

## Latin American Paths to Energy: Exploration and Appropriation of fossils fuel in Latin America

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Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, and spanning the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latin America has threaded many paths to secure and harness different sources of energy. Fossil fuels in particular were explored by several nations, in a variety of ways, to meet the growing energy demand brought forth by nation-building processes across the region, many of which included industrializing and commodifying efforts. These efforts have turned coal, oil and, more recently, natural gas into the main sources of energy of the region. The objective of this paper is to analyze the exploration of fossil fuels in a number of Latin American countries – Chile, Peru, Venezuela and Bolivia – focusing on their use for power generation. For that end, we have established a chronology, starting with Chile's endeavors in coal mining in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, moving to the oil economies of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Peru and Venezuela, and closing the last century with Bolivia's natural gas, which effectively linked the region's energy flows with its transnational pipeline.

In the first instance, the focus is on Chile. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, large scale coal mining began in the Arauco Basin, in the south-central part of the country. We discuss how coal gradually acquired importance and transformed the economy of Chile at the height of its exploration. Moving north, we turn to early 20<sup>th</sup> -century Peru. The search and initial exploration of oil in its northern littoral also impacted the economy of Peru, one of the first in the region to find oil in its territory. However, it was in Venezuela that the discovery of massive oil reserves around Lake Maracaibo had the most severe impact, making it Latin-America's most prominent representative of the 'petro-state' – a condition that permeated the country's life throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, we turn our focus to Bolivia in the later part of the 20th century and its reserves of natural gas. In the turn from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, natural gas has not only transformed Bolivian economic dynamics, but also gained importance as an element of energy transition in Bolivia and in Brazil, whose consumption of Bolivian natural gas has been facilitated by transnational infrastructure.

The crossing of geological and technical information and primary sources will be enable an environmental history approach in observing how the fossil fuel discoveries in the above-mentioned nations informed their process of appropriation and use of natural resources for energy purposes.

Beyond the more obvious economic impacts, understanding the elements that determined the patterns of energy production, consumption and transitions in different Latin American societies results in a better understanding of how these societies view the broader relationships between environment and energy in the last 150 years.