

Latin America *Transformed*?

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Abstract:

In perhaps one of the most provocative contributions to recent decolonization literature, Gardiola Rivera (2010) poses the following question and proposal in a recent book title: *What if Latin America Ruled the World?: How the South will take the North into the 22nd Century*. Gardiola Rivera concludes in this volume that Latin America and its inhabitants are now ready to realize their own potential. With particular focus on the region's persisting economic dependence on natural resource extraction and the fundamentally energy fueled nature of recent developments, this paper counters this assertion and proposes that the region's remains captive of its colonial and republican origins. Current economic conditions, political tensions and now myriad local, regional and national socio-environmental struggles focused on energy resources draw attention to the political dynamism of the region, but also reveal the fiction of a globalization made on any region's terms, and of any real harmony in Latin American efforts to rethink their relationships to the world. Recognizing these dynamics, I suggest in this paper an approach that balances Latin America's developmental wins with a more critical consideration of the region's persisting challenges and reliance as an enclave economy. Aiming to trace a course that takes both the political economic and epistemological nature of development seriously, and resource sovereignty as an inroads into understanding regional energy politics, the paper moves from an initial exploration of Latin America's recent decade of economic growth and development to a consideration of recent critical insights. Following an initial outline of the main features of energy and economic development in Latin America, I use qualitative research on recent socio-environmental struggles in Bolivia as a springboard into a more nuanced exploration of the wider limitations to the use of energy as a means to cultivate sustained development and political power. As such, the paper moves through multiple scales in order to analyze the linkages between energy and development, and to highlight the inherent tensions between competing versions of sovereignty and regionalism.