

FROM HAVANA TO QUITO: UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC REFORM IN CUBA AND ECUADOR

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Cuba and Ecuador are very different countries, but they share a common history and are politically linked by principles of the progressive Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) bloc. They are also engaged in quite distinct processes of political economic reform. In brief, Cuba is cautiously expanding its commercialisation while Ecuador is expanding its public sector. But there is more to it than that.

Travelling from Havana to Quito takes one from a warm, humid Caribbean island to perhaps the coolest city on the Equator. Quito sits in an Andean valley almost three kilometres above sea level. While most Cubans are mixed race Spanish-African, most Ecuadorians are mixed race Indigenous-Spanish.

Visitors arriving in Havana notice low levels of commercialisation and the poor state of buildings in Central Havana. Cuba is not the place to go shopping for the latest iPhone. Nevertheless, they may also have heard of Cuba's famous health and education systems and will probably notice that World Heritage listed Old Havana is being beautifully restored. The various contradictions of the city led one Cuban to write: 'Havana challenges the old Biblical proverb of "seeing is believing"' (Ledo Galano 2015).

In Quito, by contrast, visitors would notice much higher levels of commercialisation, both at the 'top end', with western brand products at first world prices, and a much more basic but extensive popular economy, often run by street people of modest means. Visitors might have heard of political changes under the government of Rafael Correa which on the one hand provoked a right wing coup attempt in 2010 but, on the other, has led to reactions from some indigenous and labour groups. Opposition

figures, including academics, have called Rafael Correa authoritarian, extractivist and post-neoliberal'. However, historian Juan Paz y Miño (2015) says the relations of power in the country have changed, and that those critics have not understood the Ecuadorian process.

What then might an educated observer make of the state of economic reform in these countries? Impressions can be influential but also misleading. The western mind, in particular, is accustomed to forming opinions very rapidly, either from broad preconceptions or from anecdotal evidence. For example, economic liberal critics (e.g. Frank 2014) characterise the 'command economy' of Cuba as having failed, and suggest a necessary reversion to market principles. This misses the logic of the 'updating' process, spoken of by Cuban economists and planners (Rodríguez 2015). Similarly, a number of leftists assert that Correa's project represents a modernising of capitalism, extractivist and elitist, pointing to the failure to expropriate monopolies (e.g. Petras 2012). They miss real social and economic advances. In both arguments the options seem very slim, reminding one of the saying that 'sins against hope are the only ones that attain neither forgiveness nor redemption' (Galeano 2004: 6). A process with momentum towards improvement, but without a final goal or even a distinct road map, may be the best hopeful option available, as the late Hugo Chavez said many times and as some western Marxists recognise (e.g. Wright 2004: 17).

To understand such changes in greater depth I suggest we must reflect on our method of learning, 'pause' our rapid judgement programming and reflect on two things. First, how might we build a mature perspective, adding to our own conceptual tools some account of the historical values and trajectory of these cultures, including indigenous ideas built around those histories? In this respect we should recognise that, for 200 years, Latin American progressive thinkers (e.g. Rodríguez 2004; Martí 1975; Mariátegui 1928) have rejected the idea of copying social or economic models, instead focusing on principles and values which might be shared across various socio-economic systems. Second, can we pay detailed attention to some social indicators of what matters in everyday life? Only after this, I suggest, might our impressions help illustrate or interrogate that more considered perspective.

This article makes a comparative study of economic reform in Cuba and Ecuador, drawing on those above-mentioned considerations. After setting the context of the shared and distinct histories of both countries, it

characterises the reform processes, arguing that they can only be properly understood as deeply historically contingent. Some examples are given of misconceptions that arise, either from overly theoretical preconceptions or from over-emphasis on particular critical features found in popular debate. These misconceptions reinforce, I suggest, the need for more careful historical examination.

Shared and Distinct Histories, Consequent Ideas

Let's first consider what historical legacies Cuba and Ecuador share: a Spanish colonial history, the Spanish language, a mixed race Latin American identity, and revolutionary independence struggles, built on the anti-colonial ideas and practice of Simón Bolívar, José Martí and Eloy Alfaro. A shared language means, in turn, a shared literature and many shared understandings of the world. Martí's prediction of the need for a 'second independence', against North American neo-colonialism, is another common thread. Similarly, Martí and Alfaro's notions of 'Our America' (Martí 1999: 118-127) contribute to understandings developed outside the ambit of those who consider just one third of those in the Americas as the 'Americans'. Latin-Americanism grows from mixed race, anti-slavery, indigenous and anti-colonial struggles, and is typically undervalued in outside perspectives. Yet on the basis of this shared identity we see in recent years, particularly under the influence of the late Hugo Chavez, the construction of a series of new regional organisations, the ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the people of Our America), UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations) and the largest group CELAC (the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), comprising 33 countries and nearly 600 million people (Anderson 2014b).

At the same time, Cuba and Ecuador have quite distinct colonial and post-colonial histories. In Cuba a complete genocide of the indigenous populations was carried out by the Spanish, several centuries ago. African people were introduced as slaves and, as in the USA, they built the most important sectors of Cuba's colonial economy. However, unlike in the USA, the emancipation of Cuban slaves was at the heart of the wars of independence. Spain abolished slavery in Cuba in 1886, as a result of several pressures, principally the first war of independence ('Creole rebellion') over 1868-1878 (Corwin 1967). The majority of Cubans today have both Spanish and African ancestors. In Ecuador, by

contrast, a large majority of the population has indigenous heritage. However, following the repression of indigenous cultures only about 7% identify as indigenous, with 80% regarding themselves as mixed race (León Guzmán 2003: 117).

Both countries have had intense land ownership concentration, by a tiny elite, but the Cuban revolution smashed that in the 1960s, with successive waves of land reform. In Ecuador a concentrated land ownership persists. Despite the promise of agrarian reform, only a little land redistribution has taken place (Telegrafo 2013, 27 Nov). Industrial monopolies were abolished in Cuba, but mostly remain in Ecuador. One important difference here was that pre-revolutionary Cuba had high levels of foreign (mainly US) monopoly control, including mafia control of a casino and prostitution economy. On the other hand, the corporate elite in Ecuador is mostly a domestic bourgeoisie, albeit one which, these days, has strong international linkages. Ecuador's monopolies supported independence from Spain. By the end of the 19th century, about 20 families controlled 70% of the cultivated lands. They dominated leadership roles and came to dominate industrial production, in the 20th century (SCPM 2015: 10-13). The power of those monopolies has long been a focus of Ecuador's radical liberals, but reaction to challenge has been fierce and often violent.

The differences between the two countries have been strongly conditioned by changes brought about under the Cuban Revolution, after 1959. Cuba underwent a complete reconstruction of the state, passing through several periods of substantial reform, notably in the 1960s and 1990s (Anderson 2002), before the current phase. The island initially maintained its role as commodity exporter, so as to purchase the oil denied it by the USA. Then the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 forced further dramatic changes. Ecuador's economy, by contrast, remained based on land and agricultural commodities until oil exports began to draw significant revenue in the 1970s. By that time, and for the next 30 years, the Andean country's governments were mostly repressive military-neoliberal regimes.

Nevertheless, Ecuador also has a long history of what might be called radical liberalism, confronting extreme conservatism. The most famous of the radicals, internationalist Eloy Alfaro, attempted a series of reforms, short of major land redistribution (Ayala Mora 2008: 93-96). In many respects Rafael Correa sits in this tradition. With the 'Citizens

Revolution' of 2006, an indigenous idea has been added, that of *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir* or 'good living' in Ecuador, and *Vivir Bien* in Bolivia (MRE 2009). They link the 'harmonious coexistence of human beings' to a similar harmony with nature (Larrea 2009: 21).

Cooperation between Cuba and Ecuador is the other important part of this short history. That resumed after Ecuador adopted its 2008 constitution, through bilateral agreements on education, health and social support, and in the new regional organisations. The two countries have kept expanding their bilateral relationship, for example through further agreements in 2014 on health, disability support, and infant development (MIES 2014). Table 1 sums up the themes of shared and distinct history, and cooperation.

Table 1: Shared and Distinct Histories

	Cuba	Ecuador
Common Histories	(1) Spanish colonisation and language, mixed race identity; (2) Revolutionary independence struggles; (3) 'Second independence' struggles against neo-colonialism; (4) 'Our America' (Marti, El Faro) (5) strong ethical systems (Christian, humanist, indigenous)	
Distinct Histories	(1) Complete indigenous genocide; (2) anti-slavery integral to independence struggle; (3) foreign bourgeoisie ejected; (4) socialist revolution and contingent development	(1) Indigenous and mestizo identity; (2) strong domestic bourgeoisie; (3) revolutionary, Alfarist liberal tradition; (4) very recent military-neoliberal history
Cooperation	(1) Ecuador's 'Citizens Revolution' of 2006 helps open bilateral programs; (2) since 2008, strong bilateral and regional cooperation, especially in education, health and social programs; (3) joint action to build Latin American regional groups, ALBA, UNASUR and CELAC.	

There are several consequent ideas that arise from these histories. First is the widespread conviction in Latin America that contingent histories matter, that emancipatory development must be founded in the particular histories of the peoples of the region, and not copied from Europe or North America. In this tradition there is the often-quoted expression, 'we invent or we fail', from Simón Rodríguez (2004), teacher of Simón Bolívar, in the early 19th century. This is reinforced by similar ideas from José Martí (Martí, 1975: 334-335) and the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui (1928) who said European ideas could not be transplanted into South America, where the social relations of production were so different.

The sharing of ethical and social values, holding them above socio-economic models, is thus well embedded in Latin American progressive traditions. Distinct Latin American themes have developed from the colonial and post-colonial experience. The idea of imperialism was taken as necessarily a foreign project, distinct from European left attempts to class it more as a function of finance monopolies (Lenin 1916). Since Bolivar's Congress of Panama, in the 1820s, the ideas of building self-determination through a continental alliance, abolishing subordination to the big powers and developing an independent body of international norms (Silva Escobar 2011: 23) has held great support. Integration and revolution are spoken of as 'at the heart' of necessary structural and cultural change (Britto Garcia 2009).

A great continuity was therefore seen between the classical imperialism of the colonial era and the economic domination which followed. In the late 19th century Martí wrote 'to be cultured is the only way to be free', stressing ethical education in emancipation and development, and foreseeing the need for a 'second independence' in a future neo-colonial era (Martí, 2009: 89-93). This was well before the neo-Marxist ideas of neo-colonialism were developed. From this distinct understanding of imperialism, the protagonists for change were seen as wider than a European industrial proletariat or, following the Russian experience, a proletariat plus a fraction of the peasant class (*e.g.* Fidel Castro in Molina, 2007: 179-180). From the broader conception of popular protagonism and the generally more inclusive nature of anti-colonial struggles, we see a distinct view of the nation-state in Latin America. Unlike the case in Europe, where there is often a chauvinistic sense of nation, and where critical perspectives may see the state as 'captured' by elites (*e.g.* Poulantzas 1973), in Latin America the state remains a contested site (Anderson 2012; Harnecker 2015). Reformist leaders like Eloy Alfaro, Salvador Allende and Hugo Chavez reinforce this idea.

From the commitment to social principles, as distinct from economic models, we see a broad acceptance of heterodox approaches. Amongst left Latin governments there is exchange of ideas but no real competition of 'models'. Associated with the emphases on social values, each Latin American reform project has drawn on a strong system of ethical values, from Christian liberation theology in Venezuela and Ecuador to Cuban humanism to the indigenous ideas of 'well-being' in the Andes. These values are incorporated to various degrees in their social policies and economic strategies. Intelligent observation of reform in both countries, I

suggest, must have reference to these common and distinct histories, including at times some quite particular ideas developed in the course of those histories.

Understanding Cuban Reform

Recent Cuba reforms, therefore, have an important historical context and a distinct ideological legacy, built in that context. The undisputed chief architect of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, says of his own contribution: 'it consists of having brought about a synthesis of the ideas of Martí and of Marxist-Leninism, and having applied them consistently to our struggle' (in Cantón Navarro, 2008: 11). That has meant selectively incorporating analytical and practical themes of capital, value, class domination and revolution from Marx and Lenin, into the humanist project of Martí, with emphases on education and culture, popular unity, common land, anti-imperial resistance and Latin Americanism. This section will explain the Cuban approach to reform and some key elements, such as the re-emergence of micro business, agrarian changes and wage values, in recent years.

The economic reforms since 2008 are presented by the Cuban Government as an adaptation and socialist updating, adopting Fidel Castro's theme that a revolution must 'change everything that needs to be changed' (CubaDebate 2011). The idea of updating comes in part from a gradual shift away from the strong 'democratic centralism' developed in face of external attack and economic blockade, but maintaining as a reference point those principles developed from Martí and Marx. The contingent adaptation of the 1960s (the 'sugar for oil' deal with the Soviet Union, which forced maintenance of the sugar monocultures) and again in the 1990s (allowing controlled foreign investment, opening up to tourism, charging new service fees) were openly acknowledged as 'survival' measures rather than of socialist idealism (see Hernandez-Reguant 2010). Similarly, the dual currency system introduced in the 1990s was a pragmatic measure, designed to save limited foreign reserves and to help protect the population from tourist-driven inflation. It did not take long before the dysfunction in maintaining this system in the longer term was recognised. Cuba has announced several times that it will revert to a single currency (see Anderson 2014a).

In a practical sense the recent changes have involved a type of controlled commercialisation, within the context of adaptive economic strategy. The main elements have been: economic efficiency measures in state owned enterprises (still more than 90% of the economy); decentralisation of decision making in state and cooperative enterprises; a continuation of the joint venture foreign investment practice (begun in 1995); expansion of the small or micro business sector; controlled and limited introduction of private labour hire; some new commercial property rights; ongoing emphasis on local food production through state, cooperative and individual leases; and a welfare reform which helps build stronger links between wages and prices (see Anderson 2014a).

Though some of these changes (*e.g.* private labour hire) appear conceptual departures, care needs to be taken in interpretation. Broad criticisms have been made, from time to time, that the Cuban approach has 'neither strategy nor model' (Font 1997), or that the state-centric approach departs from European ideals of socialism. To this Cuban analysts have generally responded that their approach is based on 'principles' with a 'necessary flexibility' of economic models (Díaz González 2005), or making 'flexible' economic plans which respond to particular conditions (Machado Rodríguez 2010). Behind this flexibility is a process of 'social accumulation', combining Marxist notions of economic accumulation with the Cuban idea (from Martí) of transforming human beings through education, health, social participation and the creation of humanist values. That element was said to have been why Cuba 'did not replicate the Euro-Soviet cycle' of a collapse of socialism (Bell Lara 2008: 83). Bell Lara (2008: 43-80) further argues that Cuba has focussed on how to manage the terms of its engagement with global economies, choosing (often through long processes of debate) which elements to preserve (education, public health, culture, basic agriculture) and with which to engage (tourism, commercial agriculture, certain health services), ensuring that 'the search for competitiveness does not annul the search for a new way of life' (Bell Lara, 2008: 94).

There were certainly heavy constraints on Cuban development, if we consider the events of the early 1960s and 1990s. It was not envisioned that the sugar monoculture would be maintained yet, after Washington cut Cuba's oil supply, the 'sugar for oil' deal from the Soviet Union was the best energy option on offer. Similarly, Cuba resisted mass tourism until the great depression of the 1990s forced a deep review of policy. At

that time not only tourism but joint venture foreign investment, certain new service fees and the problematic dual currency system were introduced (Anderson 2002). None of that was planned as part of an economic model.

Two linked changes in recent years have been the efficiency drives in the state sector and the strong expansion of the small (or micro) business sector. The former shed labour while the latter became the major 'sink' to absorb it. In the case of those laid off from state enterprises, Work and Social Security Resolution 35 (October 2010) provided the redeployment process, with union representation. The workers' options were either another position in the state sector, a 'cuenta propia' (small business) license, a land lease for small farming or employment elsewhere in the non-state sector. Retrenched workers receive their full salary for a month, then 60% for another period linked to their length of service (*Granma* 7 Dec 2010). So displaced workers were hardly thrown onto the streets.

While there had been 'tens of thousands' of small farmers in the mid-1980s, most of them incorporated into cooperatives (Miná 1987: 152-154), the expansion of small business ('cuenta propismo') began in the early 1990s. Then the several dozen authorised areas of small business activities of the 1990s became more than 150 in 2008, covering areas of transport, renting rooms, various forms of commerce and services. By late 2013 there were 444,000 registered small business people (Benítez 2013). Unlike those in informal sectors elsewhere, those in Cuba's small business sector remained linked to health, education and social security benefits. An important feature of the small business changes and new property rules was the reincorporation of a 'grey economy' that had developed due to the very modest wages since the 1990s. Rationed basic foods were being resold, properties sold or rented and services provided without license. Similarly, licenses for renting rooms were opened up more widely, whereas they had previously been available only to those without work. So liberalisation in several areas has made legal what had previously been an underground economy (Anderson 2014a). One visible feature of the expanded small business sector is a large network of restaurants and a greater availability of farm produce, albeit at higher prices.

Reforms in the agricultural sector – decentralisation of decision making in cooperatives and 'usufruct' leasing of farmland – began before the other recent changes, under distinct pressures. Cuba had tried to make a

virtue out of necessity in small scale and organic farming (Altieri *et al* 1999), after its sugar industry was decimated by the collapse of the 'sugar for oil' agreements. A highly modernised, export oriented agricultural sector began to shift back to a system of local food production. Reducing the food import bill had been a policy priority since the 1990s, but was renewed with the global food crisis of 2007-08, which lifted traded food prices (Castro Morales 2014) and so pushed the country's food import bill to more than \$2 billion per year (Café Fuerte 2015). This priority helps explain why small farming was the first sector with authorised private labour hire; a change later extended into small business (PCC, 2010: 22-24). Nevertheless, following principles set up by Martí, land remains the common property of the Cuban people. So, for example, foreign companies which invest in tourist hotels do not own land, and leases issued for small farming are all returnable to the state.

A final peculiar aspect of the Cuban economy, one often misunderstood, is the wages and prices regime. Some of this is due to the dual currency system (due to be phased out), some to the system of subsidies and some more due to the commitment to a range of free or shared services. It is often said that Cuban wages are abysmally low. For example, Carlos Seiglie wrote in 2001 that foreign companies were paying Cuban state enterprises \$500 per month for labour, while the worker's wage was only the equivalent of \$14, meaning that 'the state extracts on average a whopping \$486 a month per worker' (Seiglie 2001: 427). Similarly Carmelo Mesa-Lago, perhaps the best known of Cuba's North American economic critics, said in 2002 that 'the nominal wage in 1989-1998... had fallen from 131 to 73 pesos in that period...a decrease from \$20 to \$3 according to the CADECA exchange rates' (Mesa-Lago 2002: 6). The New York Times (2014), while urging Washington to abandon its economic 'embargo' on Cuba, noted that 'doctors now earn about \$60 per month, while nurses make nearly \$40'. All these calculations may have been correct in one technical sense but were quite wrong in substance.

It is indeed the case that the local currency has been stable for many years at 22 to 24 CUP for one 'convertible' peso, or CUC. However, there is still a range of goods and services available in CUP prices, such as many basic foods, the arts (theatre, ballet), public transport, home and personal services, books and certain commercial goods and services. On the other hand, imported goods, many manufactured goods and other 'non essential' goods and services such as mobile telephony, alcohol,

hotels, travel, imported clothes, consumer electronics are available only in CUC. The result is that, if Cubans on a monthly salary of 480 CUP buy mostly in the first group, their salaries are something like \$480; yet, if they buy into the second group, their salaries are more like \$20. Anomalies arise because the state, through its price regimes, has pre-selected many of those choices. A third factor challenging a simple 'exchange rate explanation' of wages is the large 'social wage' enjoyed by Cuban citizens. They enjoy their homes mostly rent and mortgage free, free education for life, free quality health care, universal child care and a number of other services for little or no fee, plus guaranteed pensions. These factors may help explain common misunderstandings that arise from imagining that, in Cuba, a dollar equals a dollar.

In December 2014 there seemed to be a breakthrough in US-Cuban relations, with President Obama renouncing Washington's 54-year-long economic blockade (called an 'embargo' in the USA) of the island (*El Diario* 2014). However it became clear that, apart from a surge in US tourism to Cuba, a much longer process would be needed for the US to unravel all aspects of its damaged relationship with Cuba. None of this change in relations has caused policy change in Cuba; the reforms were underway well before this.

Major challenges for Cuba involve reconciling the dysfunction of some measures adopted during previous crisis (*e.g.* the dual currency system) and deepening another, the drive into food self-sufficiency. There is also a new challenge: that of maintaining the sense of mission, the morale of the socialist project, in context of greater commercialisation and the proliferation of small business.

Understanding Ecuador's Reform

Reform in Ecuador has been very different. It was restarted by the Movimiento PAIS group led by Rafael Correa, shifting the country out of an unstable series of military and neoliberal governments, including one which briefly enjoyed the participation of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and its political wing Pachakutik (Ibarra 2010: 79). In a similar manner to Venezuela and Bolivia, the reform period began with a refounding of the country's democracy through a constituent assembly and a new constitution. Correa proposed a 'citizens' revolution' with radical liberal themes from

Eloy Alfaro: a citizens' secular state, inclusive Christian ethics and Latin Americanism (Paz y Miño 2014). The Ecuadorian President also cited José Martí's notion of a 'second independence' alongside the integration ideas of Bolívar (Correa 2009: 16-18).

This 'radical liberalism', from Alfaro to Correa, has substance. Alfaro had stressed secular education, flowing from a clear break between state and church, a state committed to citizens' rights and freedoms, liberal trade which broke from the Spanish monopolies, national integration and self-determination (linked to Latin American integration) and the recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights (MCDS 2012: 7-8, 14, 17-18). Correa has built on Alfaro's themes, stressing a citizens' state, the need to confront entrepreneurial monopolies (including those of the corporate media) and, in practice, working to displace entrepreneurial capital with industrial capital. After assuming the Presidency in 2007, he followed through with his promises to reject policy-linked agreements with the World Bank, to reject a Free Trade Agreement with the USA, to renegotiate contracts with oil companies and to invest heavily in the social sector (Silva 2009: 191). At the same time Correa has extended radical liberalism by identifying with the wider ideas of 'socialism of the 21st Century', spelt out by Hugo Chavez, and by speaking of a future 'deepening' and 'radicalisation' of the 'citizens' revolution'. He foresaw conflicts with the privileged sections of Ecuador's old trade union groupings, as he rolled back deals they had cut with some of the big companies (Abril 2009).

The 2008 'Constitution of Montecristo' met opposition from both right and left, imposing a strong, centralised and regulatory state, but one with mechanisms to enforce an extended set of citizens rights. The new *magna carta* easily passed the elected Constituent Assembly and then gained 64% of the vote in the subsequent referendum (Ibarra 2010: 95-99). Key elements were the creation of a citizen-focussed state with five distinct sectors (executive, legislative, judicial, transparency and social control, and electoral control), the regulation of monopolies, expansion of public education, health and social support, labour and media reform and a new emphasis on regional agreements, as opposed to neoliberal free trade agreements.

The Constitution built in the indigenous ethical concept of 'sumak kawsay' or 'buen vivir' (Larrea 2009: 21), meaning a harmonious structure of relations between society, nature and state, using concepts of

plurinationality, interculturality, solidarity and decentralisation', within a unitary state (Ibarra 2010: 101). This reform project broke with 'the traditional thesis of the left', broadening the idea of protagonists as a 'worker-campesino alliance' to include 'youth, the teachers, the women [and] the indigenous'. It said 'citizens are and must be the actors of change in Ecuador' (Larrea 2009: 19-21). Several areas of constitutional reform were driven by reaction to recent incursions of monopoly power. The constitution bans genetically modified organisms, bans privatised social security, bans foreign military bases and, drawing on indigenous law and in the face of unregulated oil companies, recognises mother nature (*Pachamama*) as a distinct entity with its own rights (2008 Constitution: Articles 401, 367, 5 and 71).

Strong investment in social programs, particularly in public education, public health, social security and labour reform (Paz y Miño 2014), brought results. School enrolments and rural health services expanded, while the economy grew through multiple, large infrastructure projects. Ecuador's poverty reduction plan has been 'much more ambitious' than the country's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets, according to the UNDP (*Prensa Latina* 2014). In the first stage of this plan (2007-2013) the citizen was seen as the protagonist and subject of rights, valued over capital. In the second stage (2013-2017) there was said to be greater social inclusion, removing the roots of poverty, a shift in the social and productive matrix and an emphasis on quality, efficiency and coherence in public policy (STEP 2014: 4). Income poverty between 2007 and 2014 fell from 36.7 to 25.6%, with extreme poverty falling from 16.5% to 8.6% (STEP 2014: 35). There have also been wider achievements in human development. Telesur reports that the primary school enrolment rate rose from 92% to 96%, between 2007 and 2014, while social security coverage (health care and pensions) rose from 26% to 67% (*Telesur* 2015). Inequality fell from a Gini score of 55 in 2007 to 48 in 2012, while the Latin American average was a diminution from 52 to 50 (UNDP 2010 and 2014; *Telesur* 2015). These are outstanding results, and in a fairly short time. Those achievements have helped sustain strong domestic support.

Correa has measured the reform process against what his party sees as achievable and sustainable, taking into account the very strong domestic oligarchy, which is mostly against him. An attempted coup in 2010 (Weisbrot 2010) and ongoing violent destabilisation gives some hint of the danger he faces. While he identifies with Hugo Chavez's idea of

'Socialism of the 21st century', Correa's program has been less radical, with fewer social participation initiatives than in Venezuela (Paz y Miño 2011). In response to those wanting to see more radical change, Correa has responded: 'as opposed to traditional socialism, which proposed the abolition of private property, we are using modern instruments, some unique, to mitigate the tensions between capital and labour ... [but] the supremacy of human labour over capital is the fundamental sign of Socialism of the 21st Century and of our Citizens Revolution' (Correa 2014). Nevertheless, there has been little property reform. The La Clementina property was purchased by 2,000 workers, with state assistance (*El Telegrafo* 2013, 27 Nov), while the San Vicente irrigation scheme helped 85,000 small farmers, rather than only serving the large land-holders around Guayaquil (*El Telegrafo* 2014, 28 Nov). Apart from such moves little has been done, despite the constitutional ban on large land-holdings.

This apparent retreat from agrarian reform and strong participatory mechanisms led to criticism from some on the left, including Alberto Acosta, the former head of the Constituent Assembly. Acosta agrees that there have been real social and infrastructure reforms, but maintains that people want 'a real democratic revolution based on civil participation' (Acosta 2013). He left the ruling party and now opposes Correa, accusing him of 'rentism' or 'extractivism', saying that the government relies on oil extraction, and relationships with big oil companies, to fund social programs (Acosta 2010). This is a wider criticism of several reformist Latin American governments (Lang and Mokrani 2014). According to Acosta, rentism involves: poor deployment of resources; vulnerability in the face of crises; concentration of riches and poverty; proliferation of corruption; environmental degradation; weak governance and social conflict. There is a need, he says, to re-read development in terms of *buen vivir* (Acosta 2010).

Others give more sympathetic critiques. Becker (2013) admits there have been 'genuine conflicts' with the country's social movements, but observes that 'Correa remains the most popular politician in Ecuador in decades, owing in no small part to the positive social programs he enacted' (Becker 2013). Yet certain key issues remain sensitive. In the case of the Yasuni oil reserve in Ecuador's Amazon region, after a failed attempt to get foreign sources to fund the non-exploitation of oil on conservation grounds, Correa said that responsible oil production would proceed, but with strict environmental controls. The drilling would affect

only 120 hectares of the zone and would assist with 'spectacular' social programs, including 'schools for the territories where these riches come from' (*Telesur* 2014). However, while oil extraction continues, there is substantial investment in renewable energy, principally hydro schemes. Ecuador is building eight big hydro stations, three mini-stations and a wind power centre, aiming to contribute 90% of the country's energy needs by 2016 (ANDES 2014). These are joint ventures between Ecuador and China, with some contributions from Russia and Brazil. The largest project, Coca Codo Sinclair, will by itself produce about 45% of national power demand (*El Telegrafo* 2013, 26 Aug). When these hydro projects are online, the national network expects to be exporting power.

This strong social and industrial investment tends to weaken 'extractivist' criticisms, in that it shows that petroleum resources are being deployed for diversified and human development ends, and that oil dependency is set to diminish. Historian Juan Paz y Miño (2014) says left criticisms of Correa make some valid points, but lack perspective. The popular President is in many respects fulfilling the Alfarist tradition. 'Correa has another vision', not to expropriate or nationalise but rather to establish a system in which 'capital and the entrepreneurs must not dominate the state; the citizens must dominate' (Paz y Miño 2014). Nevertheless it is a process which leaves a number of controversies, not least in the field of labour and indigenous rights. Media headlines give prominence to trade union and indigenous protests. Yet Ecuador's unions are divided.

The nature of the labour reforms seems consistent with a social democratic process. The new labour code includes: paying workers profit-sharing bonuses but placing a cap on those bonuses; protecting and regulating the right to strike, secret votes for union leaders; protection of union rights; regulation of unions by work areas (this is related to overlapping union structures); a wide prohibition of discrimination; protection of pregnant women workers; ensuring prisoner-workers have full workers rights; powers for inspectors of working conditions; provisions for the rights of artisan workers; and amendments to social security law which universalises coverage of workers, including the 1.5 million home workers (PAIS 2014; ELO 2014).

Opposition is diverse. The Quito Chamber of Commerce expressed concern that the reforms might reduce 'labour flexibility' (CCQ 2014: 1). Corporate media reports give prominence to opposition unionists who oppose the reforms (INFOBAE 2014). For example Pablo Serrano,

President of CEOSL, criticised the reforms for lack of consultation and not showing where the money was coming from to provide social security for women in the home. José Villavicencio, President of the UGTE, questioned the idea of regulated democracy in unions. 'The state is trying to control the unions', he said (*La Hora* 2014, 18 November: B1:1). A union-led rally in Quito on 19 November 2014, opposing the labour reforms, attracted about 10,000 people. From observation the participants raised a wide range of complaints. There were complaints over issues the government said the reforms addressed (job insecurity, decent wages); complaints arising from frictions caused by new regulation (new work regimes for public sector doctors and small businesses); reactions to new tax and social security regimes (which included defence of private funds); and complaints about 'extractivist' policies and the allegedly arbitrary arrest of several students. Some also opposed a constitutional reform proposal to remove term limits, allowing the popular President to stand for re-election (*El Comercio* 2014). In general there appears friction from the pace and breadth of change.

Yet this rally was significantly smaller than the pro-government rally in Guayaquil a few days earlier. The 15 November rally, which attracted about 100,000, commemorated a 93 year-old massacre of workers and promoted Correa's labour reforms. Richard Gómez, President of the 55,000 member FEDELEC, said he supported the reforms and that his union was working to create a new trade union federation, the CUT, which would link 60 labour groups (ANDES 2014). This was a reaction to older groups such as the FUT, said to have lost touch with workers. 'We agree in the medium term to work with the President on a new labour code which will protect public and private sector workers... stop dismissals, allow unions by branches' said Gómez (*El Telegrafo* 2014, 16 Nov). A majority of unionists seem to support the government.

A similar challenge for outside perspectives seems to apply to the indigenous opposition, mainly represented through CONAIE and Pachakutik. Asked about CONAIE in 2011, President Correa said: 'We make a difference between certain indigenous leaders and the indigenous movement. On the contrary, the indigenous movement has always been with us.' He cites the 2009 Presidential election, where his highest vote was in Imbabura, an area with a very high indigenous population (in Ramonet 2011). Similarly, in the 2013 elections, Correa faced five right wing candidates and a left group led by Acosta, CONAE-Pachakutik and some anti-government unions. Correa gained 57.2% of the vote and his

PAIS party 52.3%, while the Acosta-CONAIE coalition gained just 3.3% (Weck 2013). The representation claims of CONAIE-Pachakutik must be viewed with some scepticism.

Despite this conflict, CONAIE was one of the first beneficiaries of the redistribution of television licenses, under the government's media democratisation process. The Indigenous and Campesino Movement of Cotopaxi, which includes CONAIE, got its TV license and enjoys an audience of about 600,000 (Bellani 2014). The Superintendent of Information and Communication, veteran journalist Carlos Ochoa, says that dismantling media monopolies is one of the reforms taking place under the new Communications Law: '97% of [Radio and TV] frequencies were in private hands ... we are now at about 83% but, over time, we will have a redistribution ... by the law, which is 33% for the private sector ... 33% for the public sector and 34% for community groups'. The community sector can access state credit for the purchase of equipment (Ochoa in Anderson 2014c). As licenses are vacated they are reassigned. There have been cries locally and from the USA that the government is infringing corporate freedoms. However, the Canadian Foundation for Democratic Advancement says the reality of Ecuador's New Media Laws 'do not correlate' to US criticisms (FDA 2013). In many respects these reforms build on conventional liberal principles: avoiding conflicts of interest, dismantling monopolies and ensuring responsible reporting.

Yet the extension of radical liberalism into the wider social democracy implied both by the 2008 constitution and by identification with 'socialism of the 21st century' helps define the challenges for Ecuador's reform. Matters that stand out are the very weak agrarian reform and the failure to turn successful initiatives in liberal democracy into wider, participatory social democracy. The conflict engendered by the reform process indicates there is resistance, and a need for Correa to measure the pace of the 'citizen's revolution'. The process has not stalled; there have been substantial social gains. Nevertheless, historian Jorge Núñez Sánchez says Correa is going with 'lead feet' on agrarian reform 'in a country with more than half the population in rural areas, [where] there is no revolution without that component'. Others say Correa wants to 'achieve justice for communities' without disrupting agricultural production (Petriche 2013). Yet there is indeed a broad constituency which wants 'to deepen what is in the constitution, to overcome the landed oligopoly and democratise the factors of production, as the

constitution says' (Paz y Miño 2014). The idea of some type of 'social capitalism' with a 'citizens' state' would have to be redefined, in the longer term, to meet Correa's stated ambition to form part of a 'socialism of the 21st century' (Paz y Miño 2015). Yet none of this negates the arrival of a new era of post-neoliberal, social democratic reform in Ecuador.

Understanding Economic Reform Across Cultures

Both Cuba and Ecuador show strong achievements in human development and both are committed to adaptive change through sympathetic but distinct reform processes. I explained that Latin American thinkers have long focused more on social and ethical principles than on economic models. To this way of thinking adaptation or revision of socio-economic models is of less concern than departure from key principles. That is, adherence to the principles of independence and anti-imperialism, opposition to monopolies and promotion of wide participation, state protagonism and ethical education as the key to popular emancipation and social development. It is useful to bear this in mind when trying to understand Latin America's sympathetic but divergent reforms, and what motivates them.

In Table 2 below Chile has been included for comparison, as the highest ranking Latin American country in HDI terms, and one often identified as a model of neoliberal success. In the UNDP's 2014 report Chile and Cuba both appear in the 'very high human development' group, while Ecuador is in the 'high human development' group. The table shows Cuba's strong commitments to and achievements in education and health. Ecuador's more recent advances in income poverty and inequality, education and social security address these same areas but do not yet show as strongly. Both countries have linked their development to the new regional integration groups, in place of US-style 'free trade' models.

Cuba's more recent reforms involve an economic efficiency drive in state and cooperative enterprise; ongoing joint venture foreign investments; incorporation of the 'grey economy' into micro-business reforms, including limited labour hire; and some regulated property commerce. Key challenges include the management of past adaptations (*e.g.* agriculture and currencies) and maintaining morale in the face of new economic emphases (small business and competitive costings).

**Table 2: Select Human Development Indicators:
Cuba, Ecuador, Chile**

	Cuba	Ecuador	Chile
HDI rank 2014	44	98	41
Life expectancy 2013	79.3	76.5	80
Mean years of schooling 2012	10.2	7.6	9.8
GNI per capita (US\$PPP 2011)	19,844	9,998	20,804
Gender Inequality Rank, 2013	66	82	68
Infant mortality, 2012	4	20	8
Fertility rate, 2010-2015	1.5	2.6	1.8
Doctors per 10,000 people, 2002-2012	67.2	16.9	10.3
HIV prevalence	0.1	0.6	0.4
Health exp. as % GDP, 2011	10	7.3	7.5
Education exp. as % GDP, 2005-2012	12.9	5.2	4.1
Pupil teacher ratio, 2003-2012	9	18	22
Youth unemployment rate, 2008-2012	3.1	11.1	16.3
Internet users %, 2012	25.6	35.1	61.4

Source: UNDP HDR 2014, tables 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14

Popular misconceptions about the Cuban process include the idea that the Cuban approach lacks strategy, that a 'command economy' is being replaced by a market economy, or that Cuban wages can be understood simply through foreign exchange calculations.

Ecuador's reforms begin from the base of reconstituted democracy with a focus on citizens; state reform; the expansion of public education, public health and social security; and gradualist attempts to subordinate corporate power. Key challenges include the unmet demands for redistribution of rural land and the weakness in broader participatory initiatives. Nevertheless, the recent process has been termed 'a new historical cycle' (Pay z Miño 2015), one of which the late Che Guevara would approve. Che's daughter, Aleida Guevara, said that, whether or not her father agreed with a particular perspective, 'he would certainly give a hand to those leaders who are willing to change their peoples' lives for the better' (RT 2014). Oversimplified critiques claim that a radical process has been abandoned in favour of capitalism and 'extractivism',

and that the reform process faces substantial labour and indigenous opposition. Yet indications are that there is strong majority labour and indigenous community backing for the government. Key challenges lie in the limited moves towards agrarian reform and for a wider social democracy, both constitutional aims since 2008.

In a more general sense, when considering political economic change in other cultures, these studies provide illustrations of the need to have regard to the detail of contingent histories, as well as studying key ideas arising from those histories. In Latin America two centuries of post-colonial history, including struggles for the 'second independence', provide a rich source of such experience and ideas. Not least are the ethical traditions, Christian, humanist and indigenous, integrated in Latin America's emancipatory thought. To all this the intelligent observer should consider, I suggest, independent evidence of the broad social impact of reform. That is likely to be more useful in building understandings than the simple importation of theories, developed in other places and at other times.

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