks, and that is fine."

Laura, personal conversation after a discussion group, Quito, 12th June 2015

Here we see that Joselo and Laura are expressing their concerns about attempting to open more of the dialogues into the realms of theoretical and philosophical discussion on the rights of nature. What they had experienced so far when attempting to do this was that the subject could be divisive (with Joselo even stating that those with a firm desire to follow such a line of discussion were not real activists), where some group attendees were interested and others were not. This contrasted with the more material issues and topics of discussion which were generally seen as successful at what they tried to achieve. What became clear was that it was a minority of attendees who ever demonstrated a desire to talk about biocentrism specifically, but what is crucial to notice is that the discourses which permeated these conversations were not as far-removed from the subject as some might think. Consequently, the themes and issues themselves often became intertwined with one another.

Fundamentally, the majority of discussions and contributions that focused on the theme of the decommodification of nature were eco-ethically contested in nature. While references to North American authors on biocentrism were made, they were simultaneously intertwined, and used to support, discussions on the security of activists and affected communities in Ecuador. In this sense, the talk of decommodification - which is conventionally associated with biocentric and *post-materialist* environmentalisms (Eckersley, 1989) - was instead being used to promote a form of environmentalism that borrowed discourses from both anthropocentric and biocentric positions and was predicated on a fundamentally *materialist* desire for security, livelihood, and (in the context of activists' relationship with the state) political representation. This therefore shows how these rights of nature activists develop their own meanings around what the idea of the "decommodification of nature" means, and by extension what the rights of nature themselves mean, and how these subjects pertain to a locally-contextualised form of environmentalism that still draws on broader networks and discourses.

6.4 Decolonisation of Knowledge and Territory

In the context of Ecuador, the rights of nature have frequently been interconnected with, and embedded within, wider narratives of anti-imperialism (Tanasescu, 2013). As Tanasescu (2013) highlights, this was the case with the initial constitutionalisation process within the constituent assembly between 2007 and 2008. This, he argues, manifested in two ways: through the notion of doing development differently (intricately intertwined with the broader development philosophy of *buen vivir* that permeated the rest of the re-drafted constitution), and through providing an additional tool to assist in the protection of land rights of indigenous and marginalised peoples in Ecuador (Tanasescu, 2013).

Throughout my research I found repeated evidence that this narrative of anti-imperialism, generally framed in the context of decolonisation, was frequently present and utilised in the discursive production of the rights of nature within their social movement form. Most commonly, this was articulated through claims of decolonisation of knowledge and territory, linked closely to the theme of decommodification discussed in the previous section of this chapter. I posit that these narratives are, as with the others I have discussed thus far, primarily concerned with issues of security, livelihood, and political representation.

Importantly, the idea of decolonisation was evident in two ways: as pertaining to knowledge, and as pertaining to territory. I separate them briefly here due to the discourses and narratives I witnessed around them being organically separated by the activists themselves. By this I refer to the form of colonisation to which the notion of *decolonisation* was being attributed at any given time. For example, when making reference to the decolonisation of knowledge, conversations were focused on epistemic colonialism (concerned with *ways of knowing*), framed in the context of culture and cultural imperialism. Whereas when making reference to the decolonisation of territory, the notion was more indicative of neo-colonial power relations between the state, or foreign corporations, and local marginalised groups (such as indigenous or campesino communities).

The issue of decolonisation has been a key focus point for social movements in recent decades, particularly within the global south. The desire to strive for greater political representation against institutions which reproduce colonial relations (Kapoor,

2007; Offe, 1985; Sharma and Wright, 2008), the struggle to decolonise the knowledges which constitute space-making rules and practices (Power et al., 2006; Quijano, 2000; Radcliffe, 2017), as well as the fight for land rights through the decolonisation of territory (Castro, 2011; Kröger and Lalander, 2016; Merino, 2012) have all been key sites for decolonisation efforts. As I show next, issues of decolonisation remain crucial to grassroots activists' perceptions on the rights of nature; however, in some cases the extent to which their narratives reproduce certain colonial perceptions is also problematic.

6.4.1 Decolonisation of Knowledge: Associating the Rights of Nature with Indigeneity

First I believe it is important to acknowledge the problematic relationship that the rights of nature movement (both within Ecuador and beyond) maintains with indigenous groups. This has been explored by scholars such as Tanasescu (2015, 2013), and Rawson and Mansfield (2018). It is common for rights of nature activists to directly associate the rights of nature with indigenous cosmologies, cultures, and knowledges – an assertion which is contested as regards the role of indigenous groups in the constitutionalisation process (Tanasescu, 2015), and as regards the supposed genealogy of knowledge which links the rights of nature to indigenous groups (Tanasescu, 2013; Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). Rather, the rights of nature movement (both within Ecuador and beyond) relies on strategic representations of indigenous groups as inherently existing within a culture of biocentrism and holism, invoking a narrative of the “ecologically noble savage” (for a discussion of this term see: Kitossa, 2000; Raymond, 2007; Smithers, 2015). This form of cultural appropriation and representation is not unique to the rights of nature movement, and is common among many environmental social movements (Kitossa, 2000; Becker, 2014).

Within the discussion groups I attended this trend remained true. For example, discussion leaders would say things such as:

“The rights of nature are a part of the indigenous culture.”

“The rights of nature are a gift from our indigenous brothers and sisters.”

“We owe the idea of the rights of nature to the indigenous culture.”

I do not provide meta-data for these quotes due to the fact that I heard them stated so many times by different participants – this is representative of the prevalence of the issue itself.

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to explore the problematic claims of such genealogies (for a deeper discussion of this refer back to chapter 3 of this thesis), it is necessary to highlight such tensions in as much as they exist within the broader contested ecology of knowledges I do consider here. It is salient that within narratives of *decolonisation* of knowledge, forms of epistemic colonisation remain within rights of nature discourses, located in the notion of *rights* becoming naturalised as a culturally-universal phenomenon (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018).

This remains particularly significant given that across all of the discussion groups I attended, the presence of indigenous peoples was incredibly low - most groups were exclusively mestizo. Consequently, this form of cultural appropriation results in indigenous groups and knowledges being represented through a speaking “for” and speaking “about” instead of speaking “with”, which again reproduce colonial power relations of knowledge and knowing (Spivak, 1988). These forms of reproduced epistemic imperialism and colonialism were not challenged by those attending the discussion groups, thereby leaving such an issue problematic.

6.4.2 Decolonisation of Knowledge

“The rights of nature give us a chance to remove the influence of the occidental culture from our ways of living. The mentality that Mother Earth is to be abused, rather than loved... that oil is fuel for our existence, rather than the blood of the earth... that it is ok to pollute the waters that we drink... That money is God and that we must worship it, instead of worshipping that which gives us life every day, our Pachamama.”

Ricardo, discussion leader, said during his closing remarks for a discussion group,
Riobamba, 3rd May 2015

The idea that the rights of nature represent an opportunity to *descolonizar el conocimiento* (decolonise knowledge) was common throughout these rights of nature

discussion groups. For example, in Ricardo's quote above we see this articulated in the manner of challenging occidental cultural knowledges on nature-society relations, closely linked to my earlier analysis on the decommodification of nature. This association was consistent across the discussion groups, for example:

“For too long we have been led by the knowledge and culture of others. European and North American culture, telling us how to be and how to think. What we are doing now is changing that, we are pushing their cultures away and remembering that it is our connection to the earth that makes us who we are. We are Ecuadorians and we live on Ecuadorian soil, we drink Ecuadorian water and we eat Ecuadorian food. Our political system should also be Ecuadorian and the rights of nature gives us that opportunity – to return to the respectful ways of living, instead of the abusive ways of living. But our government doesn't let that happen. No, our government maintains the capitalist culture, being whores to those people who want us to suffer and our culture to be nothing.... Once it was the United States and now it is China. There is no difference, so do not believe them when they say they are different.”

Discussion group attendee, Otavalo, 18th October 2015

“We need to protect the rights of nature because they represent the way that we should think as a country. The way the world works now does not care about Ecuador, or Ecuadorians, or people in the Third World. We need to take control of our country and our society, and how do we do that? We do it by changing the way we think. I do not want people to be suffering because a mine is on their land, damaging their health and destroying their crops. If we protect the rights of nature then we protect our people. But we need to change the way we think. We need to forget the consumerism that we have learned from the culture of North America... big cars, a rolex, always more, more, more. Well all of that more has a price, and the price is the lives of Ecuadorians and other people in the Third World.”

Juan, discussion leader, said during a discussion group conversation, Quito 31st

May 2015

“[The rights of nature] are a different way of thinking about the world. It is a way of thinking that our indigenous brothers and sisters have known for a long time, but we have been mistaken as a society for not listening to them. Finally their knowledge is part of our constitution, but the government is still not listening. We must continue to decolonise our relationship with Mother Earth, and embrace this way of thinking about the world. In order to do that we must first decolonise the institutions that run the country.”

Laura, discussion leader, said during a discussion group conversation, Quito, 11th
April 2015

These quotes are representative of the broad manner in which the rights of nature were spoken about in the context of decolonising knowledge. We can see the continuation of the anti-government narrative that has permeated these discussion groups, we can also see that the notion of decolonisation is often framed in regards to North American and European cultural influences (this is particularly interesting when considering how this might be paradoxical in the context of the issues discussed in the previous sub-section of this chapter), and we can also see how this decolonisation of knowledge is subsequently connected to the protection of livelihood and security in relation to role of the political economic model of extractivism in Ecuador.

I want to highlight the first and final of these themes, the continuation of the anti-government narrative and the linkages between the decolonisation of knowledge and the protection of security and livelihood. These issues are indicative of the ways in which these rights of nature activists embed their conceptualisations of the rights of nature, and the forms of environmentalism which they constitute, in material concerns and processes. These material concerns are fundamentally based upon place-based realities experienced by people living in Ecuador, such as the effects of extractivism, lack of political representation as regards the state, and the encroachment of neo-colonial powers upon local communities and cultures.

However, what is important to note is that there are nuances to the ways in which the theme of the decolonisation of knowledge is expressed. For example, some people (such as Juan, Ricardo, and the discussion attendee) place more emphasis on the role of moving away from North American and European knowledges, while others (such as

Laura) place emphasis on the cultural break with Ecuador's indigenous groups. Consequently, it is evident that within the subject of the decolonisation of knowledge, similar to the decommodification of nature, activists experience and construct different subjectivities around what the rights of nature represent.

Consequently, what these points (along with those from the previous subsection) reinforce is the notion that the rights of nature, and the activism that exists around them, function within a contested ecology of knowledges where power, culture, place, and representation intersect with one another.

6.4.3 Decolonisation of Territory

As has been the case with the other topics covered in this chapter, the decolonisation of territory is also deeply interconnected with the issue of extractivism, and the role that the state plays within the state-society-nature relationship that is contextualised by the extractivist political economic model. This manifests through material concerns regarding the occupation of land by extraction companies, or by the state in their efforts to foster an environment that is conducive to natural resource extraction. In this sense, the rights of nature are articulated in a way that is bound with land, security, political representation, livelihood, and culture.

For example:

“With these rights we should be able to make sure that indigenous lands are protected. They are the guardians of the forests, the mountains, and of the rivers.... If there are people who are the true defenders of the rights of nature it is them. Maybe that is where we should focus, on using the rights of nature to protect the indigenous lands so that they can stop the oil companies and the mining companies. Much of what happens occurs on indigenous territory, I think this is the most important thing that the rights of nature can give us right now.”

Discussion attendee, said during a discussion group conversation, Ambato,
19th September 2015

“The most important thing is to make sure that people are not displaced. Everybody has a right to their home and to their homeland, where lives are born and grown like the flowers. The mining companies, the oil companies, the government, they want to move people from their homes and from the places to which they are connected. This is morally wrong, they violate human rights so that they can then violate the rights of nature. Therefore, it is clear that human rights and the rights of nature are connected, and that starts with our connection to the earth.”

Paola, discussion leader, said during her closing talk to a discussion group, 31st
May 2015

“The people who need these rights the most are the poorest people of the country. The campesinos, the indigenous... those who suffer so much because of how the government and the foreign corporations treat them. If we are going to make sure that the rights of nature are taken seriously then it is in those places that we must begin. We can use the rights of nature to make sure that people, their communities, and their lands are protected. For example, I think that if there is a community and the government or the Chinese or whoever want to take over the land to mine or to exploit oil, then we can use the rights of nature to stop that from happening, right?”

Estefany, discussion assistant, said during a discussion group conversation, 11th
April 2015

This theme was common across the discussion groups I attended; the idea that the rights of nature could prove to be a useful tool to use against the government, and against extraction companies, in order to protect some of the more marginalised groups of the country, such as indigenous and campesino groups. It was evident that for many of these rights of nature activists, the issue of human rights and the rights of nature were deeply intertwined, and that the issue of the illegal occupation of land via displacement was central to that argument.

What these examples demonstrate is how the rights of nature are used to constitute an environmentalism that is fundamentally concerned with material issues such as the security and livelihoods of those affected by the occupation of land that comes as a result of the prevalence of extractive industries in Ecuador. Consequently, the proposed implementation of the rights of nature become focused on place-based issues that are pertinent within Ecuador, such as the extraction of natural resources and the state's role in such activities. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the notion of the rights of nature being contextualised by the place-based social, political, and economic situations within which rights of nature activism takes place remains crucial to the ways in which these rights manifest and are conceptualised.

What is evident, then, is that the notion of decolonising territory, particularly in the context of extractivism and the protection of marginalised groups in Ecuador, is of great significance to the knowledge that grassroots activists produce and exchange in their efforts to promote the rights of nature. Furthermore, these narratives continue to be firmly embedded within the state-society-extractivism nexus, where civil society is positioned in direct contention with the state and extractive industries. This has particular relevance for the ways in which these activist knowledges, and their production and dissemination, are used within the broader counter-hegemonic struggle which is mobilised by grassroots rights of nature activists. I explore this in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

6.5 Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and Contestation in the Ecology of Activist Knowledges

Fundamentally, these rights of nature discussion groups function as sites of knowledge production and dissemination – an agenda is set and ideas are communicated and discussed in the effort to deepen understandings of the rights of nature. Evidently, the narratives that remain prominent within these rights of nature discussion groups were radical (i.e. grassroots, non-institutional, and positioned against the status-quo). Given that the production of space is both political and strategic (Lefebvre, 1991), one must question how the conducting of such events affects the overall aims and purposes of their principal group or groups, that is the rights of nature activist organisations operating in Ecuador.

If, then, the production of a counter-hegemonic space in the context of knowledge production and dissemination is both political and strategic, what is being referred to is the positioning and utilisation of power in the effort to contribute to the production of an ideological end, but also the contained and conflictual processes of power that are inherent within this process itself. For example, the ideological end which these rights of nature discussion groups work towards is one where environmental and human protection is placed centrally within the political systems that govern the country of Ecuador. However, as I have shown, this manifests in a variety of ways, some which coexist more easily than others. This can often be seen through the ways in which different people conceptualise what the rights of nature represent and how they should be used, based upon their own subjectivities and lived experiences.

Consequently, the political production of these counter-hegemonic spaces is indeed multifaceted and grounded in contention (be it internally within the discussion group itself, or externally fostering conflictual relationships with the state and extractive industries). However, it is evident that the form of hegemony that is challenged is, while concerned with ideology, fundamentally material for many of these rights of nature activists. The hegemony of the Ecuadorian state and its inability to produce and secure an eco-political context where the rights of nature can function is central to the narratives offered within these discussion groups. The materiality is particularly salient in the intertwining of the state's proposed violations of the rights of nature, and effect this has on the security and livelihoods of marginalised communities in Ecuador.

Therefore, it is clear that the strategic nature of the production of these discussion groups is closely related to (but must not be conflated with) the role that these events play in the wider war of position that is being carried out by rights of nature activists. Indeed, the strategy here lies in the manner in which this role is realised and performed. For example, during presentations within these discussion groups it was common to see images of oil spills, contaminated water, mines, as well as indigenous and campesino groups either protesting or in conflict with state forces or extractive industry workers. In this sense, the images used are done so in order to produce an ideological tapestry of what the rights of nature signify to those articulating them. In this case, it is the positioning of the rights of nature as something which is deeply intertwined with natural resource extraction, oppression of subaltern groups, as well as against the state and corporate fossil fuel interests, which remained as the dominant discourse. In this sense, the strategic and

counter-hegemonic production of the discussion group space is inseparable from the political economic reality that is constituted by fundamentally place-based issues. As we saw in chapter 5, this manifested through direct action against the government in the shape of street protests, whereas in this case it is at events where the intent is to subvert state power through knowledge production and sharing.

6.6 Conclusions

What this chapter has illustrated is three-fold; building upon the previous chapter it has shown that the rights of nature as they function within grassroots activism in Ecuador are primarily considered and conceptualised in the context of anti-state discourses. I have shown that this most often materialises through the state-society-extractivism nexus, specifically through narratives of the decommodification of nature, and the decolonisation of knowledge and territory. However, it has also shown that the environmentalisms embodied by these rights of nature activists are not always homogenous when we observe the deeper complexities of their perspectives and claims. For example, while some wanted to engage in discussions on biocentrism, the majority were concerned with material change and direct political action. This was again visible when certain activists were more concerned with the urban possibilities of the rights of nature, but the majority were focused on their application in rural and remote areas.

The final point that this chapter has elaborated is that the rights of nature exist within a complex and contested ecology of knowledges, where influences of culture and power intersect. This was evident in the ways in which the works of North American writers on biocentrism were included in discussions on fundamentally anthropocentric issues, such as the protection of communities from displacement and pollution. This reflects the ways in which the rights of nature can manifest as cultural artefacts where activists imbue them with their own, often place-based, subjectivities and perspectives on what the rights of nature (and subsequently “environmentalism”) are.

However, this ecology of knowledges was also visible through the ways in which indigenous cultures and knowledges were appropriated into these rights of nature discourses. The voices of the marginalised *remained* marginalised despite the fact that they were often central to the discussion. This was due to the speaking “for” and “about”, rather than “with”, that was shown to be so prevalent within these discussion groups. This

therefore reflects the fact that, while these rights of nature activists would indeed forge their own narratives of environmentalism and of the rights of nature, they simultaneously succumbed to the problematic power relations that have been shown to be the case within the broader international rights of nature movement, where indigenous groups are represented in such a way that primarily serves to benefit the movement itself (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018).

What these findings reflect is that to think of the rights of nature movement in Ecuador as homogenous or monolithic is problematic, due to the fact that the conceptualisations and subjectivities that constitute these rights for each individual can vary considerably. While there are indeed noticeable common trends throughout the majority of perspectives put forward by rights of nature activists in Ecuador (such as anti-state rhetoric and anti-extractivism), there remain important differences in the ways in which activists arrive to these positions.

Throughout this chapter and the previous chapter I have explored the complex dynamics, characteristics, and cultural politics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador. I have shown how the issues are nuanced, fundamentally concerned with the place-based knowledge of activists themselves, and while diverse, are representative of a form of activism that is mistrustful and principally against the Ecuadorian state. Furthermore, despite these complexities, I have shown that grassroots rights of nature activism remains principally concerned with issues of security, territory, political representation, and human rights, often in the context of extractivism. This, therefore, aligns with the characteristics of an “environmentalism of the poor” as laid out by Martinez-Alier (2014, 2002). However, I have also demonstrated that, in the context of the rights of nature, environmentalist perspectives from the global north can also permeate these activist knowledges. This manifests through the hybrid cultural artefact that the rights of nature represent within Ecuador, where place-based narratives sometimes draw upon outside knowledges in order to inform their own discourses and subjectivities. Consequently, I posit that it is fruitful to consider the networked, situated knowledges of environmentalism across the global north and global south within debates on “the environmentalism of the poor”. This aligns with the arguments put forward by Lawhon (2013).

Chapter 7. Scaling-Up the Rights of Nature: International Rights of Nature and the United Nations “Harmony with Nature” Project

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the “scaling-up” of the rights of nature to the level of international activism and advocacy within an institutional context. I do this in order to demonstrate how the knowledges and discourses of the rights of nature diverge from (but also interconnect with) the constructions of the rights of nature at the grassroots level in Ecuador (as explored in chapters 5 and 6). In line with this, I illustrate how the scaling-up of the rights of nature results in local voices and experiences being unheard or misrepresented, in a manner which primarily stands to benefit the internationally-networked actors within the rights of nature movement. Furthermore, the institutions themselves (such as the United Nations and the Ecuadorian state) within which these narratives are embedded also benefit from the reproduction of such discourses, in the sense that it legitimises their positions and power. Through an exploration of this, the secondary purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of these divergences between this international form of the rights of nature, and the localised, grassroots form of the rights of nature explored in chapters 5 and 6.

The process of scaling-up issues of political contention is common within social movements who operate in international or transnational contexts (Igoe, 2003; Lyons, 2009; Neville and Weinthal, 2016; Nost, 2014). This generally occurs through NGOs taking localised situations, mobilising them through transnational networks, and using them to inform national or global discourses on subjects such as development (Kauffman and Martin, 2014), human rights (Igoe, 2003; Lyons, 2009), and climate change (Neville and Weinthal, 2016). Institutions often play a key role in facilitating this process of scaling-up by providing the platform through which claims are voiced, and enabling groups to subvert local or national power structures that might otherwise be inhibitive (Friedmann, 2007; Glassman, 2002). However, “scaling-up” can frequently result in local complexities, grievances, and perceptions being misrepresented or ignored in the process due to oversimplification, or the necessity to align with broader agendas (Escobar, 2001; Igoe, 2003). Consequently, when political issues are scaled-up they become bound within problematic power relations of representation and flows of knowledge. This chapter

examines how this occurs in the context of the rights of nature being scaled-up to the level of the United Nations, with a particular focus how the case of Ecuador is used to support this process.

The United Nations marks the most formal international political space within which the rights of nature have been discussed, and where rights of nature activists and proponents have been able to bring and share their ideas to the international community. This chapter explores the dynamics of knowledge production around the scaling-up of the rights of nature within the United Nations. I place particular analytical focus onto the manner in which both the rights of nature and Ecuador are conceptualised, constructed, and utilised within these discourses. In order to do this, I analyse the set 108 documents which constitute the current corpus of publicly available work which has emerged from the United Nations Harmony with Nature project. These documents and statements have been produced by political representatives, experts, and rights of nature advocates taking part in the Harmony with Nature agenda between the years 2009 and 2017.

Ever since the initial phases of their constitutionalisation, the rights of nature in Ecuador have been bound within transnational and international networks of activism and socio-environmental justice (Akchurin, 2015; Tanasescu, 2013). These networks have consisted of NGOs, politicians, lawyers, activists, and local stakeholders (Tanasescu, 2013). The scaling-up of the rights of nature has, as I show within this chapter, resulted in an imbalanced distribution of power as regards the representation of activists from the global north and global south, particularly in the context of representatives from Ecuador. This is problematic given that, as I show, the Harmony with Nature project relies on the example of Ecuador in order to develop its agenda. Consequently, I argue that the rights of nature, as they manifest within the Harmony with Nature project, have increasingly become produced within a culturally-biased framework of environmentalism which misrepresents and appropriates the example of the rights of nature in Ecuador.

The United Nations Harmony with Nature project draws on the expertise of many elite, internationally-networked rights of nature activists, among other experts concerned with similar issues. Since 2009, then, the international rights of nature movement has made significant progress in becoming more visible within the United Nations, and the broader international political sphere (Espinosa, 2017, 2014). Importantly though, I show that considerable effort came from Ecuadorian and Bolivian political representatives in

fostering the initial potential for dialogue on the subject of rights for nature, or Mother Earth, at the United Nations.

However, I argue that the Harmony with Nature agenda has come to be heavily influenced and dominated by activists and environmentalist perspectives more characteristic of the global north. As Martinez-Alier (2014, 2002) notes in his work on “the environmentalism of the poor”, environmentalists in the global north are more likely to espouse biocentric and post-materialist perspectives within their personal forms of environmentalism. Post-materialist environmentalism is characterised by concerns for the intrinsic value of nature, protecting future generations, and moving toward a post-industrialist social condition (Doyle and Chaturvedi, 2010; Martinez-Alier, 2002). This is contrasted directly with environmental activists in the global south who, he argues, are more likely to frame their forms of environmentalism within the context of other contentious political issues such as political representation, territory, human rights, and the immediate security of one’s wellbeing, frequently in the context of the extraction of natural resources (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

Consequently, while the rights of nature are articulated as counter-hegemonic by the advocates who take part in these United Nations discourses, the hegemon(y)ies that they seek to counter do not necessarily align with those grassroots activists who operate in Ecuador (which I have explored in chapters 5 and 6). I posit that this is primarily due to the cultural-political differences which underpin these counter-hegemonic efforts, as well as the macro-level, and predominantly state-centric, discourses that are constructed by the rights of nature activists and advocates taking part in the United Nations Harmony with Nature project. Furthermore, and as I demonstrate later in this chapter, these international counter-hegemonic rights of nature discourses and forms of activism in fact come to reproduce local and national hegemonic structures (such as the integrity and legitimacy of the Ecuadorian state), thereby existing in direct contention with the counter-hegemonic positions held by many grassroots activists in Ecuador.

To illustrate this last point, I problematise how the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador is utilised within the Harmony with Nature project. I argue that the role of Ecuador as a place within which the rights of nature have been constitutionalised is of vital importance to the production of a narrative of success that is maintained by rights of nature advocates operating within the Harmony with Nature project. Consequently,

problems that exist vis-à-vis the Ecuadorian government's reliance on an economic model of extractivism (for example, the oppression of environmental activists) are frequently ignored or disregarded. Additionally, the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador is most commonly articulated in a fundamentally state-centric manner, and the ways in which these rights are deemed to be promoted, defended, and administrated are also focused on the state as the principle actor. As a result of this state-centric discursive production of the Ecuador case (intertwined with the aforementioned narrative of success), the realities of the rights of nature and grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador become reduced to a level of inaccuracy that mostly serves to benefit the international activists and political representatives that operate within these United Nations dialogues. Therefore, the scaling-up of the rights of nature becomes exploitative, as it appropriates the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador in order to promote the agenda of elite, internationally-networked activists within the rights of nature movement - an agenda that becomes increasingly disconnected from (and in some cases directly counter-productive to) the lived experiences of grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador.

7.1.2 Notes on the Data

The data I draw upon throughout this chapter was all made available by the United Nations through their Harmony with Nature portal (<http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/>). At the time of writing, 108 documents are available from the total of 7 dialogues (held annually since 2011), and the initial annual meetings within the General Assembly which occurred during 2009 and 2010 which provided the resolutions to move forward and establish the formal Harmony with Nature project and its associated dialogues. Therefore, all of the material considered here is from the period of 2009 to 2017.

The documents themselves are primarily reports, agendas, or presentations given within the Harmony with Nature dialogues, which occurred within the United Nations General Assembly, or personal/organisational contributions to the dialogues sent via email. The presentations and contributions were given by experts in the fields of environmental economics, ecological economics, environmental law, the social sciences (broadly speaking), as well as UN representatives from a variety of countries, the UN Secretary General, and a number of representatives from regional and international NGOs

concerned with the environment and socio-environmental justice. This set of material represents the current inputs and outputs of the Harmony with Nature agenda.

There are a number of different key types of documents which I refer to. These are:

- **Concept notes** – These are summaries of the expected outcomes, objectives, and proposed programmes of each annual dialogue. These are produced by the United Nations prior to the dialogues taking place.
- **Summaries** – These are brief summaries, produced by the United Nations, of the minutes taken during each annual dialogue, stating key agreements and outcomes reached.
- **Reports** – These are the formal reports written by the United Nations Secretary General, providing a more detailed summary of the key outcomes from each dialogue, with particular reference to what these outcomes represent for the Harmony with Nature project as a whole.
- **Speeches, contributions, and statements** – These are speeches and statements made during each annual Harmony with Nature dialogue. The documents provided are the ones which each speaker provided themselves, and therefore vary from key points the speaker wanted to cover, to fully written contributions. These were most often delivered in person, however in some cases (not for speeches, but for some statements) these were emailed in to the dialogues, instead of formally presented. When I make reference to a speech or statement, I provide the name of the person speaking or writing (if available) along with their institutional or organisational affiliation. In many cases, these are not official United Nations statements. However, if they are I specifically label the speaker with their official affiliation to the United Nations.

Each of the documents made available vary extensively in their length, some being a few thousand words long, and others being only a paragraph. Furthermore, due to the somewhat problematic nature of secondary, and in particular institutional, data (Clark, 2005), some files or documents may have been omitted from the publicly available body of material. For example, I found that not all years had concept notes available. Additionally, there may be documents omitted that I am unaware of. However, even with

this in mind, the material available provides a relatively clear image of the Harmony with Nature agenda and the dialogues which constitute its existence as a formal United Nations project.

I conducted a critical discourse analysis of these materials (refer back to chapter 4 for a thorough discussion of this process), where I consider the dynamics of ‘power through representation’ (Fairclough, 2013) which permeate the documents. Specifically, this involves paying attention to not only *what* is being said, but also to what is *not* being said, as well as *who* it is doing the speaking (Fairclough, 2013).

7.2 Bringing the Rights of Nature to the United Nations

On the 22nd April 2009 the United Nations declared that each year, this day shall henceforth be known as “International Mother Earth Day”. Formerly, the 22nd April was known simply as “Earth Day”, designated as such as the anniversary of the 22nd April 1970, when tens of thousands of people across the United States mobilised in order to promote ecological and environmental consciousness. However, on this day in 2009 it was not a North American environmentalist that was standing in front of the United Nations General Assembly, but the Bolivian president Evo Morales. At this time, Bolivia was in the process of enshrining rights for Mother Earth into their constitution, similarly to Ecuador, during a period of constitutional renewal (Bolivia’s law would come to be formalised in 2010). Morales and his U.N. delegation headed the push for the recognition of the 22nd April to be known as International Mother Earth Day, taking charge of the drafting of the resolution, securing the support of approximately fifty other member-states, and took responsibility for the presentation of said resolution to the General Assembly. Upon introducing Morales, the then president of the Assembly Mr. D’Escoto Brockmann stated:

“The proclamation of 22 April as International Mother Earth Day is an acknowledgement that the Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance throughout our lives. It also recognizes our responsibility, as called for in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humankind.

“Mother Earth” is a common expression for our planet in many cultures. It reflects

the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit.”

(Mr. D’Escoto Brockmann, President of the National Assembly, 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, 80th plenary meeting, Wednesday 22nd April 2009, New York)

When taking the floor, President Morales spoke not only of the significance of this day and its newly refined name, but also of rights, both of human beings and of Mother Earth. After drawing parallels between the social movement struggles that fought for the acknowledgement of universal human rights, and the ones that now fight for the ethical extension of rights to the environment, he stated:

“But 60 years ago [human rights] were recognized, and now we are convinced that, with today’s declaration of International Mother Earth Day, planet Earth, Mother Earth, has also won her rights. And this new century, the twenty-first, should be the century of Mother Earth’s rights. The decision we have taken today, under the leadership of the President of the General Assembly, is important. It is a singular, historic and unprecedented event for humankind, and those who have decided to support this great initiative will go down in history, the new history of awakening humankind.”

(President Evo Morales, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, 80th plenary meeting, Wednesday 22nd April 2009, New York)

However, one would be forgiven for assuming that this, the recognition of the significance of Mother Earth, was the agenda for the meeting. It was not. Rather, it was the “Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development”, which had been combined with another agenda item “Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind”. From the outset, then, the arrival of the rights of nature, or of Mother Earth, to the United Nations was bound within a framework of international sustainable development and economic rationalities. Framed as an “awakening of

mankind” by President Morales, and later as “changing the dominant mindset that has brought us so close to self-destruction” by the president of the Assembly, one cannot help but recognise the paradox of such symbolically counter-hegemonic discourse within the halls of one of the seats of capitalist international political hegemony itself.

As a result of this previous meeting, In December of the same year the United Nations General Assembly adopted the first resolution on “Harmony with Nature”. The resolution was a result of the General Assembly’s “concern over the documented environmental degradation and the negative impact on nature resulting from human activity”, and consequently would henceforth use the 22nd of April every year to promote and discuss the “Harmony with Nature” agenda among “Member States, the relevant organizations of the United Nations system, and international, regional and subregional organizations”. What has followed from this has been a series of interactive dialogues between member states, organisations including NGOs and IGOs, and experts in areas such as law, policy, environmental and ecological economics, as well as both the natural and social sciences.

Each interactive dialogue involves a set of presentations made by non-member state representatives (for example, NGOs) as well as statements by any member state representatives who wish to contribute to the discussion. During some of the interactive dialogues, a number of “stakeholders” have also been present, these have primarily consisted of members of the public who have come to contribute to the dialogues, but have most frequently been white, North Americans, most commonly coming from universities, either as staff or students. Thus far every dialogue has taken place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

While the rights of nature were not originally placed on the broader agenda explicitly, over the years they have come to feature more frequently as each meeting has occurred. This reached a significant moment in 2015, when the presence of rights of nature advocates at that year’s meeting was so great that it resulted in a discussion of these rights being placed as central to the agenda for the 2016 dialogue. The 2016 dialogue would also take a different format to the ones that were held before, with the General Assembly opting for a “virtual dialogue” as opposed to an “interactive” one, and also framing it as a “knowledge network”. The virtual nature of the interactions meant that participants could be involved via the internet, and that the dialogue itself would take

place over the course of two months. During this time experts (member-states' involvement was minimal for this year) could interact with one another online and produce knowledge based around the given agenda, specifically the topic of earth jurisprudence (of which the rights of nature were taken as a central theme).

While the format of the virtual dialogue enabled a wider variety of participants from a greater number of countries to become engaged in the exchange and production of knowledge, the diversity during the 2016 event was markedly skewed towards experts from the global north. Over half (100) of the total 189 participants were from Europe and North America, with a total of 36 coming from South America (see figure 8).

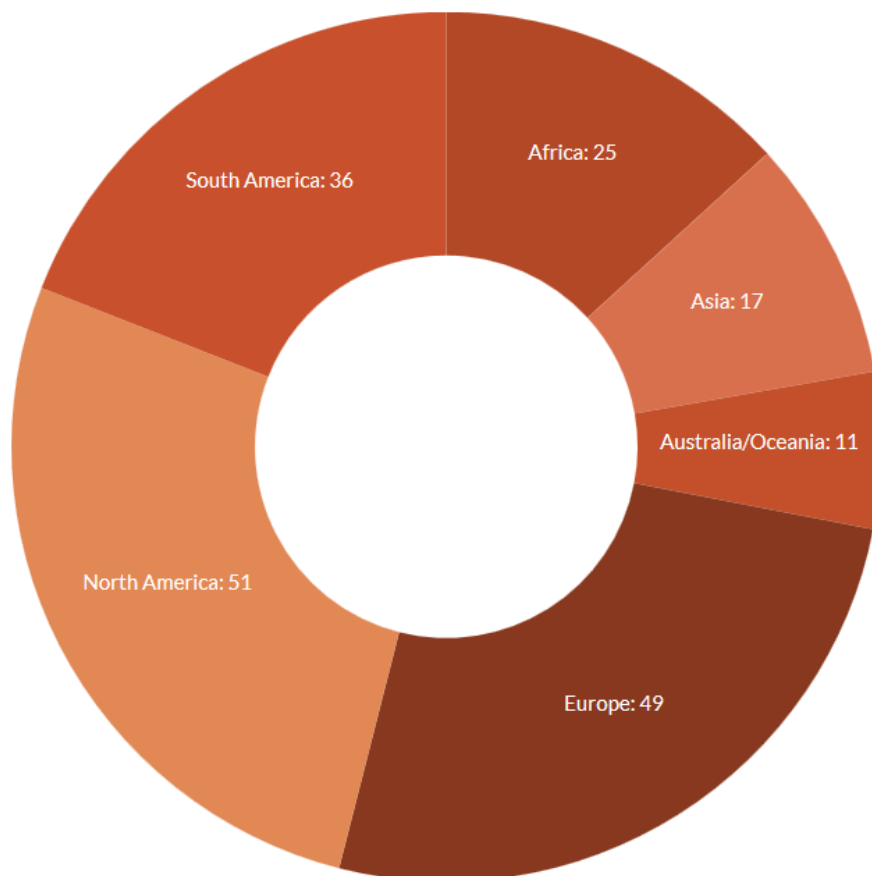


Fig. 8: Chart of participant numbers in the 2016 Virtual Dialogue according to continent (source: United Nations)

More curiously, however, out of the 36 experts from South America only 6 were from Ecuador, and zero were from Bolivia (see figure 9).

Argentina	Australia	Austria	Benin
3	11	1	1
Bhutan	Brazil	Canada	Chile
1	20	5	2
Colombia	Congo, The Democratic Republic of The	Ecuador	Ethiopia
4	1	6	3
France	Germany	India	Indonesia
4	3	3	1
Ireland	Italy	Japan	Kenya
1	4	1	1
Mali	Mexico	Netherlands	New Zealand
1	8	1	1
Nigeria	Philippines	Portugal	Slovenia
1	1	1	1
South Africa	South Korea	Spain	Sweden
14	7	2	5
Switzerland	Uganda	United Kingdom	United States
6	3	21	37
Vietnam	Zimbabwe		
1	2		

Fig. 9: Participant numbers in the 2016 Virtual Dialogue according to country (source: United Nations)

This issue was compounded in the 2017 dialogue (which took a more traditional format, similar to the pre-2016 exchanges) when not a single expert on the panel was from Ecuador or Bolivia.

This raises questions as to the diversity and distribution of power in the context of the production and sharing of knowledge during arguably one of the most prolific intellectual exchanges on the rights of nature in an international context. This is unsurprising, as the power relations which permeate the United Nations, its organisations and projects, bound within issues of political economic and cultural hegemony, are well documented (Cox, 1992; Puchala, 2005; Bailin, 1993). However, given the role of both Ecuador and (particularly) Bolivia in fostering the initial discussions around the rights of nature at the United Nations, this does seem even more problematic than one might already expect.

Furthermore, with Ecuador and Bolivia providing two of the flagship cases of the implementation of the rights of nature, they are frequently used by international rights of nature activists as examples of where such frameworks have been produced, often representing them loosely as success stories. Due to the skewed diversity of participants however, this results in a “speaking for” the peoples of Ecuador and Bolivia, with little to no local nuance presented. Within many of these United Nations dialogues then, not only are the rights of nature being produced and constructed in a politically and culturally biased environment, but the first countries to adopt such rights at the national level are

also represented accordingly. Therefore, the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador becomes reduced to a supporting statement in a wider narrative that is dominated by individuals and groups that operate and exist beyond the country's borders. Consequently, local complexities and inconvenient truths about the rights of nature in Ecuador are brushed over or ignored.

For this reason, whilst the notion of rights for nature is frequently framed as counter-hegemonic (as I explore further in this chapter), the hegemony that is being challenged is identified by a specific set of individuals within the international rights of nature movement, which may not align with the grassroots rights of nature proponents operating within, for example, Ecuador. Instead, the scaling-up of the rights of nature results in the experiences that the case of Ecuador can offer (as I have explored in chapters 5 and 6) being subsumed and assimilated into an elite, globally-minded discourse. I posit that this discourse is representative of a cultural form of environmentalism more common in the global north, where post-materialist values remain prevalent.

7.2.1 The United Nations' (sustainable) development agenda

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the Harmony with Nature project at the United Nations was born out of a wider framework of logic around sustainable development. "Sustainability", and in the same sense "sustainable development", are highly politicised terms and narratives that have, since their popularisation within the international political lexicon, provided an arena for heated academic debate (Asara et al., 2015; Frank, 2017; Jabareen, 2008; Kothari et al., 2014; Martínez-Alier, 1995; Wanner, 2015). The questions of "sustainability/development of what, how, and for whom?" have guided academic inquiry on the topic from across the spectrum of the social sciences (for a summary of some critical theoretical engagements with the concept of sustainability see Frank, 2017). However, before one considers the United Nations' sustainable development agenda, it is necessary to give a brief history of how the concept of "development" has functioned within the United Nations, and how over time the emphasis shifted onto "sustainable" development.

Prior to the UN's focus on sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there was "development" and the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). Post-World War II, the concept of “development” came to permeate international political discourses and international relations (Gibson-Graham, 2004; Kohl and Farthing, 2006; Ilcan and Philips, 2010; McKeon, 2013). A myriad of organisations emerged around the political goal of development, espousing a wide range of focuses, but particularly on the subjects of poverty and human rights. The UN was one of the key actors in this proliferation, with its organisations, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) operating as powerful international bodies that functioned beyond national borders (Ilcan and Phillips, 2010). Consequently, United Nations has, since its inception (along with the Bretton Woods institutions: the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), existed as an international organisation that has either endorsed or informed the conventional and hegemonic logic(s) of development; that is to say what development “is” at any given moment in time. The problematic power dynamics that emerged as a result of this have been well studied, particularly in the sense of reinforcing the capitalist ideological power of Europe and the United States (for some examples see: Protopsaltis, 2017; Puchala, 2005; Telleria, 2017; Wilson, 2014).

Traditionally, the UN has consistently regarded “development” as constituted by both economic growth and social development, although the changing discourses of their approaches to the subject reveals that each of these have not always been given the same level of prioritisation in any given historical era (Protopsaltis, 2017). However, from the modernisation paradigm to the human development paradigm, the UN has always maintained a technical approach to development, operationalising input/output models, as well as favouring a monolithic and universal conceptualisation of what development “is”, even though this has tended to change and evolve contradictorily over time (Protopsaltis, 2017).

In the late 80s and early 90s, international development became closely linked with the free-market project (itself synonymous with the terms “neoliberal” and “globalisation”) as a result of the Washington Consensus (Peck, 2011). This saw the *modus operandi* of development become one of privatisation, deregulation, and the opening up of markets to the globe, in the pursuit of economic and social development. Coinciding with the end of the Cold War, this further entrenched the hegemony of the

Western capitalist ideological system, and the structural marketisation that accompanied it.

In the early 2000s the UN moved to further embrace the Washington Consensus by cooperating with the World Bank, opting for privatisation strategies in development, condoning U.S. militarism, and supporting trade agreements that disadvantaged the poor, women, workers, and the environment (Bond, 2006). However, it was at this time that the organisation also sponsored the writing of the Millennium Development Goals - a set of 8 broad and ambitious goals that sought to highlight and formulate a framework through which development could be quantified, measured, and seen. While these goals have been critiqued for merely evolving the character of the neoliberal capitalist development ideology (Bond, 2006; Muzio, 2008; Telleria, 2017; Wilson, 2014), they signified (albeit only superficially) the end of an era when the logic of free-markets was seen as the absolute truth that guided development policy, and instead favouring a greater incorporation of social processes and issues (Protopsaltis, 2017).

In September 2015, and in the wake of the perceived lacklustre progress and execution of the MDGs (Kumi et al., 2014; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016) the UN launched its Sustainable Development Goals – a set of 17 goals and 169 targets that differed from the MDGs, but also absorbed and expanded on them. For example, whereas the MDGs focused primarily on north to south aid arrangements, many of the SDGs are just as applicable in the global north as they are in the global south (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). Furthermore the SDGs focus on the crucial terms “sustainable” and “sustainability”, particularly in the spheres of the social, the economy, and the environment; representing an informed continuation of the late 1980s conceptualisations of “sustainable development” (Asara et al., 2015). While attempting to pinpoint exactly what these words signify has been the focus of much academic debate even prior to the SDGs (see for example: Asara et al., 2015; Frank, 2017; Jabareen, 2008; Kothari et al., 2014; Martínez-Alier, 1995; Wanner, 2015), one of the crucial aims of these goals was to raise awareness of (and political impetus to challenge) the growing dangers of climate change and instability arising from environmental issues (Sachs, 2012).

While the MDGs were criticised for functioning in a manner which served a wider neoliberal agenda, so too have the SDGs been scrutinised and critiqued (see: Escobar, 2015; Fletcher and Rammelt, 2017; Kumi et al., 2014). The neoliberalisation of

sustainability and sustainable development, at least in the environmental and ecological use of the term, is most often identified by the use of economic frameworks of logic and understanding in order to address “green” or environmental issues (Wanner, 2015). In this sense, the commodification and economisation of the environment is often maintained and reproduced within conventional discourses and dialogues on “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. Furthermore, Cartesian dualisms of nature-society relations are rarely questioned or addressed, leading to a reproduction of the false binary between humans and the world around them (which subsequently supports and justifies this economisation and commodification). Academic scholarship has sought to address these problems by challenging the epistemological underpinnings of conventional, Western philosophical assumptions on nature-society relations (Agrawal, 2005; Escobar, 1998; Forsyth, 2008), as well as arguing for the decommodification of nature (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Pelling et al., 2012; Prudham, 2013).

It is within the SDGs that the UN’s Harmony with Nature project has found a metaphorical home, and is therefore embedded. Given the trajectory and conceptual issues of the UN (sustainable) development agenda that I have (albeit only briefly) highlighted here, it is clear to see that a synthesis between “harmony with nature” and “development”, under the guise of sustainability or not, will be problematic. For example, Escobar (2015) states:

“World-wide, the economic globalized civilization has taken on a tremendous force, seemingly relegating critical debates over growth and ‘development’ to the back burner; internationally, these debates are domesticated within the discourses of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 ‘sustainable development goals’. However, global movements continue to keep radical conversations alive, connecting development debates to questions of epistemic decolonization, social and environmental justice, the defense of cultural difference, and transition to postcapitalist, postgrowth, and non-anthropocentric societies. For most of these movements, it is clear that conventional development, in any of its forms—including ‘sustainable’—is no longer an option.”

(Escobar, 2015 pp. 460)

However, as this chapter seeks to show, much of the rhetoric emerging from the Harmony with Nature dialogues maintains a radical perspective, seeking to challenge the hegemonic political economic and ideological order, as well as advocating for many of the concepts that Escobar himself proposes here. The questions remain whether or not it can indeed separate itself from this very order, and to what extent it reproduces or evolves existing power relations and dynamics.

7.3 Creating a new paradigm?

“If we are to avoid catastrophe, current world conditions leave no doubt that a major change is required in the way that human beings relate to the three pillars of sustainable development: environmental, social and economic. We have chosen to be defined in terms of things, and it is precisely things which are holding us back from reaching our full potential, from realizing our interrelatedness with nature, from advancing towards sustainable development and, ultimately, from living a life in harmony with nature.”

(2011 Harmony with Nature Report of the Secretary-General, article 72)

“The time has come to realize that the damage inflicted by unsustainable economic activity as well as by violence and conflict on our fellow humans including poverty and other deep social inequalities, and to the Earth are inextricably linked and cannot be overcome independently of each other. It is therefore essential to go beyond the anthropocentric vision that has led us to live in a state of crisis in all the three dimensions of sustainable development environmental, social and economic. It is necessary to start thinking and designing a world where human and natural interests are balanced by greater respect for the Earth. In this regard, one of the initial tasks must lie in the decommodification of Nature. Economic objectives must take into account ecosystems needs without overlooking the respect for human dignity through actions that sustainably ensure well-being in people’s lives.”

(Summary of the 2015 UN Harmony with Nature Dialogue)

The notion that we must establish a “new paradigm” is often referred to within the Harmony with Nature dialogues. Most commonly, the current paradigm (and its problems that are deemed to be in need of change) is identified as being dictated by a pervasive anthropocentrism which exists within global society. The Harmony with Nature agenda seeks to address this by advocating and exploring ethics and approaches to social organisation which place the intrinsic value of non-human nature as paramount, thereby leading humanity away from unsustainable development, and towards a more sustainable form of development. Therefore, I believe it is reasonable to assert that these dialogues, and those who take part in them, perceive themselves as engaging in a progressive, radical, and fundamentally counter-hegemonic praxis through which a new world order can emerge.

The task of the Harmony with Nature project has been to explore the production of such a counter-hegemonic ideological formation. Over time this counter-hegemonic paradigm has become referred to as the “Harmony with Nature paradigm” within the dialogues, and that:

“Under this new paradigm, nature is recognized as an equal partner with humankind, as well as a crucial ally. In other words, being in harmony with nature means being both pro-planet and pro-people, and orienting the development of our societies towards sustaining nature and by so doing, we sustain ourselves. Such a philosophy can contribute to the elaboration of the post 2015 development agenda, which seeks to eliminate extreme global poverty and forge a single developmental pathway that is truly sustainable. Many of the issues currently under consideration in the emerging framework reflect the need to restore a harmonious relation between Earth and its inhabitants. In other words, the time has come for us to truly “talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk.” And whether we talk about agriculture, efficient use of natural resources, the protection of our forests and oceans or the development of sustainable modes of production and consumption, we need to seek ways to reconcile the needs of people with the needs and capacities of our planet. We as a human family must now learn to respect the planetary boundaries, and work towards forging a new and healthier relationship that will allow both to thrive.”

(2014 opening statement by Mr. John Ashe, President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly)

Furthermore:

“Over the years, General Assembly resolutions have increasingly recognized the importance of giving due consideration to living in Harmony with Nature. On 24 September 2015, the General Assembly, at its seventieth session, adopted resolution 70/1, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which, under Sustainable Development Goal 12, target 12.8 states that Member States should ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness needed for sustainable development and lifestyles in Harmony with Nature.”

(Concept note for the 2016 Harmony with Nature Dialogue)

The issue, however, is the tendency to associate and embed this new paradigm within the notion of “development”; and while the hegemonic conceptualisation of development is indeed questioned, the fundamental ideology of the need to develop remains intact. Given that the Harmony with Nature project is embedded within discussions and frameworks of sustainable development, this is unsurprising, however it remains highly problematic. Additionally, the compatibility between harmony with nature and the logic of development is not questioned, but is instead taken as truth *a priori*. Consequently, the meaning of “harmony with nature” becomes understood within pre-existing frameworks of knowledge, for example the “eradication of poverty”, where poverty is still understood by economic methods of evaluation; or the “efficient use of natural resources”, where the exploitation of resources is assumed to be acceptable as long as it is “efficient”. The result of this is a limited intellectual and conceptual space within which truly radical and counter-hegemonic praxis may develop.

Furthermore, as illustrated earlier in this chapter, the UN development agenda has consistently maintained a universalist ethos when considering philosophies of, and approaches to, development. The same can be seen here in the excerpt from Mr. John Ashe’s opening statement made to the 2014 Harmony with Nature Dialogue. The

assertion that the post 2015 development agenda must seek to “*forge a single developmental pathway that is truly sustainable*” demonstrates that, no matter the perceived embracing of interculturality, difference from the norm (as authorised by elite institutions such as the UN) will not be condoned. Evidently, then, the one-size-fits-all mentality of the UN’s development agenda is not questioned, and this top-down approach persists through the harmony with nature project, as it has done throughout the UN’s history (for an in-depth account of this historic tendency see: Protopsaltis, 2017).

What is evident, then, is that these UN dialogues and their contributors attempt to formulate a counter-hegemonic discourse of international development, but in so doing engage with contentious power relations that exist around the reproduction of certain received wisdoms, such as universalism and the necessity to develop. What I shall now draw attention to is the way in which the rights of nature, and the specific case of the rights of nature in Ecuador are embedded and utilised within this process.

My intention with the rest of this chapter is to explore the following questions: what are the characteristics of this counter-hegemony? Who asserts discursive and cultural power over these characteristics? And, how are the rights of nature (with particular attention being paid to the role of Ecuador) used to inform the narratives that exist around this?

7.4 From Bolivia to Rio and beyond

In order to discuss the emergence of the rights of nature within the United Nations Harmony with Nature dialogues, it is necessary to first highlight another crucial international advocacy process which occurred around these rights in 2010. The process to which I refer is the development of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (UDRME) during the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (WPCCCRME) (to see this document please refer to appendix 3).

It is important to first introduce this document, as it represents not only another significant output of international activism around the rights of nature, but also due to the fact that it is mentioned frequently within the United Nations Harmony with Nature dialogues when delegates spoke of incorporating, developing, and furthering the rights of nature. However, as the primary focus of this chapter is the United Nations Harmony with Nature Dialogues, I can only speak briefly to the intricacies, details, and complexities of

the UDRME, and likewise the WPCCCRME. For a more detailed account and critique of the UDRME and the WPCCCRME, see Espinosa (2014) for a critique of both; Lindisfarne (2010) for a brief detailing of the WPCCCRME; and Lenferna (2012) for a critique of the UDRME. I do, however, draw and build upon their work here, especially that of Espinosa (2014), in order to explore the problematic nature of the UN Harmony with Nature Dialogues in the context of the internationalisation of the rights of nature. As I show, many of the issues which they have illustrated regarding the UDRME are reproduced in the Harmony with Nature Dialogues I analysing in this chapter.

The UDRME was drafted in 2010 during the WPCCCRME, which took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and was convened by Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales. The WPCCCRME was attended by approximately 35,000 people, of which roughly 25,000 were Bolivians, many of them indigenous (Lindisfarne, 2010). This resulted in the WPCCCRME, and consequently the UDRME, being adorned with a label as fundamentally "indigenous", albeit in a generalising and mono-cultural character (Espinosa, 2014) – a tactic that the Bolivian state has utilised frequently since 2006, especially in the context of its engagement with the UN (Zimmerer, 2013). However, this large and heterogenous group included a multitude of social movement actors and organisations, including environmentalists, rights activists, and a wide variety of indigenous groups (Espinosa, 2014). One of the outcomes of this conference was the drafting of the UDRME, which was instigated, and guided by, many of the key organisations and actors which drive the international rights of nature movement (these include individuals and organisations from Australia, Bolivia, Ecuador, India, Italy, Romania, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States) (Espinosa, 2014), many of which have now been taking part in the United Nations Harmony with Nature Dialogues.

In 2012, proponents of the UDRME travelled to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and advocated for incorporating the Declaration into the United Nations dialogues on sustainable development. They were successful (to an extent), as the language of rights for nature was included in the outcome document of Rio+20 entitled *The Future We Want* (United Nations, 2012). In the context of this chapter, this is significant as some of the material I refer to henceforth makes specific reference both to the UDRME (particularly in the sense of *fully* incorporating it into the

United Nations sustainable development agenda), as well as the Rio+20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*.

As Espinosa (2014) argues, while advocates of the UDRME claimed their position to be one of biocentrism, the UDRME and its proponents struggled to move beyond the key motivational factor behind the document being the preservation of human life (albeit with an acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of non-human nature). Despite this, it is appropriate to regard the UDRME as espousing a weak-anthropocentrism (discussed in greater depth in the next section) which aligns with post-materialist values through the primary concern with the intrinsic value of nature and the protection of future generations. As Espinosa (2014) notes, these values were not wholly representative of the delegates who had met in Bolivia, and represented a fragmentation within the perceptions on what the document should signify. I now go on to discuss how these issues persist throughout the United Nations Harmony with Nature project.

7.5 The Cultural Politics of the Harmony with Nature Dialogues

“The concept of harmony with nature incorporates ideas of non-anthropocentric approaches to development i.e, approaches that consider the intrinsic value in every part of the environment.”

(Concept Note for the 2014 Harmony with Nature Dialogue, pp. 1)

Within the United Nations discussions on harmony with nature, the issue of re-conceptualising nature-society relations is mentioned frequently. In fact, from 2014 the idea that we must fundamentally re-conceptualise our relationship with the wider web of life (specifically, moving away from anthropocentric philosophies and ethics towards more biocentric ones) was placed as a central aim of the entire Harmony with Nature project - this is evident within the excerpt from the 2014 concept note quoted above, and is repeatedly reflected in the Harmony with Nature dialogues that took place from 2014 onwards. I here show how this re-conceptualisation of nature-society relations, as a fundamental part of a desired “paradigm shift”, is primarily guided and contextualised by claims of non-anthropocentric ethics. In this sense, a hegemonic paradigm (anthropocentrism) is identified by those taking part in the dialogues and is regarded as

something that must not just be altered slightly, but as something that is in need of being replaced by its binary opposite (anthropocentrism → non-anthropocentrism). However, I simultaneously illustrate how these claims remain problematic, in terms of the limits to their “non-anthropocentric” character. Additionally, I discuss how these characteristics of the Harmony with Nature dialogues subsequently constitute a post-materialist value framework within which the rights of nature come to be articulated, produced, and represented.

While the 2014 Harmony with Nature Dialogue began the trend within the dialogues to move towards non-anthropocentrism in a formal capacity (i.e. by being mentioned in the documents produced by the UN itself, such as the concept note quoted above), it gradually became more prominent as the non-anthropocentric agenda was elaborated upon by individual contributors to the dialogues.

For example:

“Nature around us is whole and interconnected. Though human beings are part of nature, we do not yet fathom her depths, and our actions often do not embody her wisdom. A fundamental shift in our way of viewing the world is necessary if we would contribute to nature's unity rather than dissolution. The Harmony with Nature initiative of the United Nations General Assembly provides a welcome forum for encouraging a new paradigm that embraces nature’s wisdom in shaping a healthy future for all.”

(Statement from the Nature Institute of Ghent, contribution to the 2015 Dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

“And, more generally, what kind of Anthropocene – or maybe Anthropocene 2.0 – are we creating for the coming generations? Will it be a Human Anthropocene, one in which individually egocentric and collectively anthropocentric desires continue to dominate our behavior, showing our collective willingness to accept the suffering of fellow humans, as well as countless other life forms, in order to feed our insatiable desires for more and more? Or will it be a Humane Anthropocene, a compassionate and non-anthropocentric one in which we

someday succeed in ascending to our potential to create a truly just and peaceful world”

(Mark Lawrence, Scientific Director, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, contribution to the 2015 Dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

“Earth law by definition, must be non-anthropocentric. We have placed ourselves at the top of ‘the hierarchy’! We have lived by very hierarchical principles that seek to control and dominate the natural world. We need to rethink the philosophical base, and ethical foundation as we attempt to solve the sustainability challenge of our time.”

(Laura Ballentyne-Brodie, Environmental Lawyer, contribution to the 2016 Virtual Dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

“The requisite ecocentric philosophy aligns with the deep sustainability of co-evolving environments, where, biodiversity and “Earth justice” take priority over competitiveness and individual profit.”

(Article 65 of the Expert Summary of the 2017 Harmony with Nature Dialogue)

The 2016 virtual dialogue (the largest of the dialogues, with participant numbers listed in figures 8 and 9) was particularly influential in driving this narrative, where the notion of “earth-jurisprudence” (earth-centred law) came to the fore, as the non-anthropocentric theme became more specific regarding its implementation.

This was then compounded in 2017 when the UN stated in the concept note for the same year that:

“The Dialogue will examine the key characteristics of, and implementation strategies for, an Earth-centred paradigm. It will advance the importance of the inclusion and application of Earth jurisprudence principles in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and all 17 Sustainable

Development Goals. Panellists will draw from the recommendations of the experts' report from the 2016 virtual dialogue, showcase how Earth jurisprudence is currently being applied across different disciplines, and offer new Earth jurisprudence implementation strategies consistent with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Dialogue will explore how Earth-centred governance policies could ensure sustainable development patterns consistent with Earth jurisprudence principles.”

(From the Concept Note for the 2017 Dialogue on Harmony with Nature, page 2)

What is evident here, is that the cultural politics of the Harmony with Nature project has, over time, become fundamentally concerned with an agenda of non-anthropocentrism, phrased in numerous ways such as “biocentric”, “ecocentric”, or “earth-centred”. While, one could argue, there are subtle differences between what these terms mean (see for example: Barrett and Grizzle, 1998; Burns et al., 2011), I feel it is reasonable to assert that, in this context that they are being used to communicate fundamentally similar ideas (non-anthropocentrism). While these ideas have been present from the early stages of the Harmony with Nature project, they have, as I have shown, become more prominent as the project matured and began to find specific ideological focus.

However, I feel that it is important to assert that this eco-philosophical underpinning of the Harmony with Nature agenda is not, in fact, biocentric, but is instead more representative of a “weak anthropocentrism”. Weak anthropocentrism is not wholly dissimilar to biocentrism (and ecocentrism), in the sense that it still acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature, and can still be regarded as a fundamental re-ordering of the socio-environmental status-quo. However, it remains a form of anthropocentrism due to the fact that the preservation and defense of the environment is still conducted with the subsequent preservation of humanity as the motivating factor (Barrett and Grizzle, 1998). Within the Harmony with Nature dialogues, agenda, and proposed paradigm, this remains as the case. It is evident within these quotes that, while they claim to espouse non-anthropocentric values, the fundamental concern remains the preservation, and general improvement, of human life. In this sense, the eco-philosophical character of the

Harmony with Nature Dialogues is one that is more accurately described as “weak-anthropocentrism”, as opposed to non-anthropocentrism.

The reason that it is important to make the distinction between weak-anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism is because it has a direct impact on the manner in which this “new paradigm” (and within it, the rights of nature) manifests and can be implemented. The fact that these discourses and narratives remain (at the most fundamental level) anthropocentric, creates the space for the institution-centric and state-centric character which is apparent throughout these dialogues (as I explore in more detail later in this chapter, specifically in the case of Ecuador). From what I have demonstrated thus far, this emerges through the binding of the United Nations discussions on harmony with nature within broader narratives of UN-sponsored sustainable development, and in particular the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which themselves are administered via governments and inter/supranational institutions such as the United Nations.

Therefore, while the Harmony with Nature Dialogues engage with counter-hegemonic themes to a certain extent (while remaining anthropocentric, “weak anthropocentrism” still moves very much in counter to the hard anthropocentrism of the status-quo via a fundamental appreciation for the intrinsic value of non-human nature), they simultaneously function to reproduce the hegemony of key institutions, such as states and global institutional actors.

Furthermore, what these eco-philosophical underpinnings represent is a cultural politics of post-materialism (for a deeper discussion of post-materialism refer back to chapter 3); that is to say, fundamentally concerned with the intrinsic value of nature, the preservation of future generations, and moving towards a post-industrialist condition (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 2013; Doyle and Chaturvedi, 2010). Indeed, a post-materialist cultural politics not only permeates the Harmony with Nature dialogues, but in fact functions as the fundamental driving-force within the project, which establishes the broader eco-political and cultural framework within which ideas are produced, conveyed, and operationalised. This is significant given that, as I argue throughout this thesis, it is cultural political factors such as these which produce divergences in the forms of environmentalism and activism between different actors and organisations seeking to promote and defend the rights of nature in varying scalar contexts and places.

This reinforces my claim that the rights of nature as they are articulated in the Harmony with Nature project, are being used to inform, construct, and drive a post-material-environmentalist, approach to development, which is predicated on “biocentric” (or, more accurately, weak-anthropocentric) values, guided by activists and experts predominantly from the global north. Therefore, the rights of nature become articulated and constructed within a culturally-biased framework of knowledge, that is to say, one that is fundamentally driven by a form of environmentalism that is more common in the global north than in the global south; this is unsurprising when we refer back to figures 8 and 9 earlier in this chapter. I contrast this with the grassroots manifestations and conceptualisations of the rights of nature in Ecuador (as explored in chapters 5 and 6), which is often more concerned with political representation, territory, and security, in the context of state-society-extractivism nexus.

Evidently, then, the determination to promote a “biocentric” (or, as established, weak-anthropocentric) agenda, as well as a narrative of post-industrialism, within the Harmony with Nature dialogues is, more akin to environmentalism(s) of the global north; that is to say, post-materialist in character. With this in mind, it is important to consider what the implications of this are for the manifestation of the rights of nature in this context, and also how certain narratives are produced and utilised within this international form of rights of nature advocacy. I develop a discussion of this in the next section of this chapter.

7.6 The Rights of Nature: The answer humanity needs?

“We can’t protect the earth by tweaking the existing laws - we need fundamental and systemic transformation. And this is what rights of nature brings.”

(Mumta Ito, Rights of Nature Europe, contribution to the 2015 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

Now that I have identified and established the characteristics of the counter-hegemonic discourse that is being formulated by the Harmony with Nature Dialogues, I here explore the manner in which the rights of nature are utilised in order to inform this broader narrative. I demonstrate how the rights of nature have come to play a crucial role

in the UN Harmony with Nature project, and function as a vital ingredient to the counter-hegemonic framework that is being produced. As we shall see, the rights of nature come to be articulated as the antithesis of the current hegemonic system and are represented as the cornerstone of the systemic change that is being sought.

Within these UN Dialogues, rights of nature advocates operating within the Harmony with Nature project often choose to portray the rights of nature as a form of “silver bullet” in the context of sustainable development and the furthering of human life.

For example:

“A second proposal is to recognise the duty of care for Nature and for each other as central to ethical economics and ethical ownership of land and environment. This can be given practical effect through recognising and enforcing rights for Nature just as we recognise and enforce human rights. In doing so the aim can be to build sustainable and flourishing economies offering progress with prosperity to all peoples without exploitation or misuse of Nature herself.”

(Ian Mason, Principal, School of Economic Science, contribution to the 2013 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“Our global social, economic, and legal systems are based on the premise that nature is property to be bought, sold, and consumed. Breaking out of the human---centered limitations of current legal systems to recognize, respect and enforce Rights of Nature is one of the most transformative and highly leveraged actions that humanity can take today to create a sustainable future for all.”

(Statement made by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, collective of Rights of Nature NGOs, to the 2013 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“It is urgent to establish a different structure of law, which acknowledges Nature as a living being, including Nature in the legal system as a rights bearing entity. A legal system that

supports an economic model that works in harmony with nature.
Rights of nature is the only viable solution for a sustainable future
for all of life.”

(Statement made by Rights of Mother Earth, environmental NGO, to the 2015 Harmony
with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“Humanity should rethink its relationship with nature, recognize the inherent
rights of nature, discontinue the appropriation and exploitation logic and substitute
it with a logic of respect, harmony and balance. This implies, inter alia, the need
to substitute short-term approaches to human development with medium-long
term roadmaps, goals and indicators.”

(Prof. Massimiliano Montini, Associate Professor of European Law,
University of Siena, contribution to the 2016 Harmony with Nature Virtual
Dialogue)

“So we are facing the challenge of reconciling the ancestral perception with the
development based on the Technologies. It seems to be a contradiction. But it
isn't. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by the comprehension that the
Rights of Mother Earth and the Harmony with Nature constitute a precondition for
the sustainable development. There is no Life for Humankind without the Mother
Earth. There is no sustainable development without Harmony with Nature.”

(Prof. Germana De Oliveira Moraes, Professor of Constitutional Law in the
Federal University of Ceará and Federal Judge in Ceará, Brazil, contribution to the
2017 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

Evident within these quotes, we can see this “silver bullet” mentality in operation.
The notion that the rights of nature are deemed to be “*the most transformative*” and “*only
viable*” solution to safeguard the future for everybody is essentialising, universalising, as
well as neglectful of more complex systemic issues (for example, inequality). This

“silver bullet” mentality is problematic as it over-simplifies the conceptual framework of the rights of nature; that is to say, it takes them as axiomatically beneficial for answering humanity’s many social crises, regardless of the form these rights take, what contextual knowledges guide them, and whom they are administered by. Furthermore, the “silver bullet” that the rights of nature are deemed to provide is, as demonstrated throughout these quotes, directly associated with a logic of sustainability and development. This logic and the components of sustainability and development are articulated in a monolithic sense, which embeds the rights of nature in a manner which is accordingly monolithic as well. By this I mean a fundamentally homogenous and universalist format which is seemingly unquestioned or critically assessed, and that the connection between the necessity of rights for nature, and a monolithic “sustainability”, produces the rights of nature as something which are likewise monolithic. We can see in particular that both “sustainability” and the rights of nature are conceptualised as social phenomena which are necessary for “all” (particularly all human beings), and therefore align with the universalist ethos that is characteristic of the UN and the dominant development agenda put forward by such institutions. Consequently, the contextualities of local politics, struggles, cultures and systems become lost in discussions predicated on universalism and homogeneity. As I have consistently shown throughout this thesis, there are many different conceptualisations of, and subjectivities around, what the rights of nature are. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, the rights of nature are embedded in processes of contestation and negotiation, which are highly dependent on contexts of place and cultural politics. What this essentialisation and universalisation ignores is the existence of this character within the rights of nature as a fundamentally political phenomenon.

I now discuss how this narrative, particularly in the context of its weak-anthropocentrism and focus on development, enables the conceptual and material space for a fundamentally state-centric (and to a lesser extent institution-centric) manifestation of the rights of nature within the Harmony with Nature project.

7.7 State and Institution-Centrism regarding the implementation of the rights of nature

Thus far, what I have established is that the Harmony with Nature project (and those who take part in its dialogues) is attempting to promote a philosophy of

development which is informed and guided by post-materialist, and weak-anthropocentric (claimed as biocentric), ethical values and cultural politics. Given the fact that, as established earlier in this chapter, the weak-anthropocentric position means that fundamentally, the Harmony with Nature dialogues are driven by the preservation of human life. When combined with the desire to establish a new approach to international development, this leads to a centrally-organised and institution-centric view of administration and application, as regards the rights of nature. Consequently, these rights are frequently advocated to be promoted and defended within the context of states and state-centric institutions (i.e. the United Nations). Therefore, within the Harmony with Nature Dialogues, the state and state-centric institutions remain the primary actors and administrators of the rights of nature, thereby endorsing a top-down approach to the implementation of these rights. This is articulated in the Harmony with Nature Dialogues through claims such as the proposed necessity for the United Nations to adopt the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (UDRME), as well as for member states and national governments to implement these laws in their countries. For example:

“We, the Alliance, recommend the General Assembly begin the formal discussion for the adoption of a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth by the United Nations.”

(Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, written contribution to the 2014 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“[...] this Harmony with Nature initiative has the potential to lead the UN to truly transformative leadership, in leading the expansion of rights to Mother Earth. Right to be whole, healthy, for other species to exist, give their gifts...in this spirit I offer support for the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.”

(Robin Kimmerer, Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology, State University of New York, speech given to the 2015 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“[I recommend the] Adoption of the Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth by the member states of the United Nations as the central document of a cohesive Earthcentered legal framework and inspiring States to promote

changes on their legal structures in order to prioritize the Earth Jurisprudence approach.”

(Ricardo Sayeg, Associate Professor of Economic Law, Catholic University of São Paulo, written contribution to the 2016 Harmony with Nature Virtual Dialogue)

“Inclusion and recognition of the rights of Nature in international, regional, constitutions (for example in Ecuador), and local and national law is vital, including in municipal ordinances (for example in the United States of America), constitutions (for example in Ecuador), and national laws (for example in the Plurinational State of Bolivia), including the civil society call for the international adoption of a universal declaration of the rights of Mother Earth. In this regard, it should be noted that Ecuador amended its constitution in 2008 to recognize the rights of Nature in light of the perceived need to better protect Nature, or Pachamama, a term that embodies not only the physical aspects of the natural world but also its spiritual aspects, which require deeper respect than they have been given in law.”

(Article 45, expert summary report of the 2016 Harmony with Nature Virtual Dialogue)

These assertions are repeated extensively throughout the Harmony with Nature dialogues, and establish a firmly state-centric and institution-centric narrative surrounding the rights of nature, and their implementation. Interestingly, this dominant state and institution-centric narrative emerged around the same time that the rights of nature began to feature heavily within the dialogues and became the central issue around which the Harmony with Nature project was focused (around the year 2014). This was driven primarily by references being made to the UDRME, as we can see from the selection of quotes included above, which had been included in the Rio+20 document entitled “The Future We Want”, just two years prior.

This top-down approach instils states and the international institutions which support them with the fundamental power to implement and administrate the rights of nature. This has direct implications for the manner in which the rights of nature affect and

reproduce state-society relations, with the former remaining as the central figure in regulating the latter. As I explored in chapter 3, this is problematic in the context of Ecuador, as the state has proved to be a controversial entity when one considers the implementation and administration of the rights of nature there.

Fundamentally, then, we can see that the rights of nature are deemed to be promoted and defended by states and state-centric institutions, in a universally-applicable manner (for example, by nation states and the UN adopting the UDRME). This is driven by a desire among the participants of the Harmony with Nature dialogues to formulate and establish a post-materialist and “biocentric” (weak-anthropocentric) approach to international development. I have explored in chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis how the rights of nature manifest at the grassroots level in Ecuador. I have illustrated the nuances, complexities, and controversies that exist when one considers the necessarily local context. In the final part of this chapter I explore how the case of Ecuador is utilised within the Harmony with Nature dialogues and consider the extent to which the experiences of local, grassroots rights of nature activists are represented within the dominant narrative that shapes the manifestation of these rights within the Harmony with Nature project.

7.8 How is the Case of Ecuador Used in the Harmony with Nature Project?

Within the Harmony with Nature project and dialogues, there is a distinct tendency to represent Ecuador as a positive example of where the rights of nature have been implemented. Owing largely to the fact that they exist at the constitutional level, and that Ecuador was one of the first countries to inscribe them into the country’s highest legal document, there is a sense that somehow the experiential capital that Ecuador offers is of great value. For example:

“These precedents join those such as the Ecuadorian Constitution and Bolivian Law of the Rights of Mother Earth, and international policies such as the World Wilderness Congress 2013 Resolutions 11 and 12 and IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 Promise of Sydney in building a body of jurisprudence which recognises the laws of the Earth.”

(Gaia Institute, contribution to the 2015 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

“Laws are being passed at the local (e.g., Santa Monica, CA) and national (e.g., Ecuador) levels that recognize nature’s rights. Court decisions and administrative actions in Ecuador support the rights of nature [...]”

(Linda Sheehan, Earth Law Center, written contribution to the 2016 Harmony with Nature virtual dialogue)

“Inclusion and recognition of the rights of Nature in international, regional, constitutions (for example in Ecuador), and local and national law is vital, including in municipal ordinances (for example in the United States of America), constitutions (for example in Ecuador), and national laws (for example in the Plurinational State of Bolivia), including the civil society call for the international adoption of a universal declaration of the rights of Mother Earth. In this regard, it should be noted that Ecuador amended its constitution in 2008 to recognize the rights of Nature in light of the perceived need to better protect Nature, or Pachamama, a term that embodies not only the physical aspects of the natural world but also its spiritual aspects, which require deeper respect than they have been given in law.”

(Article 45, expert summary report of the 2016 Harmony with Nature Virtual Dialogue)

“A radical rethink is taking place at the intersection of law and the environment. The issue is: if climate change and other ecological severities are impacting the earth systems themselves then how do we hold those causing them, legally responsible? That inevitably pushes us in the direction of a Rights of Nature framework where society legally recognizes the fundamental life-sustaining role of earth. As a result of that recognition, rivers, lakes, forests, mountains etc., which constitute nature, acquire legal standing and would be entitled to judicial redress in case of any injury or obstruction to their ability to perform that life-sustaining role. Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize these rights of nature and enshrined them in its constitution in 2008.”

(Pallav Das, presentation given to the 2017 Harmony with Nature Interactive Dialogue)

Consequently, rights of nature advocates taking part in these dialogues actively produce an imaginary of Ecuador and Ecuadorians' experience with the rights of nature that serves primarily to advance the agenda of the international movement, and of those activists, experts, and organisations who are taking part in the UN dialogues. Consequently, inconvenient truths and local complexities that occur around the rights of nature in Ecuador are often overlooked, as they do not reinforce the narrative that these participants are producing. In this sense, many problematic local realities do not contribute to the wider counter-hegemonic discourse which is being formulated within the Harmony with Nature agenda – i.e. reconceptualising development and challenging conventional nature-society relations in favour of a more post-materialist perspective.

The representation of Ecuador as a positive example of rights of nature legislation reduces the more nuanced and complex reality to a more easily manageable and understandable imaginary that aligns with the narrative put forth by the rights of nature advocates taking part in the Harmony with Nature dialogues. Consequently, Ecuador and local experiences of the rights of nature become used as a tool to advance the vested interests and conceptual (i.e. post-materialist) worldviews and environmentalisms of the activists and experts who take part in the Harmony with Nature dialogues. Problematically, this means that grassroots activists in Ecuador, and the broader experience that Ecuador has had with the rights of nature, become subsumed into a post-materialist agenda which is dominated by rights of nature activists from the global north.

For example, the increased harassment of, and violence towards, environmentalists in Ecuador is largely ignored. Likewise, the mistrust of the state, and the scepticism of its ability and willingness to enforce the rights of nature held by many activists operating in Ecuador (as explored earlier in this thesis) is barely mentioned. Whenever such a comment like this is made, it does not result in any significant change to the Harmony with Nature agenda, nor to the future contributions of dialogue participants. A prime example of this lies in the contribution to the 2016 virtual dialogue (where experts were able to write or contribute via online mediums) made by Natalia Greene (an

Ecuadorian environmentalist and NGO worker who was directly involved in the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador). She wrote:

“In Ecuador, as is the case for many southern countries, our economy is based on the exploitation of nature and the exportation of primary goods. Governments like ours, who say they promote a socialist approach, maintain the thesis that social welfare should be attained even at the expense of Nature, without understanding that human welfare cannot be attained without Nature’s welfare. Advancing with extractivist policies that benefit economic interests behind harmful activities such as oil drilling and mining, are the most important obstacle to really guarantee Rights of Nature in Ecuador. The problem is that not only are these rights not guaranteed, but the rights of those protecting nature are also violated since there is a persecution and criminalization of defenders of Nature.”

(Natalia Greene, written contribution to 2016 virtual dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

Here Natalia highlights the political economic situation in Ecuador, and how this presents a problematic environment for the rights of nature to function. She makes reference to the nation’s extractivist economy, the government’s claimed political philosophy, as well as the precarity associated with being an environmentalist in the country. By highlighting the precarious realities of rights of nature activists in Ecuador, she moves away from the essentialised and post-materialist narrative that dominates the Harmony with Nature dialogues. Instead, she articulates one that is more in tune to the issues of security and political representation in the context of extractivism, representative of grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador. In so doing, she establishes a direct critique of the essentialising discourse of success that is common when Ecuador is discussed within these dialogues.

Additionally, the fact that it was only in 2016 (six years after the Harmony with Nature formally began) that these issues came to be raised is problematic. The issues that Natalia raises are not new problems; they have been deeply entrenched in the country’s politics for decades (Latorre et al., 2015; Van Teijlingen, 2016; Zamosc, 1994), and have

continued since the rights of nature were written into the new constitution in 2008 (Fontaine, 2013; Kotzé and Calzadilla, 2017). However, other experts seem unaware of these local complexities and problems. Consequently, Natalia's is the only voice that attempts to bring attention to the fact that Ecuador is not wholly a case of success.

Natalia's comments were not picked up or elaborated on by any other participants in either the 2016 or 2017 dialogues. Instead, the majority of contributors chose to keep representing Ecuador and the Ecuadorian state as positive examples of rights of nature implementation. This creates a highly problematic relationship between the Harmony with Nature project, the Ecuadorian state, and local rights of nature activists (especially those who do not have the ability to take part in these discussions at the United Nations), in the sense that the hegemony and legitimacy of the Ecuadorian state is strengthened by such positive discursive representations. This is compounded by the fact that, within the Harmony with Nature project, the rights of nature in Ecuador are generally presented within a state-centric discourse that further reduces the complexities of the realities lived around these rights. This state-centrism results in a reduction of complex and variegated social and political communities that exist within national boundaries, and reproduces hierarchical power relations that prioritise formal political institutions (Agnew, 1994; Kearns, 2008). Concurrently, the hegemony of the Ecuadorian state is reproduced, as it is regarded as the central actor and locus of power within which the rights of nature are realised and embodied within its own borders.

Furthermore, this state-centric discourse fits well within conventional UN logics of the political, and the frameworks by which this is communicated. Within the UN sustainable development agenda, particularly as evoked within the SDGs, "sustainable development" is something which should be guided by the state (by way of implementing policy frameworks that establish a conducive environment of sustainability) (Carant, 2017). By representing the Ecuadorian state as progressive in the context of "biocentric" sustainable development, these UN dialogues are not only misrepresentative, but they also continue to reproduce this state-centric and top-down ethos of development, thereby further empowering the very government that has been responsible for many violations of the rights of nature (and of environmental activists) in Ecuador (Valladares and Boelens, 2017).

What is evident, then, is that within these dialogues the example of the rights of nature in Ecuador is essentialised, extracted, and appropriated in order to strengthen the agendas and knowledge claims made by many of the rights of nature advocates who are able to take part in the UN exchanges. This serves to produce an image of the international rights of nature movement as one that is unified and successful. For example:

“The fact that some governments like Ecuador and Bolivia, in Latin America have adopted the rights of nature in their constitutions and other countries following this initiative is showing that the movement is taking momentum.”

(Mersha Yilma, written contribution to 2016 virtual dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

And:

Acknowledgement of the rights of nature is a movement that is spreading throughout the world. Ecuador recognized these rights in its Constitution in 2008 [...]

(Linda Sheehan, 2013 presentation given to the interactive dialogue on Harmony with Nature)

However, as this thesis has shown, when one considers the perspectives of grassroots activists, the rights of nature movement is a diverse and non-homogenous political group. Some movement elites who are able to take part in these dialogues *may* be unified within their own networks, however grassroots priorities and conceptualisations do not necessarily align with them.

Consequently, what occurs is an appropriation of the rights of nature in Ecuador, and the lived experiences of those activists operating within precarious and often dangerous contexts. This is done in order to further the development of the international rights of nature movement by augmenting its political and social capital. This capital can be utilised particularly in organisations such as the United Nations and within the international political system – an arena which the international rights of nature

movement evidently regards as significant to their long-term objectives and counter-hegemonic politics.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how rights of nature advocates operating within the United Nations Harmony with Nature project attempt to produce a counter-hegemonic discourse, grounded in challenging conventional understandings of nature-society relations in the context of international development. The discourse is fundamentally embedded within logics and frameworks of a claimed “biocentric” ethics, specifically reliant upon the establishing of rights for nature. I have discussed the manner in which the rights of nature are discursively produced and articulated within these United Nations Harmony with Nature project, and how they are bound within a post-materialist framework of environmentalism, more characteristic of environmentalisms common in the global north than the global south. I have shown how this has occurred over time, and how the centrality of the rights of nature in their post-materialist sense within the Harmony with Nature dialogues correlated with the greater influence of activists and experts from the global north.

As Martinez-Alier (2014, 2002) and Guha (Guha and Alier, 2013) state, this primarily post-materialist form of environmentalism has remained hegemonic in its visibility and cultural politics within international environmental movements and networks. Problematically, then, whilst the discourses produced by these rights of nature advocates are indeed counter-hegemonic in some respects (for example, challenging market fundamentalism and strong-anthropocentrism), they simultaneously reproduce existing cultural hegemonies of environmentalism and the cultural politics embedded within it.

This is also true for their use of the rights of nature in Ecuador. I have demonstrated how the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador is used in order to strengthen the claims made by these advocates, and their positive, almost unproblematised narrative of the rights of nature. Rights of nature advocates here essentialise and reduce the complex realities occurring in Ecuador around these rights in order to produce a discursive tool that is more easily managed, understood, and incorporated into their wider narrative. However, the cost of this comes via a

reproduction of the hegemony of the Ecuadorian state in its ability to promote and defend the rights of nature, and a misrepresentation of local nuances which, if they were to be acknowledged more thoroughly, show a remarkably different image to the one that is constructed.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has provided a social movements analysis of the cultural politics underlying rights of nature activism in Ecuador, as well as an analysis of how these deviate from “scaled-up” rights of nature activism in the context of the United Nations Harmony with Nature project. Drawing on insights from Political Ecology and Human Geography, my analysis of these examples has built upon previous work regarding international social movements and the environment, particularly in the context of Latin America. Fundamentally, I have shown that activism around the rights of nature is greatly influenced by spatial and scalar contexts, and that activist subjectivities around the rights of nature are complex, dynamic, and nuanced. This is reflected not only in relation to rights of nature activism when compared between Ecuador and the United Nations Harmony with Nature project, but also within rights of nature activism in Ecuador alone. For grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, the rights of nature are conceptualised in anti-state terms, deeply rooted within issues pertaining to the country’s extractivist political economy. Furthermore, their claims are embedded within narratives of environmentalism regarding security, territory, and human rights. These remain in contrast to those espoused by rights of nature activists operating within the Harmony with Nature project, whose narratives of environmentalism are more often predicated on the intrinsic value of nature, and a universalist ethos of biocentric rights.

Theoretically, I have engaged with debates on the cultural politics of social movements, particularly in a multi-scalar sense. This engagement has been concerned with notions of what constitutes “environmentalism” within social movements, with an explicit focus on the interactions and relationships between social movement actors in the global north and global south. I have utilised the concept of counter-hegemony in order to interrogate these issues, and have explored the complexities of how different counter-hegemonies exist and interact in the context of the environment.

The methods used to conduct this research were primarily based upon a 10-month period of ethnography in the Ecuadorian Andes (which primarily took place in cities and large towns) which utilised both active and passive participant observation, as well as unstructured and semi-structured interviews. This was supplemented with a discourse

analysis of documents made available by the United Nations pertaining to their Harmony with Nature project. Consequently, the research I have presented throughout this thesis has been a theoretically-informed empirical investigation into the complexities and nuances of rights of nature activism in Ecuador, with a direct consideration as to how this fits within broader, international, and “scaled-up” rights of nature activism.

8.2 Summary of Research Findings

In Chapter 2 I discussed the conceptual intersections between social movements, the environment, and conceptualisations of nature. I showed that the environment has regularly been a site of power struggles and contestation, both in terms of materiality and knowledge, which social movements have frequently engaged in. I also showed that, as a result of divergent cultural politics, these contestations are present not only between social movements and the actors within systems they challenge, but also internally within social movements themselves.

In Chapter 3 I traced the emergence of the rights of nature in Ecuador, paying close attention to the political, geographical, and cultural underpinnings of the inscription of these rights into Ecuador’s constitution. I showed that the rights of nature, as they exist as a political project, are embedded within processes of contestation which, I argue, is true in three key ways. First, during the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador, the significant influence of key actors located primarily in the global north resulted in contested cultural political issues around what these rights signified; second, the history of social movement contestation in Ecuador provided the political space within which the rights of nature project could be embraced; and third, the current implementation of the rights of nature in Ecuador remains contested in the sense that civil-society-driven cases are significantly less successful than state-driven ones, coupled with the contentious relationship between activists and the state.

These issues, combined with the conceptual material discussed in Chapter 2, show the necessity for research to analyse the complexities and nuances of the cultural political dynamics which underpin grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador. Furthermore, they reflect the necessity to analyse the multi-scalar dynamics between “scaled-up” manifestations of the rights of nature, driven primarily by internationally-networked activists from the global north, and the manifestations of the rights of nature embedded

within the lived experiences of Ecuadorian activists. These issues remain inextricably linked, due to the extent to which the international rights of nature movement relies on the case of Ecuador in their efforts to “scale-up” these rights

This thesis contributes to a deeper-understanding of these issues by having presented answers to three key research questions and one supplementary research question.

These are:

- 1) How do activists in Ecuador seek to promote and defend the rights of nature?
- 2) What are the cultural-political dynamics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador?
- 3) How do international rights of nature activists attempt to “scale-up” the rights of nature?
 - 3.1) How does this manifestation of the rights of nature compare with that which is articulated by activists in Ecuador?

Questions 1 and 2 are interconnected and were both explored in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. These questions are interconnected in the sense that, as Muradian et al. (2003), Dwivedi (2001), and Martinez-Alier (2002) remind us, the cultural politics which underpin peoples’ perceptions of the environment directly affect the ways in which they mobilise in order to protect it.

In Chapter 5 I illustrated how civil-society-driven rights of nature activism has become increasingly radicalised as a result of the contentious relationship between activists and the state. This manifests through an anti-state rhetoric espoused by grassroots rights of nature activists, which is embedded in a process of action and reaction between activists and the state. This aligns with the arguments of scholars such as Barnard-Wills (2012) and Sbicca (2014), who assert that forms of activism and activist identities are heavily contextualised by the process of action and reaction that occurs

between activists and state institutions. I explored this through an ethnographic analysis, drawing on data obtained through active participant observation with groups of rights of nature activists taking part in a series of anti-government protests in Quito, as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews conducted in-between these protests. My research here shows that radical activism has become one of the key ways that grassroots activists seek to promote and defend the rights of nature in Ecuador, and that the cultural politics underpinning this are grounded in the state-society-extractivism nexus, where the state is seen as the vanguard of extractivist industries. This chapter, then, provided an answer to my first research question “*How do activists in Ecuador seek to promote and defend the rights of nature?*”, and it also established the foundations of my response to question 2 “*What are the cultural-political dynamics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador?*”.

In Chapter 6 I built upon the arguments I put forward in Chapter 5, both in the context of question 1 and question 2, however where Chapter 5 maintained a stronger focus on question 1, Chapter 6 focused more-so on developing a deeper answer to question 2. I showed that the anti-state narrative utilised by rights of nature activists in Ecuador remains central to their conceptualisations of, and subjectivities around, the rights of nature. Additionally, I further confirmed that this anti-state narrative is embedded within the wider state-society-extractivism nexus, where the rights of nature are seen as a tool to be utilised against the state in reaction to their complicity in the extraction of natural resources. Furthermore, I illustrated how these articulations of the rights of nature draw on narratives of decolonisation of knowledge and territory, as well as the decommodification of nature, in order to inform their wider anti-state discourse. I explored this through an ethnographic analysis, drawing on passive participant observation conducted during seven discussion groups/meetings held by rights of nature activists across the *Sierra* of Ecuador, as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews held before, during, and after these discussion groups. My research here shows that the role of knowledge production and dissemination, particularly in a radical context, is of significant importance to grassroots rights of nature activism. Furthermore, I showed that these conceptualisations exist within an ecology of knowledges, where influences of culture and power intersect. This manifests through, for example, knowledges from the United States being included, but are articulated in a manner that is culturally and spatially relevant to “environmentalism” in Ecuador, for example by targeting

extractivism and the state. I showed that these articulations of the rights of nature are fundamentally concerned with security, political representation, territory, and human rights – issues which typically characterise environmentalism in the global south (Martinez-Alier, 2002). This reflects the dynamic and fluid nature of the ecology of knowledges within which rights of nature activism exists.

Chapter 6, then, solidified my answers to questions 1 and 2. Regarding “*How do activists in Ecuador seek to promote and defend the rights of nature?*”, I posited that they do this through fundamentally radical means, through methods such as street protests and clandestine discussion groups, which are positioned within anti-state spatial and temporal contexts. Regarding “*What are the cultural-political dynamics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador?*” I argued that grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is fundamentally anti-state in its nature, where activism is deeply rooted within the state-society-extractivism nexus, with the state seen as the vanguard of extractivist industries, and therefore incapable of promoting and defending the rights of nature. This then reflects the form of counter-hegemony which is espoused by civil-society rights of nature activists, which is nationally-focused and fundamentally anti-state in its characteristics, driven by material considerations for security, territory, and human rights. However, I argued that the cultural politics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador are also complex and diverse in the sense that perspectives on what these rights signify remains contested between individuals. This illustrates the fact that treating the rights of nature movement in Ecuador as a homogenous and monolithic entity is problematic.

Chapter 7 addressed questions 3 and 3.1. I analysed how the process of “scaling-up” the rights of nature functions within the context of the United Nations Harmony with Nature project. I explored this through a discourse analysis of the 108 documents made available by the United Nations which constitute the corpus of material detailing their Harmony with Nature project. First, I showed that over time the inclusion of voices from the global south, especially from Bolivia and Ecuador (two countries used as principle examples within the Harmony with Nature project) has diminished. Instead of these voices, the project has become dominated by actors from the global north. Crucially, this shift correlates directly with the increased attention given to the rights of nature within the Harmony with Nature project, meaning that these rights come to manifest within a cultural-political framework that is more representative of environmentalism within the global north than the global south (as outlined by Martinez-Alier, 2002). As I illustrated,

this cultural-political framework is the same as that which underpins the international rights of nature movement, which was explored in Chapter 3. This is unsurprising as, over time, many of the key actors within this international movement have become influential contributors to the Harmony with Nature project. I also argued that the Harmony with Nature project itself is framed by its participants as inherently counter-hegemonic in the sense that it challenges conventional understandings of nature-society relationships in the context of development. This manifests through a desire to move away from strong-anthropocentrism, instead favouring a biocentric (or, as I argue it to be, weak-anthropocentric) praxis. Fundamentally, though, the central theme which guides this narrative of counter-hegemony is the acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of nature, within which the rights of nature are directly incorporated and come to be deemed as necessary in order to achieve. However, I demonstrated that this narrative of counter-hegemony and of the rights of nature is predicated both on an ethos of universalism and of state-centrism. I posited that these narratives diverge from grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador due to the reproduction of the hegemony of the Ecuadorian state in its power to administrate the rights of nature – the fundamental tenet which grassroots activism in Ecuador mobilises against. Consequently, this chapter provided answers to the question 3 “*How do international rights of nature activists attempt to “scale-up” the rights of nature?*” and 3.1 “*How does this manifestation of the rights of nature compare with that which is articulated by activists in Ecuador?*”. Regarding question 3, I argued that international rights of nature activists attempt to “scale-up” these rights by framing them as a counter-hegemonic discourse which challenges conventional understandings of international development and nature-society relationships, predicated on ontological universalism and state-centrism. Furthermore, I posited that these narratives explicitly draw upon the case of Ecuador in order to further a “biocentric” and post-materialist cultural-political project, focused on promoting the rights of nature and the international rights of nature movement.

Regarding question 3.1 I posited that these central themes of “scaled-up” rights of nature discourses diverge with grassroots rights of nature discourses in Ecuador via fundamental cultural-political differences. These cultural-political differences, I argued, stem from different perspectives of environmentalism, where grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is primarily concerned with material issues such as security, political representation, territory, and human rights, whereas international, “scaled-up” rights of

nature activism is primarily concerned with post-materialist values such as the intrinsic value of nature. I attributed this to the dominance of activists from the global north in the international rights of nature movement, and the influence they have come to assert in the United Nations' Harmony with Nature project. In this sense, the Harmony with Nature project has come to represent the extension of the rights of nature as they exist as a political project (explored in Chapter 3). However, I argue that this political project of the rights of nature is reliant on the case of Ecuador in order to support its validity; consequently, Ecuador is portrayed as a "successful" example of rights of nature implementation, despite the problematic issues highlighted by my analysis of grassroots rights of nature activism in the country. This representation of the rights of nature in Ecuador, I argued, is simplified, misleading, and fundamentally disconnected from the lived-realities of rights of nature activists there. Furthermore, it directly conflicts with the efforts of grassroots rights of nature activists in Ecuador, due to its reproduction of the Ecuadorian state's hegemony over socio-environmental regulation and the rights of nature.

Evidently, then, the answers I have provided to the questions guiding my research reveal five central claims. These are:

- 1) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is fundamentally anti-state in its character, but is also diverse.
- 2) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is predicated on material issues, such as security, territory, and human rights.
- 3) Grassroots rights of nature activism in Ecuador is deeply embedded within the state-society-extractivism nexus.
- 4) International rights of nature activists "scale-up" the rights of nature according to environmentalist values more characteristic of the global north than the global south, such as the intrinsic value of nature, universalism, and an agenda of "biocentrism".
- 5) International rights of nature activists appropriate and misrepresent the case of the rights of nature in Ecuador in order to promote the rights of nature as a successful and viable political project.

Now that I have summarised the key research findings of the thesis, I now discuss the contributions to knowledge made by my research.

8.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis contributes to the empirical literature on rights of nature activism, and the rights of nature in Ecuador more broadly. It also contributes to theoretical debates on social movements and environmentalism. First, I will discuss my contributions to the empirical literature, followed by a discussion of my contributions to the theoretical literature.

Throughout the existing literature on the rights of nature in Ecuador, little attention has been paid to the social movement dynamics that exist around these rights. My research begins to fill this gap, by placing an analytical focus on the cultural politics which underpin the movement across geographical place and scale. Consequently, my research addresses questions which are not acknowledged by scholars who maintain a fundamentally institutional emphasis on the rights of nature, such as Borràs, (2016), Humphreys (2017), and Shiraishi Neto and Martins Lima (2016), who focus on the rights of nature in Ecuador in as much as they represent shifts within socio-legal systems, or new approaches to development.

Furthermore, where scholars do focus on the rights of nature movement, such as Espinosa (2017) and Margil (2017), there is a tendency to treat the movement as a homogenous entity (in terms of its politics and values) across both place and scale. Consequently, this research neglects not only the complex and nuanced nature of the cultural-political underpinnings of the movement, but also the power relations that permeate the movement as a result of certain activists' perspectives dominating over others. Tanasescu (2016a, 2013), however, does acknowledge the variegated cultural politics that underpinned the constitutionalisation of the rights of nature in Ecuador, but does not draw attention to how this exists within the rights of nature movement itself. Crucially, my research fills these gaps by analysing the cultural politics of the rights of nature movement, primarily in the context of Ecuador, but also in its international form. Therefore, I am able to demonstrate that not only are there significant differences between the rights of nature movement in Ecuador and the international rights of nature movement, but that there are also variegations within the rights of nature movement in Ecuador itself. This demonstrates the complex character of rights of nature activism across geographical place and scale, and illustrates how treating the rights of nature movement as monolithic is problematic and neglectful of the different activisms through which it is constituted.

This thesis also contributes to theoretical debates on the characteristics of environmentalism. Specifically, I contribute to discussions on “the environmentalism of the poor”, where characteristics of environmentalism are seen to be different between the global north and the global south (Davey, 2009; Lawhon, 2013; Martinez-Alier, 2014, 2009, 2002; Martinez-Alier et al., 2014; Muradian et al., 2012). The idea which underpins “the environmentalism of the poor” is that environmentalism in the global south is primarily driven by a challenge to socially and environmentally damaging “externalities” placed upon poorer countries by wealthier ones, such as the extraction of natural resources and pollution (Martinez-Alier, 2002). These issues are often grounded in material claims such as security, political representation, territory, and human rights (Martinez-Alier, 2002; Muradian et al., 2012). I build upon this work by showing that the rights of nature movement in Ecuador do indeed correspond with these claims, however I also show that environmentalist perspectives within the global south can be intricately intertwined with perspectives from the global north. In the context of the rights of nature, I show how this manifests through international networks of activist knowledges, where the rights of nature come to represent a hybridised (although simultaneously contested) cultural-political artefact imbued with knowledges from the global north and the global south. Consequently, I show that treating environmentalisms from the global north and global south as conceptually separate can be problematic. This responds to a call for research from Lawhon (2013), who states that the networked nature of global north-south environmental social movement relations must be analysed deeper in the sense of their interconnected value-systems.

This thesis also contributes to the theoretical literature on social movements and the protection of the environment. Regarding debates on social movements, my research demonstrates that multi-scalar movements remain fraught with inequalities, especially in the context of internationally-networked actors maintaining higher levels of influence due to their greater access to resources and opportunities. This reinforces the work of Sikkink (2005), and additionally responds to her call for research to be conducted which takes seriously the role of international and supranational institutions in social movement relations (Sikkink, 2005). However, where Keck and Sikkink (2014) illustrate that grassroots social movement actors can often subvert these inequalities by engaging in a “boomerang” model of resource-sharing, I show that this is not the case in the context of the rights of nature movement and Ecuador. Rather, grassroots members of the movement

in Ecuador remain excluded from international rights of nature activism, and instead of benefitting from networks of resource sharing, their experiences are misrepresented and appropriated in order to strengthen the agenda of internationally-networked activists.

Finally, this thesis contributes to debates in Political Ecology on the ways in which counter-hegemony functions, specifically the role of multiple counter-hegemonies and their interactions. While the concept of multiple *hegemonies* has been utilised within Political Ecology by scholars such as Harris (2015), Waters (2015), and Bakker (2015), little attention has been paid to how multiple *counter-hegemonies* function and interact with one another. Within this thesis I offer a contribution to this academic discussion by illustrating how two counter-hegemonies (one national, and one international), which mobilise around the same phenomenon (the rights of nature), not only diverge from one another, but come to interact in a negative sense by one reinforcing the hegemonic institution which is being targeted by the other. This insight was made possible by taking a social movements approach to the issue of the rights of nature activism in a multi-scalar sense. While Harris (2015) and Waters (2015) discuss the functionings of multiple hegemonies in a multi-scalar sense, my analysis of the cultural-politics which underpin multiple *counter-hegemonies* provides a critique of the problematic power relations within social movements themselves. This, therefore, asserts the relevance of utilising a lens of counter-hegemony within Political Ecology approaches to social movements, particularly in the sense of the complex and nuanced multi-scalar politics which occur around the environment.

8.4 Avenues for Future Research

While this thesis has offered an analysis and critique of rights of nature activism in Ecuador and internationally, it is impossible for a thesis to be a wholly comprehensive account of the subject at hand. Indeed, each methodological and conceptual choice serves not only to include certain perspectives, but also to exclude others. Therefore, by reflecting on the choices I made throughout this research, as well as details brought to light across my conclusions, I now indicate where some potential avenues for further research may exist.

While my research draws attention to the dynamics of rights of nature activism in Ecuador, there are other places where these rights (or similar ones) are being

implemented, either at the national constitutional level, or at regional levels. Consequently, I believe that research needs to be conducted on the individuals and organisations which engage in the promotion and defense of these rights in countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, India, and New Zealand. By conducting research into the existence, or indeed, non-existence, of civil-society driven advocacy for these rights in other geographical locations, I believe that the intricacies of rights of nature activism(s) across cultures, place, and scale, will be understood more deeply, enabling more critical insight into the various manifestations of the rights of nature.

Furthermore, my research focused on the rights of nature as they exist within *activist* and often *radical* contexts in Ecuador. An area of research which remains relatively unexplored is how state officials perceive the rights of nature, particularly in the context of variations between local, regional, and national perspectives on the rights of nature from people such as politicians and judges. Research in this area would serve to provide a broader understanding of the ways in which the rights of nature function in Ecuador.

Next, I believe that participant observation and/or interviews with rights of nature activists taking part in the United Nations' Harmony with Nature project must be conducted in order to obtain a greater understanding of the ways in which the project functions and is administrated. My research was able to engage in a discourse analysis of the documents submitted to, and produced by, the project, however where interviews, and preferably participant observation, are able to be conducted, new insights may be gained in to the personal reflections of activists taking part in the project.

Leading on from this, it is important that research is conducted on the international activism within the rights of nature movement *outside* of an institutional context. While the United Nations' Harmony with Nature project provides certain perspectives on the "scaling-up" of the rights of nature, it seems reasonable to assume that certain restrictions and limitations are placed upon this manifestation of the rights of nature due to the institutional context within which they are being discussed. Consequently, new insights into the "scaling-up" of the rights of nature may be gleaned from a non-institutional analysis of international rights of nature activism.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Example interview schedule

Interview Schedule 1

Guiding themes

Who are defending the rights of nature?

How do they do it?

How are they affected by the eco-political contradiction that is currently at play in Ecuador?

- That is, providing nature with rights, yet opening more mines/drilling/cracking down on environmentalists.

Interview question prompts:

Initial section of interview

Aims:

- To understand the participant's background in the context of environmentalism, and how they began working for the organisation(s) with which they are currently affiliated.

Tell me about how you came to work with (organisation name)

Are you affiliated with any other organisations or groups?

Second section of interview

Aims:

- To understand participant's views on how the rights of nature currently exist and operate in the contemporary eco-political context of Ecuador.

What do the rights of nature mean to you?

What do you think they mean to the government?

How, and to what extent, do you personally engage with the rights of nature?

- In your work, in your personal life?

What role do you feel they play in Ecuadorian society currently?

- Do you feel they provide a platform on which to make legitimate legal claims?

How would you describe your relationship with the state?

- How do you think the state views/would view your work?
- Do you feel the state supports environmental work?

What do you think needs to be done in order to strengthen the rights of nature as both an idea and a functional framework of legal rights?

Third section of interview

How, and to what extent, do the rights of nature enter into the work of (organisation name)?

- Day to day work
- Philosophy
- Ambitions

Does (organisation name) work with other organisations or groups?

How would you describe the relationship between (organisation name) and the state?

- Are there any differences between this and the one you feel personally?

How do you think the state views/would view the work of (organisation name)?

Appendix 2: Interview request letter



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Newcastle University
7th Floor, Daysh Building
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU United Kingdom

Estimado señor(a),

Soy estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Newcastle, en el Reino Unido. Estoy haciendo la investigación de mi tesis aquí en Ecuador – el proyecto examina los derechos de la naturaleza. Deseo hablar con organizaciones ambientales para investigar la pregunta "como funcionan (o no funcionan) los derechos de la naturaleza en Ecuador, en el contexto de organizaciones no gubernamentales y movimientos sociales?".

Si es posible, me gustaría hablar con usted de su trabajo. Vivo en Quito, entonces yo podría irme a su oficina, o cómo usted prefiera.

Por favor, avíseme si hay algo más que le gustaría saber de mi o del proyecto.

Saludos cordiales,

Stefan Rzedzian

Stefan Rzedzian
PhD Student in Human Geography
Department of Geography
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
3rd Floor, Daysh Building
Newcastle University

Correo Electrónico: s.rzedzian@newcastle.ac.uk

Número Celular: 0994802271

Appendix 3: Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth

Proposal Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth

Preamble

We, the peoples and nations of Earth:

considering that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny;

gratefully acknowledging that Mother Earth is the source of life, nourishment and learning and provides everything we need to live well;

recognizing that the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change;

convinced that in an interdependent living community it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth;

affirming that to guarantee human rights it is necessary to recognize and defend the rights of Mother Earth and all beings in her and that there are existing cultures, practices and laws that do so;

conscious of the urgency of taking decisive, collective action to transform structures and systems that cause climate change and other threats to Mother Earth;

proclaim this Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and call on the General Assembly of the United Nation to adopt it, as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations of the world, and to the end that every individual and institution takes responsibility for promoting through teaching, education, and consciousness raising, respect for the rights recognized in this Declaration and ensure through prompt and progressive measures and mechanisms, national and international, their universal and effective recognition and observance among all peoples and States in the world.

Article 1. Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth is a living being.

(2) Mother Earth is a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings.

(3) Each being is defined by its relationships as an integral part of Mother Earth.

(4) The inherent rights of Mother Earth are inalienable in that they arise from the same source as existence.

(5) Mother Earth and all beings are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as may be made between organic and inorganic beings, species, origin, use to human beings, or any other status.

(6) Just as human beings have human rights, all other beings also have rights which are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist.

(7) The rights of each being are limited by the rights of other beings and any conflict between their rights must be resolved in a way that maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth.

Article 2. Inherent Rights of Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth and all beings of which she is composed have the following inherent rights:

- (a) the right to life and to exist;
- (b) the right to be respected;
- (c) the right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions;
- (d) the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being;
- (e) the right to water as a source of life;
- (f) the right to clean air;
- (g) the right to integral health;
- (h) the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste;
- (i) the right to not have its genetic structure modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens its integrity or vital and healthy functioning;
- (j) the right to full and prompt restoration the violation of the rights recognized in this Declaration caused by human activities;

(2) Each being has the right to a place and to play its role in Mother Earth for her harmonious functioning.

(3) Every being has the right to wellbeing and to live free from torture or cruel treatment by human beings.

Article 3. Obligations of human beings to Mother Earth

(1) Every human being is responsible for respecting and living in harmony with Mother Earth.

(2) Human beings, all States, and all public and private institutions must:

- (a) act in accordance with the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration;
- (b) recognize and promote the full implementation and enforcement of the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration;
- (c) promote and participate in learning, analysis, interpretation and communication about how to live in harmony with Mother Earth in accordance with this Declaration;
- (d) ensure that the pursuit of human wellbeing contributes to the wellbeing of Mother Earth, now and in the future;
- (e) establish and apply effective norms and laws for the defence, protection and conservation of the rights of Mother Earth;
- (f) respect, protect, conserve and where necessary, restore the integrity, of the vital ecological cycles, processes and balances of Mother Earth;

(g) guarantee that the damages caused by human violations of the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration are rectified and that those responsible are held accountable for restoring the integrity and health of Mother Earth;

(h) empower human beings and institutions to defend the rights of Mother Earth and of all beings;

(i) establish precautionary and restrictive measures to prevent human activities from causing species extinction, the destruction of ecosystems or the disruption of ecological cycles;

(j) guarantee peace and eliminate nuclear, chemical and biological weapons;

(k) promote and support practices of respect for Mother Earth and all beings, in accordance with their own cultures, traditions and customs;

(l) promote economic systems that are in harmony with Mother Earth and in accordance with the rights recognized in this Declaration.

Article 4. Definitions

(1) The term "being" includes ecosystems, natural communities, species and all other natural entities which exist as part of Mother Earth.

(2) Nothing in this Declaration restricts the recognition of other inherent rights of all beings or specified beings.

Bibliography

- Acosta, A., 2015. El Buen Vivir como alternativa al desarrollo: Algunas reflexiones económicas y no tan económicas. *Política y Sociedad*; Madrid 52, 299-330,605.
- Acosta, A., 2010. El Buen Vivir en el camino del post-desarrollo. Una lectura desde la Constitución de Montecristi. *Policy Paper 9*, 1–36.
- Acosta, A., Martínez, E., 2009. *Derechos de la Naturaleza. El futuro es ahora*, Quito, Abya Yala.
- Agar, M. (1996). *The professional stranger*. 2nd ed. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Agar, M. (2004). We have met the other and we're all nonlinear: Ethnography as a nonlinear dynamic system. *Complexity*, 10(2), pp.16--24.
- Agnew, J., 1994. The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory. *Review of International Political Economy* 1, 53–80.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4177090>
- Agrawal, A., 2005. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Duke University Press.
- Akchurin, M., 2015. Constructing the Rights of Nature: Constitutional Reform, Mobilization, and Environmental Protection in Ecuador. *Law & Social Inquiry* 40, 937–968.
- Alvarez, S.E., Dagnino, E., Escobar, A., 1998. *Cultures of politics, politics of cultures: re-visioning Latin American social movements*. Westview Press.
- Andolina, R., 2003. The Sovereign and its Shadow: Constituent Assembly and Indigenous Movement in Ecuador *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, 721–750.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X03006965>
- Anguelovski, I., 2011. Understanding the Dynamics of Community Engagement of Corporations in Communities: The Iterative Relationship Between Dialogue Processes and Local Protest at the Tintaya Copper Mine in Peru. *Society & Natural Resources* 24, 384–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920903339699>

- Appel, S., 2016. Shifting the Development Discourse: A Narrative of a Civil Society Network in Ecuador. *Journal of International Development* 28, 666–682.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3231>
- Arsel, M., Angel, N.A., 2012. “Stating” Nature’s Role in Ecuadorian Development: Civil Society and the Yasuni-ITT Initiative. *Journal of Developing Societies* 28, 203–227.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X12448758>
- Arsel, M., Hogenboom, B., Pellegrini, L., 2016. The extractive imperative in Latin America. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3, 880–887.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2016.10.014>
- Asara, V., Otero, I., Demaria, F., Corbera, E., 2015. Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–ecological transformation: repoliticizing sustainability. *Sustainability Science* 10, 375–384. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0321-9>
- Avcı, D., 2015. Mining conflicts and transformative politics: A comparison of Intag (Ecuador) and Mount Ida (Turkey) environmental struggles. *Geoforum*.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.07.013>
- Barnard-Wills, D., 2012. *Surveillance and Identity: Discourse, Subjectivity and the State*. Ashgate.
- Barrett, C.B., Grizzle, R.E., 1998. A Holistic Approach to Sustainability Based on Pluralistic Stewardship. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.141226>
- Batliwala, S., 2002. Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors: Implications for Global Civil Society. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 13, 393–409. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022014127214>
- Bazeley, P., 2006. Research dissemination in creative arts, humanities and the social sciences. *Higher Education Research & Development* 25, 307–321.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360600793101>
- Bebbington, A., 2009. The new extraction: rewriting the political ecology of the Andes? *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, 12–20.
- Bebbington, A., 1996. Movements, modernizations, and markets. In: Peet, P.R., Watts, M. (Eds.), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge, pp. 86–109.

- Bebbington, A., Humphreys Bebbington, D., Bury, J., Lingan, J., Muñoz, J.P., Scurrah, M., 2008. Mining and Social Movements: Struggles Over Livelihood and Rural Territorial Development in the Andes. *World Development*, Special Section: Social Movements and the Dynamics of Rural Development in Latin America (pp. 2874-2952) 36, 2888–2905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.11.016>
- Bebbington A (2012) Extractive industries, socio-environmental conflicts, and political economic transformations in Andean America. In A Bebbington (ed) *Social Conflict, Economic Development, and Extractive Industry: Evidence from South America* (pp 3–26). London: Routledge
- Bebbington A, Abramovay R and Chiriboga M (2008) Social movements and the dynamics of rural territorial development in Latin America. *World Development* 36:2874–2887
- Bebbington A, Connarty M, Coxshall W, O’Shaughnessy H and Williams M (2007) *Mining and Development in Peru, With Special Reference to the Rio Blanco Project, Piura*. London: Peru Support Group
- Bebbington A (2009) Latin America: Contesting extraction, producing geographies. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 30:7–12
- Beck, S.H., Mijeski, K.J., 2001. Barricades and ballots: Ecuador’s Indians and the Pachakutik political movement. *Ecuadorian Studies* 1, 1–23.
- Becker, M., 2013. The Stormy Relations between Rafael Correa and Social Movements in Ecuador. *Latin American Perspectives* 40, 43–62.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X13479305>
- Becker, Marc, 2010. *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Becker, M., 2010. The Children of 1990. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35, 291–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437541003500307>
- Becker, M., 2008. *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador’s Modern Indigenous Movements*. Duke University Press.
- Begg, A. 2000: *Empowering the earth: strategies for social change*. Totnes, Devon: Green Books.

- Bernal, A.M., 2011. Power, Powerlessness and Petroleum: Indigenous Environmental Claims and the Limits of Transnational Law. *New Political Science* 33, 143–167.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2011.570078>
- Berry, T., 2011. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. Crown/Archetype.
- Bhabha, H.K., 2012. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Biernacki, P., Waldorf, D., 1981. Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research* 10, 141–163.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/004912418101000205>
- Bond, P., 2006. Global Governance Campaigning and mdgs: from top-down to bottom-up anti-poverty work. *Third World Quarterly* 27, 339–354.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500432622>
- Boren, M.E., 2001. *Student resistance: a history of the unruly subject*. Routledge, New York.
- Borràs, S., 2016. New Transitions from Human Rights to the Environment to the Rights of Nature. *Transnational Environmental Law* 5, 113–143.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S204710251500028X>
- Brand, U., 2012. Contradictions and crises of neoliberal–imperial globalization and the political opportunity structures for the Global Justice Movements. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 25, 283–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2012.721984>
- Brand, U., Wissen, M., 2013. Crisis and continuity of capitalist society-nature relationships: The imperial mode of living and the limits to environmental governance. *Review of International Political Economy* 20, 687–711.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2012.691077>
- Brewer, J., 2000. *Ethnography*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Buchanan, K.S., 2013. Contested discourses, knowledge, and socio-environmental conflict in Ecuador. *Environmental Science & Policy, SI: Environmental and Developmental Discourses: Technical knowledge, discursive spaces and politics* 30, 19–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.12.012>

- Burdon, P.D., 2010. The rights of nature: Reconsidered.
- Burns, G.L., MacBeth, J., Moore, S., 2011. Should dingoes die? Principles for engaging ecocentric ethics in wildlife tourism management. *Journal of Ecotourism* 10, 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2011.617450>
- Buttel, F.H., 2000. Ecological modernization as social theory. *Geoforum* 31, 57–65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185\(99\)00044-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00044-5)
- Cadena, M. de la, 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Carant, J.B., 2017. Unheard voices: a critical discourse analysis of the Millennium Development Goals' evolution into the Sustainable Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly* 38, 16–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166944>
- Carroll, W.K., Ratner, R.S., 1994. Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and the New Social Movements. *Critical Sociology* 20, 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089692059402000201>
- Carruthers, D., Rodriguez, P., 2009. Mapuche Protest, Environmental Conflict and Social Movement Linkage in Chile. *Third World Quarterly* 30, 743–760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590902867193>
- Carson, R., 2002. *Silent Spring*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Castree, N., 2008. Neoliberalising Nature: The Logics of Deregulation and Reregulation. *Environment and Planning A* 40, 131–152. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3999>
- Castree, N., 2000. Marxism and the Production of Nature. *Capital & Class* 24, 5–36.
- Castro, F.W., 2011. Afro-Colombian Struggles over Development, Territory, Nature, and the Right to be Black. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 16, 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1935-4940.2011.01185.x>
- Celis, L., 2017. Economic Extractivism and Agrarian Social Movements: Perspectives on Low-Intensity Democracy in the Face of the Colombian Conflict. *Latin American Perspectives* 44, 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X17719037>

- Chartock, S., 2013. "Corporatism With Adjectives"? Conceptualizing Civil Society Incorporation and Indigenous Participation in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society* 55, 52–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2013.00193.x>
- Chatterton, P., Pickerill, J., 2010. Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35, 475–490. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40891003>
- Chatterton, P., Featherstone, D., Routledge, P., 2012. *Articulating Climate Justice in Copenhagen: Antagonism, the Commons, and Solidarity*. Antipode no–no. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01025.x>
- Christens Brian D., Collura Jessica J., 2012. Local Community Organizers and Activists Encountering Globalization: An Exploratory Study of their Perceptions and Adaptations. *Journal of Social Issues* 68, 592–611. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2012.01765.x>
- Clifford, N., Cope, M., Gillespie, T., French, S., 2016. *Key Methods in Geography*. SAGE.
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology* 94, pp. 95–120.
- Conaghan, C. M. 1996. A deficit of democratic authenticity: political linkage and the public in Andean polities. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 31 (3), pp. 32--55.
- Conaghan, C. M. 2008. Ecuador: Correa's plebiscitary presidency. *Journal of Democracy*, 19 (2), pp. 46--60.
- Conaghan, C. & Espinal, R. (1990) "Unlikely Transitions to Uncertain Regimes? Democracy without compromise in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador" *Journal of Latin American Studies* No. 22 pp. 553 – 574
- Conde, M., 2017. Resistance to Mining. A Review. *Ecological Economics* 132, 80–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.08.025>
- Conway, J.M., 2013. *Praxis and Politics: Knowledge Production in Social Movements*. Routledge.

Coryat, D., 2015. Extractive politics, media power, and new waves of resistance against oil drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon: The case of Yasunidos. *International Journal of Communication* 9, 3741–3760.

Cox, R.W., 1992. Multilateralism and world order. *Review of International Studies* 18, 161–180.

Crang, M., Cook, I., 2007. *Doing Ethnographies*. SAGE.

Daly, E., 2012. The Ecuadorian exemplar: the first ever vindications of constitutional rights of nature. *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law* 21, 63–66.

D’Arcy May, J., 1994. “Rights of the Earth” and “Care for the Earth”: Two Paradigms for a Buddhist-Christian Ecological Ethic. *Horizons* 21, 48–61.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900027924>

Davey, I., 2009. Environmentalism of the Poor and Sustainable Development: An Appraisal. *Sustainable Development* 4, 10.

Davidov, V., 2016. SOCIAL LIVES AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL: Indigenous “Oil Lawsuits” as Sites of Order and Disorder Making. *Social Analysis; Oxford* 60, 57–75.

<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/10.3167/sa.2016.600304>

Davidov, V., 2014. Land, Copper, Flora: Dominant Materialities and the Making of Ecuadorian Resource Environments. *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, 31–58.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2014.0010>

Davidov, V., 2013. Mining versus Oil Extraction: Divergent and Differentiated Environmental Subjectivities in “Post-Neoliberal” Ecuador: Mining versus Oil Extraction. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 18, 485–504.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12043>

de la Cadena, M., 2010. Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond “Politics.” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, 334–370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061>

De La Torre, C. 2013. Technocratic Populism in Ecuador. *Journal of Democracy*, 24 (3), pp. 33–46.

- De La Torre, C. 1997. Populism and democracy: Political discourses and cultures in contemporary Ecuador. *Latin American Perspectives*, pp. 12--24.
- de Sousa Santos, B., 2014. Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634876>
- de Sousa Santos, B., 2009. A Non-Occidental West?: Learned Ignorance and Ecology of Knowledge. *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, 103–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409348079>
- Della Porta, D., and Diani, M. (1999). *Social movements: an introduction*. Blackwell Publishing
- Demeritt, D., 1994. Ecology, objectivity and critique in writings on nature and human societies. *Journal of Historical Geography* 20, 22–37. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jhge.1994.1003>
- Derrida, J., 1978. *Writing and Difference*. University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J., Butler, J., 2016. *Of Grammatology*. JHU Press.
- Desai, V., Potter, R., 2006. *Doing Development Research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd, 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London England EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208925>
- Dickson-Swift, V., James, E.L., Kippen, S., Liamputtong, P., 2006. Blurring Boundaries in Qualitative Health Research on Sensitive Topics. *Qualitative Health Research* 16, 853–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732306287526>
- Diani, M. (1997). Social movements and social capital: a network perspective on movement outcomes. *Mobilizations* 2 (2), pp. 129–147.
- Doherty, B., Doyle, T., 2006. Beyond borders: Transnational politics, social movements and modern environmentalisms. *Environmental Politics* 15, 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010600937132>
- Doherty, B., Plows, A., Wall, D., 2007. Environmental direct action in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales: A protest event analysis. *Environmental Politics* 16, 805–825. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010701634182>

- Dosh, P., Kligerman, N., 2009. Correa vs. Social Movements: Showdown in Ecuador. *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, 21–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2009.11725465>
- Dowie, M. 1995. *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Doyle, T., Chaturvedi, S., 2010. Climate Territories: A Global Soul for the Global South? *Geopolitics* 15, 516–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040903501054>
- Dwivedi, R., 2001. Environmental Movements in the Global South: Issues of Livelihood and Beyond. *International Sociology* 16, 11–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580901016001003>
- Eckersley, R., 1995a. Liberal democracy and the rights of nature: The struggle for inclusion. *Environmental Politics* 4, 169–198.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644019508414232>
- Eckersley, R., 1995b. The political challenge of left green reconciliation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 6, 21–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455759509358636>
- Eckersley, R., 1992. *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*. SUNY Press.
- Eckersley, R., 1989. Green Politics and the New Class: Selfishness or Virtue? *Political Studies* 37, 205–223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1989.tb01479.x>
- Ekers, M., 2009. The political ecology of hegemony in depression-era British Columbia, Canada: Masculinities, work and the production of the forestscape. *Geoforum, Themed Issue: Gramscian Political Ecologies* 40, 303–315.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.09.011>
- Ellis, C., 2007. Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947>
- Elwood, S., Bond, P., Novo, C.M., Radcliffe, S., 2016. Learning from postneoliberalisms. *Progress in Human Geography* 0309132516648539.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516648539>

England, K.V., 1994. Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research*. *The Professional Geographer* 46, 80–89.

Esborraz, D.F., 2016. El modelo ecológico alternativo latinoamericano entre protección del derecho humano al medio ambiente y reconocimiento de los derechos de la naturaleza. *Revista Derecho del Estado* 0, 93–129.
<https://doi.org/10.18601/01229893.n36.04>

Escobar, A., 2018. *The Making Of Social Movements In Latin America: Identity, Strategy, And Democracy*. Routledge.

Escobar, A., 2015. Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation. *Sustainability Science* 10, 451–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5>

Escobar, A., 2011. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

Escobar, A., 2004. Más allá del Tercer Mundo: Globalidad imperial, colonialidad global y movimientos sociales anti-globalización. *Nómadas* 86–100.

Escobar, A., 2001. Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization. *Political Geography* 20, 139–174. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(00\)00064-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(00)00064-0)

Escobar, A., 1998. Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements. *Journal of political ecology* 5, 53–82.

Escobar, A., 1992a. Imagining a Post-Development Era? *Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements*. *Social Text* 20. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466217>

Escobar, A., 1992b. Grassroots approaches and alternative politics in the Third World 26.

Espinosa, C., 2017. Bringing about the global movement for the rights of nature: sites and practices for intelligibility. *Global Networks* n/a-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12158>

Espinosa, C., 2015. Interpretive Affinities: The Constitutionalization of Rights of Nature, *Pacha Mama*, in Ecuador. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2015.1116379>

- Espinosa, C., 2014. The Advocacy of the Previously Inconceivable: A Discourse Analysis of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth at Rio+20. *The Journal of Environment & Development* 23, 391–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1070496514536049>
- Fabricant, N., 2013. Good Living for Whom? Bolivia’s Climate Justice Movement and the Limitations of Indigenous Cosmovisions. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 8, 159–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17442222.2013.805618>
- Fairclough, N., 1992. *Discourse and social change* (Vol. 10). Cambridge: Polity press.
- Fairclough, N., 2013. *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.
- Featherstone, D., 2003. Spatialities of transnational resistance to globalization: the maps of grievance of the Inter-Continental Caravan. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, 404–421. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2003.00101.x>
- Ferry, E., 2016. Gold prices as material-social actors: The case of the London Gold Fix. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3, 82–85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2015.11.005>
- Fitz-Henry, E., 2018. Challenging Corporate “Personhood”: Energy Companies and the “Rights” of Non-Humans. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41, 85–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12255>
- Fitz-Henry, E., 2012. The Natural Contract: From Lévi-Strauss to the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court. *Oceania* 82, 264–277.
- Fletcher, R., Rammelt, C., 2017. Decoupling: A Key Fantasy of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. *Globalizations* 14, 450–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1263077>
- Flowerdew, R., Martin, D., 2005. *Methods in Human Geography: A Guide for Students Doing a Research Project*. Pearson Education.
- Fontaine, G., 2013. Los conflictos ambientales por petróleo y la incidencia del movimiento ambientalista en el Ecuador. *Letras Verdes. Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Socioambientales* 0, 11–13. <https://doi.org/10.17141/letrasverdes.3.2009.825>

Forsyth, T., 2008. Political ecology and the epistemology of social justice. *Geoforum* 39, 756–764. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.12.005>

Forsyth, T., 2007. Are Environmental Social Movements Socially Exclusive? An Historical Study from Thailand. *World Development* 35, 2110–2130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.01.005>

Forsyth, T., 2001. Environmental Social Movements in Thailand: How Important is Class? *Asian Journal of Social Science* 29, 35–51. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853101X00316>

Foucault, M., 2002a. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Psychology Press.

Foucault, M., 2002b. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Psychology Press.

Frank, A.K., 2017. What is the story with sustainability? A narrative analysis of diverse and contested understandings. *J Environ Stud Sci* 7, 310–323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-016-0388-3>

Frickel, S., Gross, N., 2005. A General Theory of Scientific/Intellectual Movements. *American Sociological Review* 70, 204–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000202>

Friedmann, H., 2007. Scaling up: Bringing public institutions and food service corporations into the project for a local, sustainable food system in Ontario. *Agriculture and Human Values* 24, 389–398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-006-9040-2>

Fukuda-Parr, S., 2016. From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: shifts in purpose, concept, and politics of global goal setting for development. *Gender & Development* 24, 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1145895>

Galeano, E., 2009. *La naturaleza no es muda*. Acosta A. & Martínez, E. *Derechos de la Naturaleza: el futuro es ahora*. Abya Yala: Quito.

Galeano, E., 1997. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. NYU Press.

Geertz, C., 1998. Deep Hanging Out. *The New York Review of Books*.

Gerber, J., 1997. Beyond dualism – the social construction of nature and the natural and social construction of human beings. *Progress in Human Geography* 21, 1–17.

<https://doi.org/10.1191/030913297671906269>

Gerlach, J., 2017. Ecuador’s experiment in living well: Sumak kawsay, Spinoza and the inadequacy of ideas. *Environ Plan A* 0308518X17718548.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X17718548>

Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2004. The Violence of Development: Two political imaginaries. *Development; Houndmills* 47, 27–34.

Ginn, F., Demeritt, D., 2008. Nature: a contested concept. *Key concepts in geography* 300.

Glassman, J., 2002. From Seattle (and Ubon) to Bangkok: the scales of resistance to corporate globalization. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, 513 – 533.

<https://doi.org/10.1068/d334>

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Gobo, G., 2008. *Doing Ethnography*. SAGE.

Goldman, M., 2007. How “Water for All!” policy became hegemonic: The power of the World Bank and its transnational policy networks. *Geoforum, Pro-Poor Water? The Privatisation and Global Poverty Debate* 38, 786–800.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.10.008>

Goodman, D., DuPuis, E.M., Goodman, M.K., DuPuis, E.M., Goodman, M.K., 2012. *Alternative Food Networks : Knowledge, Practice, and Politics*. Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203804520>

Goodman, J., Salleh, A., 2013. The ‘Green Economy’: Class Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony. *Globalizations* 10, 411–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2013.787770>

Gregor Barié, C., 2014. Nuevas narrativas constitucionales en Bolivia y Ecuador: el buen vivir y los derechos de la naturaleza. *Latinoamérica. Revista de estudios Latinoamericanos* 9–40.

Gudynas, E., 2016. Derechos de la naturaleza: ética biocéntrica y políticas ambientales.

Grugel, J. and Riggirozzi, P. 2012. Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and Reclaiming the State after Crisis. *Development and Change*, 43 (1), pp. 1--21.

Gudynas, E., 2013. Development Alternatives in Bolivia: The Impulse, the Resistance, and the Restoration. *NACLA Report on the Americas* 46, 22–26.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2013.11722007>

Gudynas, E., 2011a. Desarrollo, derechos de la naturaleza y buen vivir después de Montecristi. *Debates sobre cooperación y modelos de desarrollo. Perspectivas desde la sociedad civil en el Ecuador* 86.

Gudynas, E., 2011b. Los derechos de la Naturaleza en serio. *Respuestas y aportes desde*.

Gudynas, E., 2011c. Tensiones, contradicciones y oportunidades de la dimensión ambiental del Buen Vivir. *Vivir bien: ¿ Paradigma no capitalista?* 231.

Gudynas, E., 2010. The biocentric path: intrinsic values, Nature rights and ecological justice. *Tabula Rasa* 45–71.

Gudynas, E., 2009. La ecología política del giro biocéntrico en la nueva Constitución de Ecuador. *Revista de estudios sociales* 34.

Guha, R., Alier, J.M., 2013. *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. Routledge.

Haboud, M. "Ecuador Amazónico" in Sichra, I., 2009. *Atlas sociolingüístico de pueblos indígenas en América Latina*.

Haraway, D., 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, New York.

Hardt, M., Reyes, A., 2012. “New Ways of Doing”: The Construction of Another World in Latin America: An Interview with Raúl Zibechi. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, 165–191. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472648>

Harter, J.-H., 2004. Environmental Justice for Whom? Class, New Social Movements, and the Environment: A Case Study of Greenpeace Canada, 1971-2000. *Labour / Le Travail* 54, 83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25149506>

Harvey, D., 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford ; New York.

- Harvey, D., 1996. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Heckathorn, D.D., 2002. Respondent-Driven Sampling II: Deriving Valid Population Estimates from Chain-Referral Samples of Hidden Populations A Methodological Contribution. *Soc. Probs.* 49, 11–34.
- Heckathorn, D.D., 1997. Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations Studying Hidden Populations. *Soc. Probs.* 44, 174–199.
- Helwege, A., 2015. Challenges with resolving mining conflicts in Latin America. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2014.10.003>
- Herbert, S., 2000. For ethnography. *Progress in human geography* 24, 550–568.
- Heynen, N., Robbins, P., 2005. The neoliberalization of nature: Governance, privatization, enclosure and valuation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (after Jan 1, 2004) 16, 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045575052000335339>
- Himley, M., 2013. Regularizing Extraction in Andean Peru: Mining and Social Mobilization in an Age of Corporate Social Responsibility. *Antipode* 45, 394–416. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01001.x>
- Hopkins, P.E., 2007. Positionalities and knowledge: Negotiating ethics in practice. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, 386–394.
- Humphreys, D., 2017. Rights of Pachamama: The emergence of an earth jurisprudence in the Americas. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, 459–484.
- Ibhawoh, B., 2008. *Imperialism and human rights: Colonial discourses of rights and liberties in African history*. SUNY Press
- Igoe, J., 2003. Scaling up Civil Society: Donor Money, NGOs and the Pastoralist Land Rights Movement in Tanzania. *Development and Change* 34, 863–885. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2003.00332.x>
- Iltis, S., Phillips, L., 2010. Developmentalities and Calculative Practices: The Millennium Development Goals. *Antipode* 42, 844–874. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00778.x>
- Ince, A., Barrera de la Torre, G., 2016. For post-statist geographies. *Political Geography* 55, 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.04.001>

Inglehart, R., 1995. Public Support for Environmental Protection: Objective Problems and Subjective Values in 43 Societies 17.

Inglehart, R. (1989) *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R. (1997) *Modernization and Postmodernization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R. and Welzel, C. (2005) *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jabareen, Y., 2008. A New Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Development. *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 10, 179–192.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-006-9058-z>

Jazeel, T., 2014. Subaltern geographies: Geographical knowledge and postcolonial strategy. *Singap J Trop Geogr* 35, 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12053>

Jenkins, K., Rondón, G., 2015. ‘Eventually the mine will come’: women anti-mining activists’ everyday resilience in opposing resource extraction in the Andes. *Gender & Development* 23, 415–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2015.1095560>

Johnson, J.C., Avenarius, C., Weatherford, J., 2006. The Active Participant-Observer: Applying Social Role Analysis to Participant Observation. *Field Methods* 18, 111–134.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05285928>

Johnston, P., 1994. *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace*. Cornell University Press.

Jovchelovitch, S., Bauer, M.W., 2000. Narrative interviewing, in: Bauer, M.W., Gaskell, G. (Eds.), *Qualitative Researching With Text, Image and Sound : A Practical Handbook*. SAGE, London, UK, pp. 57–74.

Juris, J.S., Pleyers, G.H., 2009. Alter-activism: emerging cultures of participation among young global justice activists. *Journal of Youth Studies* 12, 57–75.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260802345765>

Kapoor, D., 2007. Subaltern Social Movement Learning and the Decolonization of Space in India 33.

Karriem, A., 2009. The rise and transformation of the Brazilian landless movement into a counter-hegemonic political actor: A Gramscian analysis. *Geoforum* 40, 316–325.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.10.005>

Kauffman, C.M., Martin, P.L., 2017. Can Rights of Nature Make Development More Sustainable? Why Some Ecuadorian lawsuits Succeed and Others Fail. *World Development* 92, 130–142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.11.017>

Kauffman, C.M., Martin, P.L., 2014. Scaling up Buen Vivir: Globalizing Local Environmental Governance from Ecuador. *Global Environmental Politics* 14, 40–58.
https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00256

Kearns, G., 2008. Progressive Geopolitics. *Geography Compass* 2, 1599–1620.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00125.x>

Keck, M.E., Sikkink, K., 2014. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press.

Kitossa, T., 2000. Same Difference: Biocentric Imperialism and the Assault on Indigenous Culture and Hunting. *Environments; Waterloo* 28, 23–36.

Kohl, B., Farthing, L.C., 2006. *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*. Zed Books.

Koons, J.E., 2008. Earth Jurisprudence: The Moral Value of Nature. *Pace Env'tl. L. Rev.* 25, 263–340.

Korovkin, T., 2000. Weak weapons, strong weapons? Hidden resistance and political protest in rural Ecuador. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, 1–29.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150008438738>

Kothari, A., Demaria, F., Acosta, A., 2014. Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. *Development* 57, 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2015.24>

Kotzé, L.J., Calzadilla, P.V., 2017. Somewhere between Rhetoric and Reality: Environmental Constitutionalism and the Rights of Nature in Ecuador. *Transnational Environmental Law* 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2047102517000061>

Kröger, M., Lalander, R., 2016. Ethno-territorial rights and the resource extraction boom in Latin America: do constitutions matter? *Third World Quarterly* 37, 682–702.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1127154>

Kuecker, G.D., 2007. Fighting for the Forests: Grassroots Resistance to Mining in Northern Ecuador. *Latin American Perspectives* 34, 94–107.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X06299081>

Kumi, E., Arhin, A.A., Yeboah, T., 2014. Can post-2015 sustainable development goals survive neoliberalism? A critical examination of the sustainable development–neoliberalism nexus in developing countries. *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 16, 539–554. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-013-9492-7>

Lalander, R., 2016. The Ecuadorian Resource Dilemma: Sumak Kawsay or Development? *Critical Sociology* 42, 623–642.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514557959>

Lalander, R., 2014. Rights of nature and the indigenous peoples in Bolivia and Ecuador: A straitjacket for progressive development politics? *Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies* 3, 148–172.

Larrea, C., Warnars, L., 2009. Ecuador's Yasuni-ITT Initiative: Avoiding emissions by keeping petroleum underground. *Energy for Sustainable Development* 13, 219–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esd.2009.08.003>

Latorre, S., Farrell, K.N., Martínez-Alier, J., 2015. The commodification of nature and socio-environmental resistance in Ecuador: An inventory of accumulation by dispossession cases, 1980–2013. *Ecological Economics* 116, 58–69.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.04.016>

Laurie, N., Andolina, R., Radcliffe, S., 2005. Ethnodevelopment: Social Movements, Creating Experts and Professionalising Indigenous Knowledge in Ecuador. *Antipode* 37, 470–496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00507.x>

Laurie, N., Andolina, R., Radcliffe, S., 2003. Indigenous professionalization: transnational social reproduction in the Andes. *Antipode* 35, 463–491.

- Lawhon, M., 2013. Situated, Networked Environmentalisms: A Case for Environmental Theory from the South. *Geography Compass* 7, 128–138.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12027>
- Lee, S.O., Kim, S.J., Wainwright, J., 2010. Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea. *Political Geography* 29, 359–369.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2010.07.005>
- Lenferna, G.A., 2012. The Universal Declaration’s Problematic Rights Justification. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 31, 314–327.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2012.10751778>
- Leopold, A., 1968. *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, Enlarged edition edition. ed. Oxford University Press, U.S.A., New York USA.
- Levitsky, S. and Loxton, J. 2013. Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes. *Democratization*, 20 (1), pp. 107--136
- Lewis, T.L., 2016. *Ecuador’s Environmental Revolutions: Ecoimperialists, Ecodependents, and Ecoresisters*. MIT Press.
- Li, J., 2008. Ethical Challenges in Participant Observation: A Reflection on Ethnographic Fieldwork. *The Qualitative Report* 13, 100–115.
- Lyons, L., 2009. Transcending the Border. *Critical Asian Studies* 41, 89–112.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710802631178>
- Machado, V., 2018. Geopolitics and Social Resistance: Flows of Latin America’s Natural Resources. *J Agric Environ Ethics* 31, 129–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9714-y>
- Mallory, C., 2006. Ecofeminism and Forest Defense in Cascadia: Gender, Theory and Radical Activism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 17, 32–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750500505408>
- Mann, G., 2009. Should political ecology be Marxist? A case for Gramsci’s historical materialism. *Geoforum* 40, 335–344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.12.004>
- Margil, M., 2017. The Standing of Trees: Why Nature Needs Legal Rights. *World Policy Journal* 34, 8–11. <https://doi.org/10.1215/07402775-4191552>

- Marston, S.A., Jones, J.P., Woodward, K., 2005. Human geography without scale. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, 416–432.
- Martinez-Alier, J., 2014. The environmentalism of the poor. *Geoforum* 54, 239–241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.04.019>
- Martinez-Alier, J., 2009. Social Metabolism, Ecological Distribution Conflicts, and Languages of Valuation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 20, 58–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750902727378>
- Martinez-Alier, J., 2002. *The environmentalism of the poor: a study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Edward Elgar.
- Martínez-Alier, J., 1995. The environment as a luxury good or “too poor to be green”? *Ecological Economics* 13, 1–10. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0921-8009\(94\)00062-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0921-8009(94)00062-Z)
- Martinez-Alier, J., Anguelovski, I., Bond, P., Bene, D.D., Demaria, F., Gerber, J.-F., Greyl, L., Haas, W., Healy, H., Marín-Burgos, V., Ojo, G., Porto, M., Rijnhout, L., Rodríguez-Labajos, B., Spangenberg, J., Temper, L., Warlenius, R., Yáñez, I., 2014. Between activism and science: grassroots concepts for sustainability coined by Environmental Justice Organizations. *Journal of Political Ecology* 21, 19–60. <https://doi.org/10.2458/v21i1.21124>
- Martinez-Alier, J., Temper, L., Bene, D.D., Scheidel, A., 2016. Is there a global environmental justice movement? *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 43, 731–755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1141198>
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930 – 1970*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McCarthy, J., Prudham, S., 2004. Neoliberal nature and the nature of neoliberalism. *Geoforum* 35, 275–283. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2003.07.003>
- McDonnell, E., 2015. The co-constitution of neoliberalism, extractive industries, and indigeneity: Anti-mining protests in Puno, Peru. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, 112–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2014.10.002>
- McFarlane, C., 2009. Translocal assemblages: Space, power and social movements. *Geoforum* 40, 561–567. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.05.003>

- McIlwaine, C., 2007. From Local to Global to Transnational Civil Society: Re-Framing Development Perspectives on the Non-State Sector. *Geography Compass* 1, 1252–1281. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2007.00061.x>
- McKeon, N., 2013. *The United Nations and Civil Society: Legitimizing Global Governance – Whose Voice?* Zed Books Ltd.
- McNeish, J.-A., 2018. Resource Extraction and Conflict in Latin America. *Colombia Internacional* 93, 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint93.2018.01>
- Merchant, C., 1990. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Reprint edition. ed. Bravo Ltd, New York.
- Merino, R., 2012. What is 'Post' in Post-Neoliberal Political Economy? Indigenous' Land Rights and the Extractive Industry in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. *Indigenous' Land Rights and the Extractive Industry in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador* (June 20, 2012).
- Miller, B. (2000). *Geography and social movements: comparing antinuclear activism in the Boston area*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Moore, J. and Velásquez, T., 2012. Sovereignty negotiated: anti-mining movements, the state and multinational mining companies under Correa's 21st century socialism. *Social Conflict, Economic Development and the Extractive Industry: Evidence from South America*, pp.112-134.
- Morell, M.F., 2012. The Free Culture and 15M Movements in Spain: Composition, Social Networks and Synergies. *Social Movement Studies* 11, 386–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.710323>
- Morley, J., 2017. '... Beggars sitting on a sack of gold': Oil exploration in the Ecuadorian Amazon as buen vivir and sustainable development. *The International Journal of Human Rights* 21, 405–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2016.1249140>
- Muehlebach, A. (2001). "Making place" at the United Nations: Indigenous cultural politics at the U.N. working group on indigenous populations. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(3), 415–448.
- Muhlhausler, P., & Peace, A. (2006). Environmental discourses. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35(1), 457–479.

- Mullis, D., Belina, B., Petzold, T., Pohl, L., Schipper, S., 2016. Social protest and its policing in the “heart of the European crisis regime”: The case of Blockupy in Frankfurt, Germany. *Political Geography* 55, 50–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.07.001>
- Muradian, R., Martinez-Alier, J., Correa, H., 2003. International Capital Versus Local Population: The Environmental Conflict of the Tambogrande Mining Project, Peru. *Society & Natural Resources* 16, 775–792. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920309166>
- Muradian, R., Walter, M., Martinez-Alier, J., 2012. Hegemonic transitions and global shifts in social metabolism: Implications for resource-rich countries. Introduction to the special section. *Global Environmental Change, Global transformations, social metabolism and the dynamics of socio-environmental conflicts* 22, 559–567. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2012.03.004>
- Musante (DeWalt), K., DeWalt, B.R., 2010. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Rowman Altamira.
- Muzio, T.D., 2008. Governing Global Slums: The Biopolitics of Target 11. *Global Governance* 14, 305–326.
- Naess, A., 1973. The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary*. *Inquiry* 16, 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682>
- Lindisfarne, N. 2010. Cochabamba and climate anthropology. *Anthropology Today* 26, 1–3.
- Nash, R.F., 1989. *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Nespor, J., 2000. Anonymity and Place in Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, 546–569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600408>
- Neville, K.J., Weinthal, E., 2016. Scaling up site disputes: strategies to redefine ‘local’ in the fight against fracking. *Environmental Politics* 25, 569–592. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2016.1154124>
- Newton, T.J., 2002. Creating the New Ecological Order? Elias and Actor-Network Theory. *The Academy of Management Review* 27, 523. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4134401>

- Nicholls, W.J., 2007. The Geographies of Social Movements. *Geography Compass* 1, 607–622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2007.00014.x>
- Nost, E., 2014. Scaling-up local foods: Commodity practice in community supported agriculture (CSA). *Journal of Rural Studies* 34, 152–160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.001>
- Noy, C., 2008. Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, 327–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>
- O'Connor, J., 1992. A political strategy for ecology movements*. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455759209358468>
- Offe, C., 1985. New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics. *Social Research* 52, 817–868.
- Oksanen, M., 1997. The Moral Value of Biodiversity. *Ambio* 26, 541–545.
- Panelli, R., 2010. More-than-human social geographies: posthuman and other possibilities. *Progress in Human Geography* 34, 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132509105007>
- Papadopoulos, D., 2011. Alter-ontologies: Towards a constituent politics in technoscience. *Social Studies of Science* 41, 177–201. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41301901>
- Paredes, M., 2016. The glocalization of mining conflict: Cases from Peru. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3, 1046–1057. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2016.08.007>
- Peck, J., 2011. *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. Oxford University Press, Oxford :
- Peck, J., 2009. Political Economies of Scale: Fast Policy, Interscalar Relations, and Neoliberal Workfare*. *Economic Geography* 78, 331–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2002.tb00190.x>
- Peet, R., Watts, M., 2004. *Liberation ecologies: environment, development, social movements*. Routledge, London; New York.
- Pelling, M., Manuel-Navarrete, D., Redclift, M., 2012. *Climate Change and the Crisis of Capitalism: A Chance to Reclaim, Self, Society and Nature*. Routledge.

- Peluso, N.L., 1992. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Pensado, J.M., 2013. *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long Sixties*. Stanford University Press.
- Perkins, H.A., 2011. Gramsci in green: Neoliberal hegemony through urban forestry and the potential for a political ecology of praxis. *Geoforum* 42, 558–566.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.05.001>
- Perreault, T., 2008. Latin American Social Movements: A Review and Critique of the Geographical Literature. *Geography Compass* 2, 1363–1385.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00142.x>
- Perreault, T. (2003). Changing places: Transnational networks, ethnic politics, and community development in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Political Geography*, 22, 61–88.
- Petras, J., 2011. *Social Movements in Latin America: Neoliberalism and Popular Resistance*. Springer.
- Philo, C. and Wolch, J., editors 1998: Through the geographical looking glass: space, place and society – animal relations. *Society and Animals* 6, 103–18.
- Pickerill, J., 2004. *Cyberprotest: Environmental Activism On-line*. Manchester University Press.
- Plumwood, V., 2002. *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. Routledge, London; New York.
- Postero, N.G., Zamosc, L., 2006. The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 11, 208–210.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jlca.2006.11.1.208>
- Power, M., Mohan, G., Mercer, C., 2006. Postcolonial geographies of development: Introduction. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 27, 231–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2006.00259.x>
- Power, E.R. 2005: Human-nature relations in suburban gardens. *Australian Geographer* 36, 39–53.— 2008: Furry families: making a human-dog family through home. *Social and Cultural Geography* 9, 535–55.

Protopsaltis, P.M., 2017. Deciphering UN development policies: from the modernisation paradigm to the human development approach? *Third World Quarterly* 38, 1733–1752. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1298436>

Prudham, S., 2013. Men and things: Karl Polanyi, primitive accumulation, and their relevance to a radical green political economy. *Environment and Planning A* 45, 1569–1587. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a45303>

Prudham, S., 2008. Tall among the trees: Organizing against globalist forestry in rural British Columbia. *Journal of Rural Studies* 24, 182–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.12.005>

Puchala, D.J., 2005. World Hegemony and the United Nations. *International Studies Review* 7, 571–584.

Quijano, A., 2000. Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” *Nepantla: Views from South*, in: Ramose, M.B., “Tranforming Education in South Africa: Paradigm Shift or Change?”, *South African Journal of Higher Education*. pp. 533–580.

Radcliffe, S.A., 2017. Geography and indigeneity I: Indigeneity, coloniality and knowledge. *Progress in Human Geography* 41, 220–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515612952>

Radcliffe, S.A., 2012. Development for a postneoliberal era? *Sumak kawsay, living well and the limits to decolonisation in Ecuador*. *Geoforum, SI - Party Politics, the Poor and the City: reflections from South Africa* 43, 240–249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.09.003>

Radcliffe, S.A., 1999. Reimagining the Nation: Community, Difference, and National Identities among Indigenous and Mestizo Provincials in Ecuador. *Environ Plan A* 31, 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a310037>

Rawson, A., Mansfield, B., 2018. Producing juridical knowledge: “Rights of Nature” or the naturalization of rights? *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618763807>

Raymond, H., 2007. The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 36, 177–190. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123321>

- Rhoads, R.A., 1998. *Freedom's Web: Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4319; Web site: [www](http://www.jhu.edu/~rhoads/).
- Riofrancos, T., 2015. Beyond the Petrostate: Ecuador's Left Dilemma. *Dissent* 62, 102–111. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2015.0058>
- Riofrancos, T.N., 2017. Scaling Democracy: Participation and Resource Extraction in Latin America. *Perspectives on Politics* 15, 678–696. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717000901>
- Rival, L., 2010. Ecuador's Yasuní-ITT Initiative: The old and new values of petroleum. *Ecological Economics, Special Section: Ecological Distribution Conflicts* 70, 358–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2010.09.007>
- Robbins, P., 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Rootes, C., 2007. Acting locally: The character, contexts and significance of local environmental mobilisations. *Environmental Politics* 16, 722–741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010701640460>
- Rose, G., 1997. Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*; London 21, 305–320. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/030913297673302122>
- Routledge, P., 1996. Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance. *Political Geography* 15, 509–531. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298\(96\)00029-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(96)00029-7)
- Routledge, P. (1997). Putting politics in its place: Baliapal, India, as a terrain of resistance. In: Agnew, J.(ed.) *Political geography: a reader*. London:Arnold.
- Rühs, N., Jones, A., 2016. The Implementation of Earth Jurisprudence through Substantive Constitutional Rights of Nature. *Sustainability* 8, 174. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8020174>
- Saavedra, L.Á., 2013. Commentary. Rights in the era of extraction policies. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement* 34, 122–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2013.761131>

- Sachs, J.D., 2012. From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals. *The Lancet* 379, 2206–2211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60685-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60685-0)
- Said, E.W., 2001. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin UK.
- Salleh, A.K., 1984. Deeper than deep ecology: The eco-feminist connection. *Environmental Ethics* 6, 339–345.
- Santos, B. de S., 2011. Epistemologías del Sur [WWW Document]. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana*. URL <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=27920007003> (accessed 2.24.17).
- Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., Kitzinger, C., 2015. Anonymising interview data: challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative Research* 15, 616–632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114550439>
- Saunders, C., 2007. The national and the local: Relationships among environmental movement organisations in London. *Environmental Politics* 16, 742–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010701634083>
- Sawyer, S., 2002. Bobbittizing Texaco: Dis-Membering Corporate Capital and Re-Membering the Nation in Ecuador. *Cultural Anthropology* 17, 150–180.
- Sawyer, S., 2001. Fictions of Sovereignty: Of Prosthetic Petro-Capitalism, Neoliberal States, and Phantom-Like Citizens in Ecuador. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 6, 156–197. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlca.2001.6.1.156>
- Sbicca, J., Perdue, R.T., 2014. Protest Through Presence: Spatial Citizenship and Identity Formation in Contestations of Neoliberal Crises. *Social Movement Studies* 13, 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.822782>
- Schlosberg, D., Carruthers, D., 2010. Indigenous Struggles, Environmental Justice, and Community Capabilities. *Global Environmental Politics* 10, 12–35.
- Scott, R.E., 1968. Student Political Activism in Latin America. *Daedalus* 97, 70–98.
- Sessions, G., 1987. The Deep Ecology Movement: A Review. *Environmental History Review* 11, 105–125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3984023>

- Shade, L., 2015. Sustainable development or sacrifice zone? Politics below the surface in post-neoliberal Ecuador. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, 775–784.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2015.07.004>
- Sharma, N., Wright, C., 2008. Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States. *Social Justice* 35, 120–138.
- Sikkink, K., 2005. Patterns of dynamic multilevel governance and the insider-outsider coalition. *Transnational protest and global activism*, pp.151-173.
- Sikkink, K. (2005). Patterns of dynamic multilevel governance and the insider-outsider coalition. In: Della Porta, D. and Tarrow, S. (eds) *Transnational protest & global activism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Shiraishi Neto, J., Martins Lima, R., 2016. Rights of Nature: The Biocentric Spin in the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador. *Veredas do Direito* 13, 111.
- Silva, E. 2009. *Challenging neoliberalism in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies*. 1st ed. London: Zed Books.
- Smith, S.1993. Bounding the borders: Claiming space and making place in rural Scotland. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18, 3, 291-308.
- Smithers, G.D., 2015. Beyond the “Ecological Indian”: Environmental Politics and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Modern North America. *Enviro Hist Durh N C* 20, 83–111. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emu125>
- Soja, E. (1980). The social-spatial dialectic. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70 (2), pp. 207–225.
- Soper, K., 1998. Representing Nature. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 9, 61–65.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10455759809358833>
- Soper, K., 1995. *What Is Nature?* Blackwell, Oxford.
- Soyez, D., 2001. Anchored locally – Linked globally. *Transnational social movement organizations in a (seemingly) borderless world** 10.
- Spradley, J.P., 2016. *Participant Observation*. Waveland Press.

Stahler-Sholk, R., Vanden, H.E., Becker, M., 2014. Rethinking Latin American Social Movements: Radical Action from Below. Rowman & Littlefield.

Stahler-Sholk, R., Vanden, H.E., Kuecker, G.D., 2008. Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-first Century: Resistance, Power, and Democracy. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Stephen, M., 2011. Globalisation and resistance: struggles over common sense in the global political economy. *Review of International Studies* 37, 209–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001142>

Stevenson, H., 2014. Representing Green Radicalism: the limits of state-based representation in global climate governance. *Review of International Studies* 40, 177–201. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210513000077>

Stewart-Harawira, M., 2012. Returning the sacred: Indigenous ontologies in perilous times. *Radical human ecology: Intercultural and indigenous approaches*, p.73.

Stone, C.D., 2010. Should Trees Have Standing?: Law, Morality, and the Environment. Oxford University Press.

Stuart, E., Woodroffe, J., 2016. Leaving no-one behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked? *Gender & Development* 24, 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1142206>

Szasz, Andrew. 1994. *EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Tanasescu, M., 2016a. *Environment, Political Representation, and the Challenge of Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, London. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137538956>

Tanasescu, M., 2016b. Local, National, and International Rights of Nature, in: *Environment, Political Representation, and the Challenge of Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 107–128. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137538956_6

Tanasescu, M., 2016c. The Rights of Nature in Ecuador, in: *Environment, Political Representation, and the Challenge of Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 85–106. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137538956_5

- Tanasescu, M., 2015. Nature Advocacy and the Indigenous Symbol. *Environmental Values* 24, 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327115X14183182353863>
- Tanasescu, M., 2013. The rights of nature in Ecuador: the making of an idea. *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 70, 846–861. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2013.845715>
- Taylor, Verta and Nancy Whittier 1992. 'Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization'. Pp. 104–29 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by C. M. Mueller and A. D. Morris. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Telleria, J., 2017. Power relations? What power relations? The de-politicising conceptualisation of development of the UNDP. *Third World Quarterly* 38, 2143–2158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1298437>
- Temple, B., Young, A., 2004. Qualitative Research and Translation Dilemmas. *Qualitative Research* 4, 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794104044430>
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. 1st ed. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Touraine, A., 1981. *The voice and the eye: An analysis of social movements*. Cambridge University Press.
- Valladares, C., Boelens, R., 2017. Extractivism and the rights of nature: governmentality, 'convenient communities' and epistemic pacts in Ecuador. *Environmental Politics* 0, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2017.1338384>
- van Schendel, W., 2002. Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, 647–668. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d16s>
- Van Teijlingen, K., 2016. The 'will to improve' at the mining frontier: Neo-extractivism, development and governmentality in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3, 902–911. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2016.10.009>
- Van Cott, D.L., 2007. *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Van Dijk, T.A., 1993. Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & society*, 4(2), pp.249-283.

Vanden, H.E., 2007. Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance. *Latin American Perspectives* 34, 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X06299082>

Walsh, C., 2012. “Other” knowledges, “Other” critiques: Reflections on the politics and practices of philosophy and decoloniality in the “Other” America. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1.

Walsh, C., 2010. Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements. *Development; Houndmills* 53, 15–21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/dev.2009.93>

Walter, M., Urkidi, L., 2017. Community mining consultations in Latin America (2002–2012): The contested emergence of a hybrid institution for participation. *Geoforum* 84, 265–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.09.007>

Wanner, T., 2015. The New ‘Passive Revolution’ of the Green Economy and Growth Discourse: Maintaining the ‘Sustainable Development’ of Neoliberal Capitalism. *New Political Economy* 20, 21–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2013.866081>

Warnaars, X. and Bebbington, A., 2014. Negotiable differences? Conflicts over mining and development in South East Ecuador. *Natural Resource Extraction and Indigenous Livelihoods: Development Challenges in an Era of Globalization*, pp.109-128.

Watts, M.J. (2003) Political Ecology, in *A Companion to Economic Geography* (eds E. Sheppard and T. Barnes), Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 257-274.

Webber, J.R., 2011. A New Indigenous-Left in Ecuador? *NACLA Report on the Americas* 44, 9–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2011.11722137>

Weyland, K. 1999. Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe. *Comparative Politics*, pp. 379--401.

Weyland, K. 2003. Neopopulism and neoliberalism in Latin America: how much affinity?. *Third World Quarterly*, pp. 1095--1115.

Weyland K. 2013. The Threat from The Populist left. *Journal of Democracy*, 24 (3), pp. 18--32.

- Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., Charles, V., 2008. The Management of Confidentiality and Anonymity in Social Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, 417–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701622231>
- Wilson, B.R., Curnow, J., 2013. Solidarity™: Student Activism, Affective Labor, and the Fair Trade Campaign in the United States. *Antipode* 45, 565–583. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01051.x>
- Wilson, J., 2014. Model villages in the neoliberal era: the Millennium Development Goals and the colonization of everyday life. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, 107–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.821651>
- Wilson, J., Bayón, M., 2017. The nature of post-neoliberalism: Building bio-socialism in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Geoforum* 81, 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.01.014>
- Wodak, R., Meyer, M., 2009. Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* 33.
- Wolch, J. and Emel, J., editors 1998: *Animal geographies: place, politics and identity in the nature–culture borderlands*. London: Verso.
- Woo, G.L.X., 2011. *Ghost dancing with colonialism: Decolonization and Indigenous rights at the Supreme Court of Canada*. UBC Press.
- Xiang, B. (2013). Multi-scalar ethnography: An approach for critical engagement with migration and social change. *Ethnography*, 14(3), pp.282--299.
- Yates, J. S. and Bakker, K. 2013. Debating the ‘post-neoliberal turn’ in Latin America. *Progress in Human Geography*, pp 1-29.
- Yanow, D. 2007. “Interpretation in Policy Analysis: On Methods and Practice.” *Critical Policy Analysis* 1(1):110-122.
- Youatt, R., 2017. Personhood and the Rights of Nature: The New Subjects of Contemporary Earth Politics. *Int Polit Sociol* 11, 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olw032>
- Zamosc, L., 2007. The Indian movement and political democracy in Ecuador. *Latin American Politics and Society* 49, 1–34.

Zamosc, L., 1994. Agrarian Protest and the Indian Movement in the Ecuadorian Highlands. *Latin American Research Review* 29, 37–68.

Zimmerer, K.S., 2015. Environmental governance through “Speaking Like an Indigenous State” and respatializing resources: Ethical livelihood concepts in Bolivia as versatility or verisimilitude? *Geoforum* 64, 314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.07.004>

Online Sources:

Ecuador Transparente (2015), SENAIN llevó a cabo espionaje sistemático a políticos y activistas, Last accessed 27/8/2016 URL:

<https://ecuadortransparente.org/publicaciones/senain/vigilancia/>

El Comercio (2015), La sentencia de Javier Ramírez sentó un precedente en el valle de Íntag, Last accessed 15/7/2018 URL: <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/intag-javier-ramirez-mineria-detencion.html>

El Universo (2013), “Rafael Correa comienza en la selva campaña de 'la mano sucia de Chevron” Last accessed 14/7/2018 URL:

<https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2013/09/17/nota/1456401/rafael-correa-muestradanos-ocasionados-chevron-texaco-selva>

Lonely Planet, Map of South America, Last accessed 2/5/18 URL:

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/south-america/>

United Nations (2016), 2016 Harmony with Nature Virtual Dialogue, Last accessed 14/3/2018 URL:

<http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/dialogue/r48Y!GuPmWRb9pyWxg09PIyZiPB8RK+uN7ynKQiQsqiuxSboBZ5j4KwsHYVwZuESAbVQgRW!FSxsMQZawuvh!w==>

Wikimedia Commons, Ecuador, Last accessed 2/5/18 URL:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Ecuador>

World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Right of Mother Earth (2010), Draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, Last accessed 20/7/2018

URL: <https://pwccc.wordpress.com/programa/>

