

Analysing the Rhetoric of Latin American Populist Leaders Regarding the European Union: The Cases of Bolivia and Ecuador¹

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Historically, Latin America has been a fertile ground for the emergence of populism. Scholars have identified several waves of populist governments flourishing in the region during the last century. The third wave began in the 2000s when leftist leaders came to power in some Latin American countries, a phenomenon called “the Pink Tide”. Two of the most notable examples of populist governments in this wave were Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006–2019) and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007–2017). Both leaders promoted an anti-elitist rhetoric highlighting a confrontational divide between domestic elites (as perpetrators of injustices) and the people (as victims). This rhetoric also involved external actors. The relationship with the great powers was permeated by the populist discourse based on the logic of “them vs. us”. In this context, the paper analyses the rhetoric of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa concerning the role of the European Union in their countries. Primary sources (speeches, press releases and official documents) are examined to understand the image built around the EU and to grasp how populist rhetoric portrayed the EU’s role in areas such as trade and migration. The result is a complex assessment of the ideas about the EU disseminated by these leaders, examining how Morales’s and Correa’s rhetoric evolved over the years and identifying similarities and differences between their approaches.

Keywords: *populism, Ecuador, Bolivia, European Union*

Introduction

Populism is an extensively debated topic in Political Science. Many scholars have devoted significant attention to the question of what populism is and how to identify it. In this endeavour, multiple theoretical and methodological approaches have been considered,

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resulting in different definitions.³ Some authors describe populism as an ideology that underlines the antagonism between “the elite” and “the people” in a society. Others prefer to label it as a discursive style based on a Manichean language that emphasises the logic of “them vs. us”. Finally, some scholars define populism as a political strategy that represents a specific form of mobilisation and organisation whereby the interplay between populist leaders and their constituents plays an important role.

Regardless of its different conceptualisations, populism is primarily distinguished by its hostility towards elites and the political establishment.⁴ While this characteristic is commonly observed at the domestic level, the question of whether populist leaders behave the same at the international level remains open. Understanding how the rhetoric⁵ about the antagonism between “the elites” and “the people” (“them vs. us”) may be extrapolated to external actors is a key topic when analysing populism in view of its implications on foreign policy actions. In this regard, the study of Latin American countries provides a valuable contribution, as many of them have experienced the rise of populist governments on multiple occasions since independence. Moreover, the role of external powers in the region has been frequently questioned and contested by many of the populist leaders that have come to power.

In this context, the role of the European Union (EU) as an external power in Latin America has been understood from different perspectives over time. The EU is counted among the great powers in the international system in consideration of its political clout and economic power in the world. Furthermore, “development, modernity and civilization have been conceived as a transfer from Western Europe and North America to the rest of the world”.⁶ This notion has placed them as part of an “elite”⁷ at the international level. Under this premise, and considering the historical background of the European colonisation in the Americas, the study on how the image of the EU has been portrayed in the region gains special importance in the context of populist governments that have based their rhetoric on the antagonism between “the elites” and “the people”.

In particular, this research aims to understand how the populist rhetoric of Latin American leftist leaders has portrayed the role of the EU in their countries, specifically studying the cases of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. The analysis focuses on identifying how the EU’s image was represented in their discourse and what were the implications of this rhetoric for their relationship with the EU. To this end, selected speeches of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa are examined to recognise what kind

³ GIDRON–BONIKOWSKI 2013.

⁴ ZAKARIA 2016: 9–15.

⁵ According to the Cambridge Dictionary, rhetoric is defined as “speech or writing intended to be effective and influence people”. Meanwhile, the Oxford Dictionary identifies rhetoric as “the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques” as well as “the language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience, but which is often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content”. Considering these definitions, rhetoric is understood, in this paper, as the use of language to persuade an audience by promoting and reinforcing certain ideas that may be of dubious veracity.

⁶ LÓPEZ-ALVES 2011: 51–77.

⁷ However, it should be noted that, within this elite, the EU is considered a supporting actor while the U.S. has been perceived as the main head due to its leading role since the end of the Second World War and its efforts to expand the so-called capitalist system globally.

of language they use when they talk about the EU, how they refer to the EU's role in their countries, and whether they appeal to the remembrance of colonial times to extrapolate internal hostility towards elites to external partners such as the EU.

The contribution of this paper is threefold. First, it sheds light on less studied cases of populism in Latin America such as Bolivia and Ecuador, considering that countries such as Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil have received more attention from scholars in the field.⁸ Secondly, the paper fills a gap in the literature on the Pink Tide leaders' foreign policy since most of the analyses in this regard focus mainly on their relations with the United States and China, leaving aside the study of other actors such as the EU. Finally, the paper contributes to enrich the debate on populist foreign policy in general considering that the implications of populism in domestic politics have been largely studied but its consequences in terms of external action require a deeper analysis.⁹

The article is organised according to the following structure. First, the conceptualisation of populism is addressed, introducing its main characteristics and discussing its implications on foreign policy and external relations. Secondly, a contextual framework is presented to examine the rise of populist leaders in Latin America during the Pink Tide and its implications for the relationship with external partners such as the EU. Third, the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador are introduced, portraying their peculiarities and providing a detailed analysis of the rhetoric of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa on the EU during their terms in office. The article concludes by presenting a comparative analysis of the cases and outlining possibilities for further research.

Conceptualisations of populism

Despite being a highly debated topic in academia, populism is a phenomenon notoriously difficult to conceptualise.¹⁰ Depending on the theoretical and methodological framework used to analyse it, different definitions arise. The literature in this field identifies three main conceptualisations of populism.¹¹ The first defines populism as an ideology or set of ideas.¹² Cas Mudde is the most famous exponent of this approach. Mudde contends that populism is a thin-centred ideology that “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.¹³ Under this approach, populism, as a thin-centred ideology, is usually accompanied by a thicker ideology, such as socialism or liberalism.

⁸ On the cases of populism in Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil see HAWKINS 2003: 1137–1160; BRADING 2013; GRIGERA 2017: 441–455; MUNO 2019: 9–26; WEHNER–THIES 2020: 320–340.

⁹ The need for further analysis on populist foreign policy has been pointed out by authors such as VERBEEK–ZASLOVE 2017: 384–405; BURRIER 2019: 165–193; WAJNER 2019: 195–225; WEHNER–THIES 2020: 320–340; WAJNER–WEHNER 2023: 1–13.

¹⁰ JANSEN 2011: 75–96.

¹¹ GIDRON–BONIKOWSKI 2013.

¹² This approach is endorsed by authors such as MUDDÉ 2004: 541–563; ABTS–RUMMENS 2007: 405–424; STANLEY 2008: 95–110; PANKOWSKI 2010; PAUWELS 2011: 97–119; KRIESI 2014: 361–378.

¹³ MUDDÉ 2004: 543.

Other scholars argue that populism should be understood as a discursive style.¹⁴ According to this conceptualisation, language is a key aspect when analysing populism, since strategic rhetoric is used to assign a binary moral dimension to political conflicts.¹⁵ Hostility towards the established order and the glorification of the common folk are the main characteristics of the populist message.¹⁶ Ernest Laclau is one of the most recognised authors of this approach. Laclau contends that a distinction between two groups (“us” and “them”) is constructed in populist discourse and used strategically since they constitute empty signifiers whose meaning can be interpreted at convenience.¹⁷

Finally, populism has also been defined as a political strategy manifested through specific policy choices and mobilisation practices.¹⁸ In this approach, some scholars focus on the economic policies implemented by populist governments;¹⁹ others examine their types of political organisation²⁰ and forms of mobilisation.²¹ Meanwhile, authors such as Moffitt and Tormey narrow their focus to the performative elements of politics and point out that populism is a political style in which particular performative repertoires connect the leader with the people.²²

Regardless of its conceptualisation, one of the prevalent characteristics of populism is its emphasis on the existence of antagonistic identities in society. Populist leaders stress a division between “the elite”, often described as corrupt and reluctant to lose their power; and “the people”, depicted as inherently good and represented as victims of injustices perpetrated by the elites. However, the criteria for determining who can be considered part of each group may vary from case to case. In fact, Hadiz and Chryssogelos contend that the meanings attached to the labels “elite” and “people” are continually reshaped by social conflicts based on the contest over power and resources in specific national and international contexts.²³

When studying populism, the analysis of its repercussions at the domestic level has been privileged in the academic debate. Yet, some authors have shed light on the foreign policy consequences of populist governments. Drezner holds that populist leaders tend to reject alternative centres of power beyond their personal control and are averse to any external interference.²⁴ Furthermore, he argues that populist leaders are more likely to escalate conflicts as they “tend to project anger as part of their leadership style”.²⁵ Meanwhile, Kane and McCulloch contend that a new form of populist governments characterised by nativist and anti-establishment sentiments has increased popular divisions over foreign

¹⁴ This conceptualisation is supported by scholars such as KAZIN 1995; LACLAU 2005; HAWKINS 2009: 1040–1067; PANIZZA 2005; JAGERS–WALGRAVE 2007: 319–345; ASLANIDIS 2016: 88–104.

¹⁵ HAWKINS 2009: 1040–1067.

¹⁶ TAGGART 2000.

¹⁷ LACLAU 2005.

¹⁸ This approach is supported by authors such as WEYLAND 2001: 1–22; ROBERTS 2006: 127–148; MADRID 2008: 475–508; ACEMOGLU et al. 2011; LEVITSKY–ROBERTS 2011; MOFFITT–TORMEY 2013: 381–397.

¹⁹ MADRID 2008: 475–508; ACEMOGLU et al. 2011.

²⁰ WEYLAND 2001: 1–22.

²¹ LEVITSKY–ROBERTS 2011.

²² MOFFITT–TORMEY 2013: 381–397.

²³ HADIZ–CHRYSSOGELOS 2017: 399–411.

²⁴ DREZNER 2017: 23–44.

²⁵ DREZNER 2017: 31.

policy issues and fuelled the formation of an inefficient and less experienced foreign policy apparatus.²⁶

More recent research has focused on comparing the foreign policy behaviours exhibited by populist governments.²⁷ These studies have found that populist governments formulate and implement a wide variety of foreign policy strategies. Thus, there is no homogeneous populist foreign policy. However, “the literature tends to neglect the diversity of populist foreign policies and the different contexts in which it unfolds”.²⁸ In this sense, there is a need for empirical studies that shed light on this diversity. This paper aims to contribute to this endeavour.

Finally, while this research recognises the variety of conceptualisations, the understanding of populism as a discursive style is the privileged approach. This selection is consistent with the aim of identifying populist rhetoric in the discourses of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa when referring to external actors such as the EU. Moreover, the analysis of the narrative that these leaders built around the EU’s role in Latin America allows us to understand the practices and behaviours exhibited by them in negotiation spaces such as the trade negotiations between the Andean Community and the EU. Therefore, the paper focuses on the use of a rhetoric that emphasises antagonistic divisions (“them vs. us”) extrapolated to the regional and international levels.

Contextual framework

After the difficult period of the debt crisis in the 1980s (also called the “lost decade”) Latin America went through the implementation of neoliberal reforms proposed by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These reforms were aimed at disciplining fiscal policies and stabilising the region’s economies after years of mismanagement. Privatisation of state-owned companies, tax reforms, market liberalisation and, in general, reduction of state intervention in the economy were some of the neoliberal policies promoted within the framework of the so-called Washington Consensus.²⁹

Although these policies helped to stabilise macroeconomic indexes such as inflation, the debt rate and the fiscal deficit, austerity measures led to an increase in poverty and inequality rates. In this sense, neoliberal policies meant a setback in terms of social development in the region, triggering high levels of social unrest. Disappointment with neoliberal reforms led to the rise of left-wing governments in many Latin American countries, a phenomenon called “the Pink Tide”.³⁰ Leftist leaders such as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández in Argentina, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica in Uruguay,

²⁶ KANE–McCULLOCH 2017: 39–52.

²⁷ For example BURRIER 2019: 165–193; WAJNER 2019: 195–225; WEHNER–THIES 2020: 320–340.

²⁸ WEHNER–THIES 2020: 321.

²⁹ LLISTAR 2003: 11–20.

³⁰ EDWARDS 2009; WEYLAND 2010: 1–27.

Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Michelle Bachelet in Chile among others, were categorised under this label. Some of them used populist rhetoric to come to power in their respective countries.

During the first decade of the 2000s, coinciding with the onset of the Pink Tide, Latin America benefited from an economic boom driven by growing Asian demand for raw materials, especially China's demand. The price of commodities increased exponentially and export revenues filled government coffers. Moreover, "the booming commodity sector expanded and drew in labor, raising wages and employment. The demand for more workers also spilled over to other sectors, such as construction".³¹ The economic boom allowed the implementation of redistribution policies and social transfers led by leftist presidents.³² The positive impact of those policies increased the popularity levels of these leaders and, in several cases, favoured their re-election.

In terms of foreign policy and external relations, leftist leaders tended to reframe the role of their own countries in the international order and questioned the influence of external powers in Latin America. Particularly, the U.S. was perceived by some of them as one of the biggest enemies due to its interventionist past in the region. Aspirations for greater autonomy appeared alongside new integration processes that explicitly excluded the U.S. (for example Unasur, CELAC and ALBA). In general, anti-hegemonic rhetoric against major Western powers increased. Rapprochements to non-traditional partners became more frequent in an attempt to diversify the region's foreign relations.³³

In this context, the relationship between Latin American countries and the EU has gone through different stages. In the 1990s, during the implementation of neoliberal reforms, the EU was eager to establish closer relations with Latin America as conditions for foreign investment were more favourable.³⁴ Countries such as Spain, France, Germany and the Netherlands were interested in investing in the newly opened Latin American markets. Furthermore, the EU was looking for opportunities to increase interregional trade in the context of a "post-Cold War world" in which regions were expected to play a greater role. The peak of this rapprochement was the establishment of a strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America in 1999. However, during the following years, the relationship lost dynamism as the Pink Tide governments had an anti-hegemonic approach and the Asian demand for commodities overshadowed the importance of the EU in the region. Moreover, the EU's priorities also changed.

It is important to note that the EU has approached Latin America by establishing dialogues with various actors in the region over the years. Thus, in addition to the strategic partnership with Latin America as a whole, the EU has also maintained dialogues with sub-regions and countries directly. Each of these dialogues has followed a different path depending on the eagerness of the actors involved to establish new agreements and engage more deeply with the EU. In the case of Bolivia and Ecuador (which are the focal points of this research) the relationship with the EU has developed

³¹ BALAKRISHNAN–TOSCANI 2018.

³² URIBE GÓMEZ 2018: 101–118.

³³ MOLANO 2012: 1–28.

³⁴ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 1999.

within the framework of the dialogue between the EU and the Andean Community (AC). The AC is a regional bloc created in 1969 and composed of four countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.³⁵

One of the most important topics in this dialogue has been trade. Since July 2005, the AC benefited from trade preferences granted by the EU under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) on the modality of the Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance (GSP+). The main aim of the GSP+ was to promote exports from developing countries by granting them tariff preferences to enter the EU market.³⁶ However, the AC was interested in establishing a long-term association agreement with the EU. Negotiations to create this association formally began in April 2007, but were suspended in June 2008 due to differences in the views of the Andean presidents. Evo Morales and Rafael Correa were reluctant to continue with the process due to their cautious stance on trade negotiations with the EU.

This disagreement led the Andean countries to follow different paths. Bolivia withdrew from the negotiations while Ecuador remained under certain conditions. Colombia and Peru maintained the initial enthusiasm and pushed the agreement forward. In this context, the European Council had to modify the authorisation mandate so that the European Commission could negotiate bilaterally with the countries and not with the Andean Community as a whole. This stage of the negotiations began in February 2009. In July of the same year, Ecuador suspended its participation due to disagreements with the EU proposals related to labour and environmental regulations. In February 2010, Ecuador rejoined the negotiations but maintained a cautious attitude by including some changes in its own agreement with the EU.³⁷ Finally, Colombia and Peru reached an agreement with the EU in 2012 while Ecuador, under Correa's government, negotiated for 4 more years and signed its own agreement in 2016.

The reluctance of Bolivia and Ecuador to participate in these negotiations can be explained by analysing Morales's and Correa's views on the role of the EU in their countries. The extrapolation of their populist rhetoric (the antagonism between elites and people) from the domestic to the international level provides key elements to understand their behaviour in dealing with the EU. Under this premise, the following section focuses on the analysis of the evidence collected from each case, explaining how the role of the EU has been portrayed in the speeches of these leaders and how populist rhetoric influenced their relationship with the EU during their tenure.

The case of Bolivia: Evo Morales's rhetoric

Evo Morales's rise to power in 2006 represented a milestone in Bolivia. As the country's first indigenous president, Morales led a profound transformation process in political, economic, social and cultural terms to favour the population that had been largely

³⁵ This regional bloc was called the Andean Pact until 1996 when it was reformed and renamed.

³⁶ LEVÍ CORAL 2013.

³⁷ LEVÍ CORAL 2013.

neglected over the years.³⁸ The fact that he belongs to the Aymara ethnic was understood as the beginning of an era of vindication for the indigenous population in the country (which is the biggest share of the Bolivian population³⁹). Furthermore, his government embodied a “re-foundation of the nation” that aimed to transform not only the role of the state at the domestic level but also its international projection and external relations.⁴⁰

Domestically, Morales (like other leftist presidents in Latin America) was in favour of a greater role of the state in the economy. This approach entailed a set of major changes in the management of the country. One of the most important ones was the nationalisation of gas and oil in 2006, right after Morales came to power. The state took control of the operations of foreign energy companies in the country on the grounds that Bolivian natural resources should not be under foreign management. Hence, these transnational firms had to sign new contracts with the government (which included higher taxes and royalties) and convert their operations into minority partnerships with the state-owned company YPFB.⁴¹ As a result, between 2006 and 2016, the nationalisation of gas and oil generated \$31.5 billion for the public coffers.⁴²

This reform allowed Morales to increase public spending and invest in social policies that improved access to public services for the majority of the population to unprecedented levels.⁴³ These policies raised the living standard of the Bolivian population, especially in rural areas. Basic services such as electricity and potable water reached large parts of the country for the first time during Morales’s tenure. Health and education indices also improved considerably.⁴⁴ In general, there was a successful effort to raise the standard of living of the poor population in Bolivia.⁴⁵

At the socio-cultural level, Morales promoted the “re-founding of Bolivia” as an indigenous country in the hope of reversing decades of contempt for the native heritage. Historically, the indigenous people had been relegated and discriminated against despite being the majority of the population. During his tenure, Morales exalted the Bolivian identity and tried to change the negative perception traditionally associated with the indigenous population. Morales’s presidency made many Bolivians feel that they were truly represented in politics.⁴⁶ He took advantage of this circumstance to use populist rhetoric to present himself as the true representative of “the people” unlike previous Bolivian presidents that were part of “the elite”.

At the political level, Morales proposed the creation of a new Constitution for Bolivia in 2008 with the aim of giving more power to the indigenous majority and “rolling back half a millennium of colonialism, discrimination and humiliation”.⁴⁷ The approval of the

³⁸ QUEREJAZU ESCOBARI 2015: 159–184.

³⁹ According to the latest census conducted in 2012 by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the indigenous population constitutes 41% of the Bolivian population.

⁴⁰ CEPPI 2014: 125–151.

⁴¹ KAUP 2010: 123–138.

⁴² EFE Agency 2016.

⁴³ UHARTE POZAS 2017: 13–48.

⁴⁴ JOHNSON 2010: 139–159.

⁴⁵ GÓMEZ SARMIENTO 2019.

⁴⁶ POSTERO 2010: 18–34.

⁴⁷ TAYLOR 2009.

final text was submitted to a referendum in January 2009 and 61.4% of the population supported it.⁴⁸ This Constitution refounded the country, naming it the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The name was changed in order to recognise the right of indigenous people to have their autonomous territories where they can govern according to their traditions and customs but always subordinate to the central government. The Constitution also included clauses on land redistribution to vulnerable sectors and reserved congressional seats for indigenous minority groups.

Changes at the domestic level were followed by changes in terms of foreign policy. Morales aimed at a more assertive international projection based on two main drivers: “indigeneidad” and decolonisation. “Indigeneidad” can be defined as belonging to and identification with indigenous origins.⁴⁹ This concept also implies the strategic use of ethnic identity to achieve the recognition of certain rights and the acknowledgment of the indigenous population as a social actor.⁵⁰ In Bolivia, this approach included historic vindications of indigenous legacies and proposals for alternative models to the neoliberal economic system based on indigenous worldviews such as “el buen vivir” (the good living) which refers to living in harmony with all forms of existence, prioritising respect for nature over economic considerations.⁵¹

Morales used the notion of “indigeneidad” to support his own views on global issues, mixing it with populist rhetoric to be recognised as the legitimate voice of indigenous peoples. As a consequence, Bolivia’s international projection and its relationship with some external actors changed. Morales’s foreign policy can be labelled revisionist since it involved the rupture of relationships that previous Bolivian governments had prioritised and asserted a new stance on trade agreements and diplomatic relations in general.⁵² This policy also entailed a contestatory attitude towards what Morales identified as colonialist practices. In this sense, it is important to highlight that the assertion of “indigeneidad” is closely related to the experience of colonialism.⁵³ The vindication of the indigenous identity leads to revisiting the history and rethinking the past and present role of colonial powers. Thus, “indigeneidad” was followed by the notion of decolonisation.

Decolonisation represents a restorative process that aims to restore voice and power to those who were oppressed.⁵⁴ Decolonisation seeks to challenge the superiority of the coloniser over the colonised. Due to his origins and ideology, Evo Morales has been one of the main promoters of decolonisation in Bolivia. His decolonial approach was strongly institutionalised at the national level. For example, “the Vice-Ministry of Decolonisation was created, with the mission of making forgotten historical processes visible and putting them on an equal footing with the Western version of Bolivian history”.⁵⁵ In the same vein,

⁴⁸ Vicepresidencia de la República Plurinacional de Bolivia 2009.

⁴⁹ QUEREJAZU ESCOBARI 2015: 159–184.

⁵⁰ FRANKE 2009: 47–60.

⁵¹ MAKARÁN 2013: 141–156.

⁵² QUEREJAZU ESCOBARI 2015: 180.

⁵³ VECCHIONE GONÇALVES 2009: 133–153.

⁵⁴ JOHNSON 2010: 139–159.

⁵⁵ QUEREJAZU ESCOBARI 2015: 166.

Morales's rhetoric was openly confrontational towards what he called "the hegemonic powers". His views were recognised as anti-imperialist and resembled those deployed by leftist movements during the Cold War.⁵⁶

In terms of discursive practices, Morales was enthusiastic in highlighting the changes he planned to implement during his administration. Domestically, for example, his inauguration speech reflected "the rescue of the insurreccional memory of the Bolivian indigenous movement" and "the decolonising utopia".⁵⁷ At the international level, Morales used his participation in global forums as an opportunity to draw attention to the injustices of the international system and the relegated role of Latin American countries in it.⁵⁸ In this context, he used populist rhetoric to position himself as the representative of the oppressed, emphasising an antagonistic division between "them" (the oppressive colonisers) and "us" (the oppressed people).

Decolonisation was also understood in terms of trade. Morales's goal was to reduce trade flows with big economic centres such as the U.S. His decolonial approach did not entail isolation from the world but an attempt to diversify trade partners⁵⁹ based on ideological affinity.⁶⁰ The logic behind this behaviour was the perceived need to strengthen ties only with like-minded countries (identified as "us") to avoid relations with colonialist actors (identified as "them"). In this sense, regarding the relationship with the EU, Evo Morales showed a contestatory attitude, which was reflected in his speeches both domestically and internationally.⁶¹ Unsurprisingly, the notions of *indigenidad* and decolonisation played an important role.

Bolivia was part of the association agreement negotiations between the EU and the AC since its inception in 2007. However, Evo Morales had some reservations about what should and should not be included in the agreement. In particular, he viewed the trade component with caution. He argued that international trade should aim to reduce the asymmetry between developed and developing countries by providing some guarantees for the latter (which are not provided for in agreements such as FTAs, according to him). In this regard, one of the most remembered speeches of Evo Morales regarding the association agreement between the EU and the AC is the one he delivered in Lima in May 2008 on the occasion of the 5th EU – Latin America Biregional Summit. At that time, Morales said: "FTAs are

⁵⁶ MAIRA 2007.

⁵⁷ CAUDILLO FÉLIX 2007: 183–201.

⁵⁸ ROSELL 2010.

⁵⁹ However, it is important to note that the expected trade diversification based on ideological affinity was not fully achieved. For instance, in 2006, at the beginning of Morales's term, the U.S. was Bolivia's third largest trading partner with a total trade flow of USD 756 million (according to statistics retrieved from the World Bank System, see WITS s. a.). In 2017, after 11 years of the Morales Government, the U.S. was still among the most important trade partners, ranking fourth, with a total trade flow of USD 1,390 million. Thus, trade with the U.S. continued to be crucial for Bolivia. Moreover, the trade relationship with the EU also continued to grow. The total trade flow in 2006 was EUR 290 million while in 2017 was EUR 1479 million (according to statistics retrieved from Eurostat s. a.).

⁶⁰ AGRAMONT LECHÍN 2015: 15–26.

⁶¹ It should be highlighted that although the coloniser of the Bolivian territory was Spain, Morales's anti-colonialist discourse referred to European countries in general. However, on some occasions, Morales specifically criticised Spain on issues such as the Spanish policy of treatment of Bolivian immigrants and the participation of the King of Spain in the Ibero-American summits.

instruments of colonisation and domination. The FTA [between the EU and the AC] does not sit well with Bolivia. I want to ask the presidents to submit to the people and not to the empire. Why not submit [this decision] to a referendum in the Andean region and let the people decide with their vote?”⁶²

This part of the speech reveals Morales’s opinion on FTAs. He contends that FTAs are harmful to Bolivia (and to developing countries in general) because they promote foreign domination just as colonisation did. Morales equated FTAs with colonisation processes, understanding them as promoters of exploitation and oppression of the weakest actors. Moreover, the analysis of this excerpt exposes the link established by Morales between the EU and the notion of “empire”, as well as the importance of giving voice to the Andean people instead of following the orders of the “empire”. The idea of decolonisation, as opposed to accepting orders from the big powers, is a predominant pattern in Morales’s discourse, as is the populist idea of the antagonism between “them” (the empire) and “us” (the people).

In the same speech, Morales stated:

The underlying issue is that they talk about free trade of products, of services, but there is no free movement of human beings. Why is there no treaty on the free movement of human beings? Let us be responsible with humanity: to enter Europe, there are procedures and visas; to enter Latin America, there is no (need for) visa. It would be important for these authorities to begin to reflect deeply on life, on poverty.⁶³

In this case, the migration issue is addressed by Morales to highlight the reluctance of the EU to open its borders to Latin American migrants. When he says “they talk about free trade of products, of services, but there is no free movement of human beings”, he refers to the EU’s interest in liberalising trade with Latin America while rejecting migration from this region. He stresses what he considers an injustice since Latin America is open to European migration and there is no reciprocal behaviour from the EU. Once again, his rhetoric endorses the logic of “them vs. us” in which “they” are unfair to “us”.

Later, speaking to the media in November 2008, Morales said: “We don’t want an FTA [with the EU] because sardines cannot compete with sharks.”⁶⁴ As Rosell explains, Morales used this metaphor to represent the asymmetry between Bolivia and the EU, as well as Bolivia’s role as a victim of a much bigger (and dangerous) competitor like the EU.⁶⁵ Thus, a negative image of the EU was reinforced through Morales’s lexical manoeuvres in multiple contexts and for different audiences.

The Morales Government abandoned the negotiations of the agreement between the Andean Community and the EU at the end of 2008. However, the EU decided to continue the process with the other Andean countries. In his speech to the Bolivian National Congress on the occasion of his third year in office in January 2009, Morales stated:

⁶² This excerpt from the speech was retrieved from Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Bolivia 2009.

⁶³ Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Bolivia 2009: 24.

⁶⁴ This declaration was retrieved from El Universo 2008.

⁶⁵ ROSELL 2010.

The EU has made a big mistake by giving up on negotiating bloc-to-bloc with the Andean Community [...]. It is a shame that the promoters of the integration processes are not consistent with their principles and put their commercial interests before the need for integration of our peoples. As far as I know, Europe is the great promoter of integration and now they only try to divide us in the Andean region.⁶⁶

In this case, Morales questions the coherence of the EU by comparing its principles (specifically, the spirit of integration) and the decision to negotiate separately with Ecuador, Colombia and Peru instead of with the AC as a whole. He argues that the EU generates disagreements and conflicts within the AC, whereas promotes integration in Europe. His purpose was to portray the EU as a troublemaker that seeks to harm the union among the Andean countries.

Finally, as repeatedly mentioned, Morales privileged a populist rhetoric that emphasised the antagonism between the EU (identified as “them”) and Latin American countries, particularly Bolivia, (identified as “us”). This rhetoric is used by populist leaders to create a division between two groups (the victims and the victimisers) and present themselves as the true representatives of the victims. In this sense, Morales identified himself as the representative of the native peoples in Latin America in the fight against the colonial legacies promoted by the great powers. In this line, a negative image of the EU was reinforced through Morales’s discourse in multiple contexts and before different audiences, preventing a closer relationship with this region and hindering the progress of negotiations between the AC and the EU from the beginning.

The case of Ecuador: Rafael Correa’s rhetoric

After several years of political and economic instability, Rafael Correa’s rise to power in 2007 represented the beginning of a new era in Ecuadorian politics. Correa was elected on the promise of changing the neoliberal system that had been implemented in Ecuador since the 1990s. His political project was called “the Citizen Revolution”. He aimed to undertake a set of socio-economic reforms that would encourage citizen participation in decision-making processes and promote a change in the economic development model to give greater prominence to the role of the state.⁶⁷

As in the case of Morales, high revenues from raw materials exports allowed Correa to implement redistributive and progressive public policies. The economic boom that Ecuador experienced since 2005, mainly due to oil exports, provided the Correa Government with the necessary resources to run ambitious social programs. As a result, poverty and inequality levels in Ecuador decreased exponentially.⁶⁸ Moreover, unprecedented infrastructure projects were developed throughout the country. However, the extractivist economic model was reinforced during this period, increasing the country’s dependence on changes

⁶⁶ This declaration was retrieved from CORNEJO 2009.

⁶⁷ BASABE-SERRANO 2015.

⁶⁸ MUÑOZ JARAMILLO 2014.

in commodity prices in the international market and perpetuating the vulnerability of the Ecuadorian economy to external shocks.⁶⁹

At the political level, Correa established a hyper-presidential system based on his personal charisma, polarising rhetoric and technocratic support.⁷⁰ In this sense, his approach was described as “technopopulism” because it was characterised by the appointment of technocrats to the highest offices of government.⁷¹ Moreover, since Correa identified himself as the maximum representative of the collective political will, he favoured the concentration of power in the Executive, which gave him the possibility of intervening in all spheres of government.⁷² As the media frequently criticised this way of governing, Correa got into constant disputes with them. He was reluctant to accept negative judgments about his administration. In this context, the Ecuadorian Congress passed a controversial communication law in 2013 that gave the government broad powers to restrict media activities.⁷³ Because of this media censorship, Correa was accused of limiting press freedom in Ecuador.

Like Evo Morales in Bolivia, Correa promoted the creation of a new Constitution as a necessary step to make the changes that Ecuador needed. Therefore, a constituent assembly was instituted in 2007 to draft the text. In December 2008, 63.9% of Ecuadorians approved the document in a referendum.⁷⁴ In Correa’s words, the new Constitution “laid the foundations for a new coexistence pact that allowed the country to get out of neoliberalism, recover national sovereignty over strategic resources, and relaunch the state at the forefront of social coordination”.⁷⁵

In terms of foreign policy, as the new Constitution granted a greater role to the president, Correa was deeply involved in all the decisions to be taken. At the beginning of his tenure, Correa’s foreign policy was characterised by a strong nationalist and anti-imperialist orientation.⁷⁶ As Córdova Jaramillo pointed out, “Correa’s discourse always included, both domestically and internationally, references to anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and reforms to capitalism as we know it”.⁷⁷ During his government, Ecuador maintained a distant relationship with the U.S. and rather diversified its diplomatic ties by establishing relations with other countries.⁷⁸ Besides, Correa used populist rhetoric to highlight the division between developed countries (“them”) and developing countries (“us”) criticising how the former take advantage of the latter due to the asymmetry of power between them.

Regarding the relationship with the EU, the possibility of a trade agreement and the treatment of Ecuadorian migrants in Europe were the most relevant issues during Correa’s administration. In terms of trade, Ecuador, like Bolivia, was part of the negotiations

⁶⁹ ALBUJA–DÁVALOS 2013: 83–112.

⁷⁰ MELÉNDEZ–MONCAGATTA 2017: 413–447.

⁷¹ MELÉNDEZ–MONCAGATTA 2017: 413–447.

⁷² MUÑOZ JARAMILLO 2014.

⁷³ MELÉNDEZ–MONCAGATTA 2017: 413–447.

⁷⁴ Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Ecuador 2008.

⁷⁵ This declaration was retrieved from New Left Review 2012.

⁷⁶ MALAMUD–GARCÍA-CALVO 2009.

⁷⁷ CÓRDOVA JARAMILLO 2018: 19.

⁷⁸ In this sense, as Díaz González points out, Correa’s government promoted the development and strengthening of relations with countries such as China, Russia, Iran and Belarus.

for the association agreement between the AC and the EU. When negotiations began in 2007, Correa had some reservations about the agreement, as did Evo Morales. In fact, the discourses of both leaders coincided in pointing out the importance of maintaining the independence of their national economies according to their own views on how international trade should be.⁷⁹ However, it is important to note that Ecuador's economy was more dependent on trade with the EU since the European market was, and still is, one of the main destinations for Ecuadorian agricultural exports.⁸⁰

Concerning the treatment of Ecuadorian migrants in Europe, Correa was a staunch critic of some policies implemented by the EU.⁸¹ For example, he strongly condemned the so-called Return Directive, which is the European policy that established common rules and procedures for the return of migrants residing irregularly in the EU.⁸² In this regard, Correa stated:

We are negotiating a trade and political cooperation agreement between the EU and the AC. What cooperation are they talking about when migrants are treated as criminals? There are many Africans but also Latin Americans. What cooperation are we talking about? If it were up to me, I would even suspend those negotiations. What do we have to talk about with a union of countries that criminalises immigrants?⁸³

Making emphasis on the colonisation period, he added:

We are going to respond strongly, comrades. Enough of being trampled on, of being humiliated. What would have happened if we had applied the same laws when the Europeans invaded us? If we analyse history, their well-being depends on all the looting they did in our territories. How long are we going to allow so much humiliation, so much indignity?⁸⁴

These statements reveal Correa's confrontational attitude towards the EU at that time.⁸⁵ He conditioned the ongoing agreement negotiations on the treatment of Latin American migrants in Europe. He drew a parallel between recent Latin American migration to Europe and the arrival of European colonisers in the 15th century, arguing that Latin

⁷⁹ BANCHÓN 2019.

⁸⁰ In 2007, at the beginning of Correa's mandate, the total trade flow between the EU and Ecuador was EUR 2,551 million. Bilateral exchange increased gradually over the years reaching a total of EUR 5,172 million in 2019 with a surplus in favour of Ecuador of EUR 550 million (according to statistics retrieved from Eurostat s. a.).

⁸¹ In this regard, it is worth noting that Latin American populist leaders of the Pink Tide had a different approach to migration compared to European populist leaders, since the former demanded more open borders and recognition of migrants' rights while the latter tend to favour xenophobic policies.

⁸² The Return Directive was adopted in December 2008. According to the European Parliament's Research Service, this regulation aimed to "ensure that the return of third-country nationals (non-EU nationals) without legal grounds to stay in the EU is carried out effectively through fair and transparent procedures that fully respect the fundamental rights and dignity of the people concerned".

⁸³ This excerpt from the speech was retrieved from Archivo Audiovisual 2017a.

⁸⁴ Archivo Audiovisual 2017a.

⁸⁵ It should be mentioned that Rafael Correa did not address his confrontational discourse specifically toward Spain (which was the coloniser of the Ecuadorian territory) but toward Europe as a whole.

America never expelled European migration when it arrived in the region. Moreover, he appealed to memories of the colonisation era to create an antagonistic division between “them” (Europeans as invaders) and “us” (victims of their invasion), which is a typical characteristic of the rhetoric of populist leaders. It should be noted that the Return Directive was criticised not only by Correa but also by other Latin American presidents including Evo Morales.

Despite these discrepancies, negotiations for the agreement continued. However, Correa maintained a cautious view of the EU’s intentions behind the process. For him, the association agreement was an understatement while the real interest was to achieve an FTA. In May 2009, during his weekly radio and television program called *Enlace Ciudadano*, Correa said: “The European Union can call it whatever nice name it wants, but the direction this is taking is to lead us towards a free trade agreement, and we are not going to accept it.”⁸⁶ He also pointed out that these trade negotiations included issues such as intellectual property in which “they try to impose neoliberal principles of intellectual property on us”.⁸⁷ His aim was to emphasise what he perceived to be the dominant character of the EU in negotiating with the Andean countries.

In July 2009, Ecuador withdrew from the talks due to a dispute over the conditions for banana exports and some disagreements with EU proposals related to labour and environmental regulations.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Correa insisted that the EU was offering nothing more than an FTA to the Andean countries. He claimed that FTAs only serve the interests of developed countries and perpetuate inequality in the international system. In this regard, he stated during a radio interview: “I ask: Has the U.S. signed an FTA with Europe? Or Europe with Japan? No, it is the developed countries that sign it with the underdeveloped countries to guarantee free access to their goods, because they know that they are going to gain from it.”⁸⁹

However, Correa had to reconsider his approach after Colombia and Peru signed their trade agreement with the EU. The entry into force of that agreement jeopardised Ecuadorian economic interests since agricultural products from Colombia and Peru would be more competitive in the EU. Therefore, Correa’s discourse underwent a transformation from a confrontational attitude to a more pragmatic approach when dealing with the EU. In this sense, Malamud and García-Calvo point out that, in terms of international politics, there was a learning process that led Correa to adopt pragmatic positions in order to defend better Ecuadorian interests.⁹⁰ For example, in May 2011, Correa declared: “We go to international trade intelligently, in a patriotic way. And we go, if possible, [...] to a trade agreement and not an FTA with the European Union, beneficial for both parties, avoiding the neocolonialism that has been imposed on other treaties.”⁹¹

This excerpt from Correa’s speech reveals the change in his rhetoric regarding the EU. Although he continued to argue that there is a link between neocolonialism and the

⁸⁶ This declaration was retrieved from Archivo Audiovisual 2017b.

⁸⁷ Archivo Audiovisual 2017b.

⁸⁸ LEVÍ CORAL 2013.

⁸⁹ This declaration was retrieved from MENA ERAZO 2010.

⁹⁰ MALAMUD–GARCÍA-CALVO 2009.

⁹¹ This declaration was retrieved from ESTÉVEZ 2012.

signing of FTAs, his position became more conciliatory and he showed more willingness to reach an agreement with the EU. Yet, he insisted that he wanted to obtain a “development agreement” with the EU rather than an FTA. In August 2012, during his weekly radio and television program, Correa said: “Our political will is to sign a treaty with the European Union, but we are not going to sign an FTA. We are going to sign a trade agreement that truly benefits our country and, obviously, that also benefits Europe.”⁹²

His discourse became less confrontational and his hostile attitude diminished. In this declaration, Correa portrayed the EU as a partner rather than an enemy that takes advantage of the negotiations. This time he did not appeal to rhetoric about neocolonialism or neoliberal impositions. He was more willing to recognise the role of the EU as one of the main markets for Ecuador’s non-oil exports.⁹³ Thus, his positions became progressively more pragmatic in consideration of the expected disadvantages of not having a trade agreement with the EU, especially for Ecuadorian agricultural products. The reasons for his change of attitude were also made explicit in some of his speeches. For example, in July 2014, he stated:

We have to be realistic because economies that export goods very similar to ours, such as Colombia and Peru [...] have already signed those agreements. So we have to be very objective on this. Honestly, if I didn’t have the pressure that we don’t have the tariff preferences that Colombia and Peru have [...] I wouldn’t worry about signing a trade agreement [with the EU]. But the reality is different.⁹⁴

In 2014, after several rounds of negotiation, Ecuador and the EU reached a trade agreement that, according to Correa, is not an FTA. Two years later, in November 2016, the Ecuadorian Government signed the Protocol of Accession to the Multiparty Trade Agreement with the EU, of which Colombia and Peru were already part. Back then, Correa said in an interview: “The agreement we have signed with Europe cannot be called a free trade [agreement]. There are a series of protection restrictions for our small producers, for our agricultural sector, for public procurement, a powerful development instrument that we were not going to give in.”⁹⁵ He further stressed: “If we did not lose the [GSP+] tariff preferences in December, I would not have negotiated a multiparty agreement with the European Union.”⁹⁶

Certainly, the pressure of losing preferential access to the European market accelerated the pace of negotiations and influenced Correa’s change of attitude. As Meléndez and Moncagatta point out, the signing of the agreement with the EU constituted a sacrifice of ideological principles for the Correa Government.⁹⁷ However, Córdova Jaramillo argues

⁹² This declaration was retrieved from BBC News 2012.

⁹³ El Economista 2014.

⁹⁴ This excerpt from the speech was retrieved from Telesur TV 2014.

⁹⁵ This declaration was retrieved from Medios Públicos EP 2016.

⁹⁶ Medios Públicos EP 2016.

⁹⁷ MELÉNDEZ–MONCAGATTA 2017: 421.

that Correa's foreign policy orientation was, in general, a mixture of ideological and pragmatic aspects.⁹⁸ In this sense, his populist rhetoric based on the antagonism between "them" and "us" was replaced by a less confrontational approach over time.

Conclusions

Evo Morales and Rafael Correa were recognised for the profound changes that their governments brought to Bolivia and Ecuador respectively. Both represented the beginning of a new political era in their countries. Consequently, their rhetoric was characterised by the refoundational sense of their political projects that aimed to mark a solid break with the past. This sense of exceptionalism was fuelled by their populist discourse according to which they were the only true voice of "the people" in the context of a confrontation against "the elites". Their governments were favoured by an economic boom that allowed them to implement redistributive social programs that increased their popularity and reinforced their role as representatives of "the people".

This populist rhetoric was also extrapolated to the international level, specifically to the relationship with the EU. However, although both leaders maintained a confrontational position towards the EU at the beginning, they followed different approaches later. On the one hand, Evo Morales championed the vindication of Bolivia's native heritage, highlighting the negative legacies of the colonisation period. His government sought to represent the rise of indigenous power, which implied the rejection of what were perceived as colonialist attempts to assert control over the country. In this sense, the agreement negotiations between the AC and the EU were seen by Morales as a European effort to impose unfavourable conditions for Bolivia's development. Moreover, Morales's rhetoric underlined the asymmetry between Latin America and the EU and how it was reflected, for example, in European policies to contain migration from the region. A negative image of the EU based on the logic of "them vs. us" was reinforced through Morales's discourse in multiple contexts and before different audiences.

On the other hand, Rafael Correa's government was characterised by a strong nationalist and anti-colonialist orientation. At the beginning of his term, his rhetoric revolved around the importance of maintaining the independence of the Ecuadorian economy and diversifying the country's diplomatic relations. This implied questioning the role of actors such as the EU by taking a critical stance on the agreement that was being negotiated between the AC and the EU and even temporarily withdrawing from the talks. However, after observing the progress of the trade agreement between the EU and other Andean countries (and in the face of the imminent cancelation of trade preferences for Ecuador) Correa had to change his discourse to a moderate and pragmatic rhetoric. This is explained by the fact that Ecuador had a higher dependence on exports to the EU (especially agricultural products) compared to Bolivia. Thus, Correa moved towards a more conciliatory position in which references to European neocolonialism gradually decreased. His rhetoric shifted from constantly attacking the EU to focusing on the refusal

⁹⁸ CÓRDOVA JARAMILLO 2018.

to negotiate an FTA. The discourse on the EU evolved from portraying it as a colonising actor to considering it only as a trading partner. In the end, Correa went ahead with the negotiations and signed an agreement with the EU, which represented an ideological sacrifice for him as he had rejected this option in previous years.

When analysing the speeches of these leaders, several similarities were found in their rhetoric. Morales and Correa maintained a frontal opposition to what they perceived as colonialist practices in their countries. They sought to vindicate the role of “the people” in the face of “oppression and abuse” by domestic and international elites. Regarding the relationship with the EU, migration and trade were the most important issues for both leaders. In terms of migration, they coincided in condemning the EU’s management of immigration from Latin America. In particular, they criticised that, in the negotiations of the agreement between the AC and the EU, the free movement of goods and services was promoted while the free movement of people was hindered. In terms of trade, Morales and Correa had a negative view of the negotiation of an FTA with the EU. In their speeches, FTAs were portrayed as instruments of colonisation from which only developed countries benefit. Moreover, the notion of asymmetry between Latin American countries and the EU was constantly highlighted by them to justify their position in the negotiation and the concessions they tried to obtain.

Regarding the differences, Morales’s rhetoric placed more emphasis on the recognition of the power of the indigenous population, as he is part of one of the most important indigenous ethnic groups in Bolivia and identified himself as their legitimate voice. The notion of “indigeneidad” played an important role in his rhetoric by claiming the importance of indigenous legacies and the recognition of ethnic groups as social actors. Meanwhile, Correa’s discourse was less related to the indigenous population since he does not belong to any specific native ethnicity, so his leadership did not depend on that aspect. Furthermore, Morales held a stronger ideological position based on the decolonisation approach that openly challenged the superiority of the coloniser over the colonised peoples. Morales’s rhetoric was more incisive in references to the colonisation period and highlighted more vehemently its negative legacies in Latin America. In contrast, Correa adopted a more moderate view that also condemned colonisation and questioned the role of the EU in Latin America but was more willing to adapt his rhetoric to the circumstances.

Finally, it is clear that the use of certain rhetoric influences the image that is constructed about a certain actor. In this case, at the beginning of the Morales and Correa Governments, an image of the EU as a promoter of colonialism was reinforced, limiting the possibility of negotiating an agreement with that region. The populist logic of “them vs. us” was promoted and replicated in different spheres and levels. Their discourses portrayed the EU as “an empire”, “a dangerous competitor” and, in general, as an “elite” that perpetuates injustices against “us” (“the people”). Thus, the domestic antagonism between “the elite” and “the people” was extrapolated to the relationship with the EU. However, rhetoric can change at convenience according to the circumstances, as was in the case with Correa.

As for further research, it is recommended to explore the populist rhetoric of other Latin American leaders regarding the EU in order to compare them with the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, and identify whether there is any common pattern across the region. Another research direction is to conduct an analysis of the Latin American populist

rhetoric on the role of the U.S. in the region and compare it with the role of the EU to point out the similarities and differences between them. Studies in this direction are especially important in the context of the rise of non-Western powers, since the image that has been portrayed of the EU and the U.S. in Latin America may determine future alliances with these actors in future reconfigurations of the international system.

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