

Reproducing the Imperial Mode of Living in Times of Climate Crisis: Green(ing) Extractivisms and Eco-territorial Conflicts in the Chilean, Mexican and Peruvian Mining Sector [1]

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Abstract

The climate crisis is coming to a head. The technological solutions for an energy transition, including solar panels and wind turbines, however, require a material base. Copper, lithium, and silver are imported from Latin American countries, the costs of which are externalized and unequally distributed over Nature and societies. Informed by the concept “imperial mode of living”, we identify how this transfer is possible, namely based on dominant discourses and practices that are legitimized by institutions, amongst others. Insights from dependency theory unveil extractivist structures which are currently greened and thus continue to safeguard this century-old exchange. The case studies on Chile, Peru, and Mexico show how the greening of extractivisms is facilitated but also contested by different collective actors. Certain discursive strategies on green extractivism and its partial institutionalization seem to reproduce an extractivist common sense. At the same time, as the lithium exploitation in the Salar de Atacama in Chile, the planned copper mining in the Tambo Valley in Peru, and the equally planned silver extraction in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico demonstrate, eco-territorial conflicts also continue to occur in the course of “sustainable” mining. Based on our findings, we argue that the hegemonic strategies facing climate change reproduce both a green IML and green extractivisms and thus result in the exploitation of Nature, territories, and humans.

Keywords: green extractivism, green imperial mode of living, energy transition metals, eco-territorial conflicts, sustainable mining.

1. Introduction

As climate change becomes a more pressing issue, global hegemonic actors seem to agree that fostering “green” growth may be an effective way to mitigate or adapt. However, the ecological modernization of capitalist centers and certain emerging economies might even aggravate the socio-ecological crisis in nature-exporting countries such as Chile, Mexico, and Peru. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the Paris Agreement, as well as the European Green Deal, amongst others, emphasize the need to embrace new “clean energy technologies”. The consequential rising demand for “energy

transition metals” (Church and Crawford 56) such as copper, silver, and lithium are either already being mined extensively and/or have acquired a critical status (IEA 248). Electricity networks and wind turbines require copper, solar panels silver, and batteries for electric vehicles lithium (6). Thus, their demand is expected to grow to 40, 18, and 90 percent respectively until 2040 (5, 56). Currently, Chile is the world’s largest copper exporter and second in lithium; Peru exports the second most copper and the third most silver, while Mexico is the largest exporter of silver, the fifth largest of copper, and lists as 10th in worldwide lithium resources (OEC; USGS). Their extraction, however, entails high pressure

on humans and nature *elsewhere*. Indeed, negative externalities have been transferred to Latin American countries for centuries and are hitherto partially veiled by hegemonic forces. Recently, this has reactivated the debate on sustainable development in the context of the climate crisis and a “green” economy. By means of discursive practices and their institutionalization, a “green” extractivist frontiers expansion seems to be enabled. Nevertheless, the course of this intensification coincides with the proliferation of eco-territorial conflicts, which amount to 60 in Chile, 97 in Peru, and 183 in Mexico, equivalent to one-third of all conflicts in Latin America (EJAtlas).

Drawing on the notion of the “imperial mode of living” (hereafter IML) by Brand and Wissen and its recent debates, as well as insights into the dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto; Dos Santos), we connect those externally conditioned factors with internal dynamics, merging them into a complex whole that plays a crucial role in the expansion of (greening) extractivist activities. Likewise, the focal point on the dialectical relation between the sustainability discourses applied by different actors and their materialization into (eventually) legitimized practices by governmental institutions allows intertwining structural changes related to global crises (in the present case: the climate crisis) with socio-ecological conflictive action, while avoiding the reduction of one to the other (Dietz and Engels 209). By deploying a refined analytical framework (Dietz and Engels 212) considering structures, discourses, contestations, and institutionalization, we examine associated eco-territorial mining conflicts. The focus of the Chilean case in the Salar de Atacama lies on the hegemonic actors and their discursive practices. Allied to a lithium alliance, they seem able to generalize their interests in “sustainable” lithium mining to such a degree as a lithium consensus is currently adumbrating that would merely reproduce the prevailing (neo-)extractivist structures. However, the concomitant process to institutionalize it remains (partially) contested by collective counter-hegemonic actors. For Peru, we examine the development of environmental politics in the mining sector, discourses favoring sustainable development as well as the local

conflict in the Tambo Valley, and perceptions of resisting local actors. For Mexico, we highlight some distinctive features of its green neo-extractivist trajectory, examine relevant processes of institutionalization and discursive strategies used by mining companies, the state and local collective actors, as well as counter-hegemonic strategic arguments in the Sierra Norte de Puebla. These analyses are based on (ethnographic) fieldwork, selected semi-structured interviews with diverse actors ranging from the local to the national level, participatory observation, and documentary research all undertaken for our doctoral projects (Mexico in 2018, 2020-2021; Peru in 2019-2022; Chile in 2022).

This article is organized as follows: First, we build a theoretical foundation by delineating the heuristic notion of the (peripheral) imperial mode of living that we combine with insights from dependency theory. Second, we outline current academic debates on (neo-)extractivisms and their greening and shed light on discursive strategies and processes of institutionalization. Third, we embed our empirical case studies by applying our conceptual framework, depicting their historical context, and illuminating aspects of socioeconomic, ecological, political, and cultural structures at different scales. Finally, we present our conclusions.

2. (Peripheral) Imperial Mode of Living

Extractivisms and their greening can be understood as an inherent part of an expanding “imperial mode of living”. The corresponding concept uncovers hegemonic production and consumption patterns which are based on “(i) the unlimited appropriation of resources; (ii) a disproportionate claim to global and local ecosystems and sinks; and (iii) cheap labor from elsewhere” (Brand and Wissen, *The imperial mode of living* 39). In effect, this mode of living, notably ascribed to societies of the Global North, generates social and ecological costs which are externalized in space and time - primarily to the countries of the Global South and the future. The capitalist centers, but increasingly also emerging markets, import metals such as copper, lithium, and silver for a purported *green imperial mode*

of living which yet externalizes extractivist costs to the metal-exporting countries. There, they are unequally distributed over nature as well as present and future generations. Brand and Wissen (40) explain this alarming dynamic by the “invisibility of the social and ecological conditions” which enable societies to experience the consumption, and use of everyday products (such as electric cars) and infrastructures (e.g. for the energy transition) “as a natural given” (54). Therefore, and irrespective of its destructive power, this way of life is anchored in the common sense, and, in Gramscian terms, deeply rooted in everyday practices. The latter are accompanied by respective discourses which are diffused by institutions (i.e. schools, universities, trade unions, media, etc.) and inscribed in socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures, guaranteed by the governmental institutions, among others. This could help to explain its wide acceptance by the “externalization society” (Lessenich *Neben uns die Sintflut*). However, externalized and thereby “hidden” costs (Brand and Wissen) do not vanish into thin air but need to be internalized by the “internalization society” in (semi-)peripheral countries, where costs are borne by *others* (Landherr and Graf).

Structural Dependence of the Internalization Society

The internalization society, constituted by the propertied class, middle classes, and urban labor aristocracy (Landherr and Graf), contributes decisively to the generalization and deepening of the IML and thereby to the perpetuation of the centuries-old (neo-)colonial relationship between the capitalist centers and the (semi-)periphery. Given that, hierarchical social relations and society-nature relations are both structural conditions and consequences of the IML. Insights from dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto; Dos Santos) give clues about structural mechanisms facilitating the internalization of the costs. Generally speaking, dependence refers to a “changing historical condition” (Beigel 12) of countries whose social organization and economy are conditioned by the economic and political power and development of the centers (Dos Santos 304).

Core elements of structural dependence are unequal trade and exchange relations, as well as dependency on foreign investments/currency and technological innovations based on the asymmetrical international division of labor. External factors, such as the demand from industrialized countries for raw materials, condition, maintain, and/or alter prevailing internal structures, including class relations and societal hierarchization. This conjunction is central to dependency and the reproduction of structures of exploitation (Cardoso and Faletto). Notwithstanding that, externally conditioned dependence is not possible unless the dominant interests of the centers intersect with the interests of the ruling forces in the subordinated countries (Dos Santos). In times of globalized (green) capitalism, national elites still constitute an internal driving force for facilitating the externalization from the centers, enabling the internalization of costs in the periphery (Landherr and Graf). In the example of Chile - which also resembles the context of Mexico and Peru - Landherr and Graf identify that the propertied class, based on structural, financial, institutional, territorial, and hegemonic power resources and in collaboration with the political elite, knits the national structures guaranteeing, e.g., the accumulation of capital, the appropriation of land, and the allocation of concessions in its own interests. Moreover, Landherr and Ramírez (167) refer to subtle mechanisms of norm diffusion via communication channels, predominantly owned by the propertied class itself. The idea of national development based on growth and the interlinked pledge of a “better” life (Landherr and Graf) is spread. Even though the extractivist costs are unequally distributed over “marginalized sectors” (Landherr and Ramírez 168) and along dividing lines of class, gender, and “race” (ibid.), the hope of yet excluded classes of population to participate in the IML in the future becomes a powerful internalizing mechanism and thus contributes to the formation of hegemony. It is further culturally backed, as illustrated by the concept of the coloniality of power (Quijano) referring to patterns of power that operate through the naturalization of territorial, racialized, cultural, ecological, and epistemological hierarchies. It is supported by

a certain “colonial logic” (Machado Aráoz) that legitimizes and normalizes the exploitation of people, nature, and territories and eventually serves as a legitimation for the perpetuation of structural dependence (Krams and Preiser 14), (neo-)colonial patriarchal power, and class relations in the political and legal system (Landherr and Ramírez 167). Consequently, the IML is reproduced and generalized, not least due to its attractiveness to certain actors, as addressed in this contribution. However, the accompanying internalizing processes and structures, just like institutionally entrenched relations between and within countries can still be “transformed, or broken down by actions of social groups, classes, and movements” (Beigel 26). In the course of the expanding green extractivist activities, (some) subaltern actors widen the slowly visible systemic fractures, as chapter 4 illustrates.

3. Green(ing) of Extractivisms

Based on extractivisms, Latin American countries have allowed the reproduction of the IML in the capitalist centers but also its expansion to the (semi-)periphery. A working definition of extractivism refers to the appropriation of natural resources in high volume or intensity of extraction that are exported as raw materials with none to minimal processing and whose exportation is about 50 percent or more (Gudynas, “Extractivismos” 17). During the early 2000s, also known as the “supercycle of the resource boom” (Gudynas, “Extractivismos;” Svampa; Acosta et al.; Brand and Dietz), extractivist structures have deepened and are currently greened. The rising demand for energy transition metals also opened a debate on “green extractivism”. The growing research field to which we try to contribute can be situated at the crossroads of critical discussions on extractivisms and green growth as a new business opportunity based on the long-known reproduction of capitalist extractivist patterns of exploitation and the commodification of nature and tensions created on a local scale (Bruna xix; Dunlap and Jakobson 99-109; Voskoboynik and Andreucci; Ulloa 14, 19). Along these lines, Jerez et al. understand “green extractivism” as the logic reproduced by “climate change mitigation

proposals, which end up transferring the environmental costs of “zero-carbon lifestyles” of the Global North to the ecologies of the Global South” 3). Voskoboynik and Andreucci consider it as a continuation of intensive and extensive resource exploitation in which discourses about the creation of jobs – this time ‘green’ - and imaginaries of prosperity, modernization, and development are being reproduced, feeding “the fantasy of an environmentally and climatically benign resource frontier” (17).

The Intricacies of the Green Extractivist Discourse and Green Mining

The conviction for the need for development based on extractivisms can be called “extractivist common sense” (Silva Santisteban 29; Gudynas, “Las narrativas que construyen” 201). Inscribed into large parts of the population, it is accompanied by an extractivist discourse. According to Silva Santisteban - whose discussion on extractivism is also valid for its greening - “the serious problem is that the extractivist discourse -with its myths, fallacies, and common sense- is *performativizado* (performed) day by day in specific practices, such as the demonization of anti-extractivist dissidents” that would eventually eliminate “peoples, empty territories and reconnect them to the global market” (26, 43, 52). She lists principles on which the extractivist discourse is based: an authoritarian discourse that discredits critical voices, criminalizes ecological concerns, promises “progress” and “development”, neglects harmonious socio-ecological relations, and lauds extractivist rents as the “magic bullet” to reduce poverty. Furthermore, the discourse suggests a “technical knowledge hierarchization” about “sustainable mining” as “efficient, technical, without the burdens of the past” (Silva 25-26). Following this, Voskoboynik and Andreucci identify a novel discourse stressing that mining is “climate-friendly”, compatible with climate change, even necessary for its mitigation, and serves as a “vehicle for reaching wealth, inclusive development, industrialization and modernization” (1, 10). Evident impacts such as environmental degradation, the degrading occurrence of metal ores, increasing water

scarcity (Nurmi 1), negative social consequences (Ñiquen 19), or the intensification of eco-territorial conflicts, are hidden by this discourse (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 17) and eventually institutionalized.

Institutionalizing the Greening of Extractivisms

Institutional and legal frameworks that regulated mining and (neo-)extractivisms so far get adjusted nowadays to enable future green extractivisms. Seeing that, Orihuela refers to the environmentalization of mining and defines it as a “process by which society embeds the economy into environmental beliefs, discourses, rules, organizations, and governmental practices, i.e., into an institutional regime” (1). While processes of green(ing) extractive industries are a widespread phenomenon that are influenced by international discourses of sustainability, the specific form of environmentalization is contingent (Orihuela, “Environmentalization of Mining” 1-3). Different actors with different power resources at their disposal try to inscribe their interests and understandings of sustainability into the state, politics, and discourses (Brand and Wissen, “Die Regulation” 21), leading to different outcomes in the evolution of state apparatuses, law-making, and binding rules, and in the actual implementation of rules in different countries (Orihuela, “Environmentalization of Mining” 1-2, 8). The greening has been, however, coupled “with the consolidation of market economics” (O’Toole 244) and facilitated by processes such as an ecological modernization, that in turn has been promoted by international climate agreements, regional or national politics as well as (multi)national companies (Ulloa 20 qtd. in Ulloa 2010). Presented as environmentally sound, extractivist dynamics maintain profit-oriented economic models, national rents, and the capitalist notion of nature as a commodity (19). In turn, this “generat[es] new scenarios of transnationalization of nature through its incorporation into green markets ... reconfiguring the relations between the transnational and the local in relation to decarbonization and energy transition” (27).

Eco-territorial Conflicts

Green extractivism still creates various territorial, environmental, and socio-cultural long-term impacts at the local scale (Ulloa 14), which contradict dominant discourses and processes of institutionalization but are the consequence of the internalization of costs created by the IML. Nature continues to be exploited, livelihoods destroyed or at least profoundly affected, local population expelled and politically excluded. And in many cases, cultural differences, various valorizations of territories, and rights are neglected. While conflicts occur on various scales, we focus on the local level where its consequences become especially evident. Beyond economic-distributive claims, we consider the notion of eco-territorial conflicts instructive because it refers to conflicts in which communities struggle and fight for control of their territories and common goods. Silva Santisteban (52) also acknowledges the biopolitics of extractivism, i.e., the power to control all life on disputed territory, including humans, animals, and plants. Dominant actors seem to regard “sustainable” or “green” mining as socially and environmentally coherent, ignoring the threat of change faced by local populations (Lanegra Quispe 75). Conflict, however, often involves different definitions of desirable ways of living, differences in development and visions of the future, societal-nature relationships, economic activity-nature relationships, traditional identity, practices, ancestral relationships with the land, and water management. In that context, the notion of territory deems useful, not only to define a physical-geographical area (Leff and Porto-Goncalves 83), but considering it as a space that includes natural, artificial, social, and spiritual elements that are valued differently by different actors. Those elements are interconnected to mutually influence local culture, history, identity, power relations, and social, economic, and political structures (Fini 103; Echave 286). The following case studies attempt to illustrate them.

4. Green(ing) Extractivisms in Chile, Mexico, and Peru

We understand the greening of extractivisms as an ongoing process: Constructed discourses materialize into practices that condense in structures such as those delineated above and finally become in parts institutionalized and contested alike. In this complex, we subsequently embed the empirical case studies by means of a refined analytical framework (Dietz and Engels 212) that comprises the following dimensions: *historical context* and *structures*; *discourses*, *discourse strategies* and *practices*; *contestations*; *institutionalizations* and *institutional framework* (Table 1).

with 50 percent of total exports, lithium products barely constitute two percent - despite high commodity annuities in a growing market and immense reserves in the Salar de Atacama. Thus, the quondam “corporatist State” (Klein), governed by the right-conservative president Sebastián Piñera and in close collaboration with the economic elites, intended to turn lithium into the “new copper”. This plan could result in eco-territorial conflicts as in the copper case - but with lithium, it seems to be different. In fact, active resistance at the local level occurred first, but now even a passive lithium consensus seems to emerge. To understand these *prima facie* inconsistent dynamics, this section sheds light on discursive practices on “sustainable”

Table 1. Dimensions and subdimensions for analyzing eco-territorial conflicts

Framework dimensions by Dietz and Engels	Refinement and additions
Structures	Historical context Structures
Narratives	Discourses Discourse strategies Discursive practices
Agency	Contestations
Institutions	Institutionalization Institutional Framework

Source: Own compilation

4.1. Towards a *Lithium Consensus* in Chile? The Balancing Act between Greening the (Neo-)Extractivist Status Quo and a Radical Transformation

Among Latin American countries, Chile is considered a model country in terms of development, a relatively stable economy as well as low(er) poverty and corruption rates. Individual progress by consumerism of a growing middle class and the concomitant impression to benefit from an *American Way of Life* (Landherr and Graf) became possible due to the *development* of the export-oriented primary sector that is indeed not labor-intensive but at least contributes around eleven percent to the national GDP and even accounts for a quarter of public revenue (OECD). Dominated by copper

and “green lithium production”. The focus on the negotiation process to constitute a lithium consensus, to what extent it is contested and finally (de-)legitimized, reveals continuities and fractures of the “model Chile”, on the one hand, and the emergence of (counter-)hegemonic actor groups, on the other.

The Historical Process of Institutionalizing (Sustainable) Lithium Mining in Chile: Institutions, Laws, Producers, and Contracts

Chile’s extractivist “sustainable” development” model got its green coat only after the turn of the millennium, but today’s institutional lithium framework dates back to the 1970s. However, the first mining laws were not passed and

contracts remained unsigned before the *golpe de Estado* faced by president Salvador Allende (1970-1973). After Allende's overthrow, the Constitution (1980), Water Code (1981), and Mining Code (1983), written by the *Chicago Boys*, amongst others, were brutally enforced by the civil-military junta of Augusto Pinochet. Thenceforward and to this day, legislations grant the right to exploit lithium through state-owned companies, administrative concessions, and through special Lithium Operation Contracts issued by the Ministry of Mining (OLCA 7), which altogether merely serve the interests of transnational enterprises. And even though initial exploitative activities started already in 1984 (Garcés and Álvarez 190), it was only the politicized climate crisis and the resulting rising lithium demand for "clean" technologies that ultimately paved the way to the "discovery of lithium" (Poveda Bonilla 12). The years between 2014 and 2021 were determined by a lithium boom on the world market and a resulting production increase in Chile, where the world's largest lithium reserves are located (USGS) and whose State concluded new contracts with the two largest lithium producers of the world: in 2016 with Albemarle and two years later with Sociedad Química y Minera (SQM). Although the National Lithium Commission recommended revising both contracts (Aylwin et al.) because of probable negative externalities, a first compromise was reached: Both producers were eventually authorized to exploit more brine on the condition that they share benefits with the *indigenous* communities and the State. This new measure initially sparked conflicts but ended in a compromise that altered power relations and shifted conflict lines along different imaginaries.

Discourses: (Un)Sustainable Lithium Mining in the Salar de Atacama

Former socio-political discourses regarding lithium as "the white gold" or "21st-century oil" turned Chile into the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium." In the course of the politicization of climate change, these imaginaries were complemented by a sustainability nexus, comparably driven by both lithium producers and governmental institutions. These range from sustainable development by

green lithium production for clean energy and green electric automobility to lithium as a means to curtail the global climate crisis. From this, the former president and multi-billionaire Sebastián Piñera concludes that: "Leaving lithium in the ground would be no option" (Marconi). And the ministry of mining echoes: "We all want Chile to obtain the maximum benefit from lithium" (Gobierno de Chile, *Licitación*). In their view, lithium would be "an essential mineral for the society of the future ... which can be used to fight climate change". While the actual beneficiary remains vague, the ministry does not refer to the changing climate on its website in any way. Instead, it lists the "opportunity by the growth of this market", and "the need to strengthen Chile's strategic position ..., work[ing] on a framework for action to increase lithium production" (Gobierno de Chile, *Licitación*).

These political views and their embedded green growth imperatives are mirrored by corporate discourses on "green lithium production". Due to the high altitude in Atacama, SQM argues that "more than 95 percent of the required energy comes from solar radiation" (SQM 2) and therefore expects its carbon neutrality for the lithium division by 2030 - the year in which the contract with CORFO, the governmental organization to foster economic growth, expires. Albemarle applies the narrations on climate compatibility too. Admittedly, and based on the planned capacity growth to fight climate change, the "GHG emissions related to the production of lithium will increase in absolute terms through 2030" (Albemarle 54). Notwithstanding that, the lithium superpower is "proud to say that [its] products play a critical role in reducing GHG emissions while helping [its] customers achieve their sustainability goals" (ibid.).

The sustainability of lithium extractivism is questioned by critical (non-)indigenous defenders of the salt flat as well as environmental and cultural organizations. They understand it as a form of "green extractivism" and "water mining" because of its enormous water use in the world's driest desert. There, a million liters of the compound of brine and water evaporate every day in basins, covering several thousand hectares of indigenous territories and ultimately impede a solidary mode of living. For several

thousand years more than human beings and humans lived there in harmony together. Against this backdrop, a former activist in water issues of the region understands the putative clean energy as the “death of their culture”. Lithium would not be as green as the world might think, at least not for them (CL01). In the same vein, the Executive Director of the *Centro de Pensamiento Atacameño* (CL02) calls sustainable lithium production an “oxymoron”, because nothing about it would be sustainable, referring to the degradation of Nature and deconstruction of culture. However, the “de-ethnification” (Jerez et al. 8) is not only externally conditioned. An *agriculturalist* from Toconao witnesses that young adults prefer “*la buena vida*” (the good life) as lithium miners with a shift of 7x7 (seven working days and then seven days off). Seeing that, the coaction of the external and internal spheres is what makes the discourses on green lithium extractivism so potent, especially when translated into “sustainable” practices.

Hegemonic Practices: Greening the Extractivist Common Sense

The hegemonic practices to green and thereby consolidate the “extractivist common sense” (Gudynas “Los extractivismos”) are possibly less nebulous. With the growing demand for “Chile lithium”, SQM and Albemarle extended the extractive frontiers and - on governmental disposition - diversified their corporate social responsibility strategies, especially on behalf of indigenous peoples. Following the instruction to obtain the social license to operate by the Lickanantay, on the one hand, and consequently the authorization for the production increase by CORFO, Albemarle signed cooperative agreements with several communities between 2012 and 2016 (Jerez et al.). Since then, the enterprise transfers annually 3.5 percent of its Chilean revenues to *indigenous* communities (in total 6,000 people) (Albemarle 45). SQM (“Sustainability of lithium” 24), in contrast, is committed to an annual payment of ten to 15 million US Dollars. Further material rewards include job creation and development projects (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 15). The bundle of accumulated measures is used to (re)produce the

logic of lithium exploitation as being “*necessary*” (16) to mitigate climate change and, ultimately, to consolidate an active or at least passive lithium consent. As the Atacameño leader of the Catarpe community observes, these capital waves pose a powerful consent instrument insomuch as it separates the societal groups (Jerez et al. 8). And this, in fact, is *necessary* to consolidate a lithium consensus: Namely, first, to convince parts of the heterogeneous groups of the virtue of lithium extractivism, second, to separate the opponents from the new lithium advocates and, third, to build a lithium alliance with the latter. To network, SQM attempts to be a “good employer and neighbor” (“Sustainability Report” 251), implements agricultural programs, such as the cultivation of grapes for wine or a project for hydroponic production to produce lettuces to contribute to food sovereignty in a meanwhile extremely arid area with salt-affected, decreasing groundwater table. Albemarle (44) seeks to “preserve their culture and add value to their way of life”, and finances cultural festivities alike. And more than 35 percent of its employees are indigenous by now (ibid.). These diverse approaches equally aimed at preserving “traditional” cultural values but also implanting Eurocentric ideas of “sustainable development” seem to support the lithium consensus-building process. Meanwhile, the Lickanantay go by the name of “Lukanantay”, following the (coincidentally green) thousand pesos bill which is colloquially called “Luka”. However, this strong generalization might conceal the (former) resistance to the constitution of a lithium consensus.

(Contested) Constitution of a Lithium Consensus? Resistance versus Institutionalization

Between the 1990s and 2000s, the transition from small-scale to large-scale lithium mining was attended by an increase in eco-territorial conflicts (Voskoboynik and Andreucci; Jerez et al.; Prause and Dietz). The latter, according to Kristina Dietz and Louisa Prause (342), are attributed to the “access to, [the] control over, and [the] use of natural resources,” for which reason “lithium companies [are] often perceived as

intruders and competitors for natural resources such as water, salt, and land". However, the Salar does not only constitute land or a means of production; moreover, it is an indigenous territory and a spiritual place where water represents more than a natural resource or a commodity, taken to mean a hydrocosmic good. This might better explain why the resistance against extractivist intensification further accelerated and peaked in 2017/2018. After the effectless opposition against Albemarle two years ago, parts of the local and indigenous population mobilized against the negotiation process between SQM and CORFO, namely by dint of roadblocks to the mining plant, hunger strikes, and even lawsuits against SQM (Jerez et al. 9). They scandalized the misconduct of mining operations, decreasing water level just as corruption and the dominance of transnational capital (Liu and Agusdinata). Notwithstanding that, this contract was signed, including a clause related to the ILO Convention No. 169 (free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous peoples). And while in January 2019 hundreds of people demonstrated in Santiago against the expansion of lithium extractivism or rather demanded to *renationalize* it, allied with social movements and NGO (repressed altogether by the *Carabineros*, national police), antagonistic dynamics evolved in Atacama.

There, the process of building a lithium consensus accelerated. First, once opposing parties got together, namely the lithium producers and Lickanantay, to negotiate the (im) materialist terms under which the exploitation of the Salar would be accepted henceforth. And the emerging "lithium alliance", consisting of both (trans-)national lithium producers, the absent extractivist State, and a part of the Lickanantay, grants and enjoys privileges based on green extractivism. Second, consequential tensions and conflicts (of interest) between local and indigenous peoples separated the reassembled indigenous actor groups - convinced of the "lithium development project" - from the local people and anti-extractivists. This (more or less) post-extractivist pact became equally separated due to corporate infrastructural measures, seized job opportunities as lithium workers, and finally integrated into the lithium alliance although with different amenities. Finally, and

re-entering national terrain, the left government debates the nationalization of lithium, setting up a state-owned lithium company, and intends to introduce a novel institutional lithium framework at the beginning of 2023 (Gobierno de Chile, "Noticias"). The formation of a lithium cartel with Argentina and Bolivia is also currently being discussed. This looming governmental legitimization contributes to the consolidation of an emerging lithium consensus and thus solidifies the extractivist common sense rather than deconstruct it. This, in turn, would be necessary to suit the action to the word Gabriel Boric gave during his inauguration speech in March 2022: "We don't want more sacrifice zones and projects that destroy our country, that buy and destroy communities" (Fieldnotes *Discurso*).

4.2 Greening Mining in Peru: National Institutionalization, Discourses, and Local Resistance against Tia Maria

With a long-standing mining tradition (MINEM), Peru is the second-largest producer of copper and silver in the world. In the 1990s, an economic crisis and stagnant mining led to a new mining expansion cycle. Under Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), structural adjustments were aimed once again at liberalizing trade, privatizing mining, and attracting foreign investment, reinforcing extractivism (Lanegra Quispe 147). While promoting mining projects, the World Bank ("Poverty"), IMF, and companies also demanded that environmental standards be incorporated as a condition for credits and investments. The mining sector was once considered the dirtiest sector that came with fatal ecological effects. In the meantime, institutional changes, increasing environmental standards, supposedly strict environmental mining practices, the introduction of new technologies and socioeconomic benefits have been supported by dominant discourses: Mining expansion presented as "sustainable" and "modern" is being legitimized now (Damonte 44, 51; Andreucci and Kallis 98). In the face of rising socio-ecological conflicts, it has also served to renew and safeguard the extractivist common sense widespread among governmental actors, mining companies, and well-disposed

civil society, including emerging urban sectors (Damonte 38, 51). Mining constituted around 60 percent of all exports (UNCTAD) and twelve percent of Peru's GDP (EY 2019/2020 18). Based on the conviction that this sector has been the motor of Peru's considerable economic growth, it is regarded as a major driver of development, central to the reduction of overall national poverty from 58.7 percent in 2004 to 20 percent in 2019 (World Bank, "Poverty") and the creation of jobs (Damonte 44). Nonetheless, despite having the highest environmental regulations (Orihuela, "Environmental Rules" 163), the mining industry has the highest number of socio-ecological conflicts, with 93 conflicts registered in 2015 (Defensoría del Pueblo 20) and 79 conflicts registered in 2019 (Ombudsman 20).

This section illustrates the greening of extractivism in Peru by outlining some institutional developments and dominant discourses, as well as by highlighting how limits are manifested in the proposed mining project Tía María.

The Greening of Institutions and Discourses

In the 1990s, being less of an autonomous process rather than an outcome of external factors and forces of globalization (Orihuela, "Environmental Rules" 170; Lanegra Quispe 151) legal norms, public environmental institutions, and "a green state of mining" started to emerge "at a neoliberal juncture" (Orihuela and Paredes 101). In the past 30 years, amongst others, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (in 1993) (Huertas del Pino 103), norms such as air quality standards (in 1996), wastewater regulations, or plans to close mines were introduced, at least on paper (Orihuela and Paredes 104). In the 1990s, ministries were the entities responsible for introducing and overseeing environmental regulation for their respective sectors (Huertas del Pino 101), which – due to its lacking implementation – was criticized for its conflict of interest. Eventually, in 2008, strongly influenced by the free trade agreement with the USA calling for the strengthening of environmental institutionality, (more) independent environmental bodies regulating and overseeing different sectors were

established with Legislative Decree No. 1013, namely the Ministry of the Environment and the authority for environmental auditing and control (OEFA) (Orihuela and Paredes 110).

A governmental representative admits Peru's sad environmental history and stresses positive developments: "Since Fujimori's epoch this has changed: They created bodies that monitor the environment, ..., and the state is the guarantor of healthy investment" (regional public official). Not only institutional developments are highlighted within dominant discourse to legitimize supposedly sustainable mining, but also the role and practices of mining companies, as a representative of a Consulting Firm confirms: "Multinationals brought those standards to Peru. ... The environment is at the top of companies' priorities." Discourses and a further commitment to the sustainability of mining were reinforced by Peru's Mining Vision 2030 - elaborated by governmental actors, the mining lobby, (critical) civil society organizations, and universities (Grupo Visión Minería): It defines guidelines for the development of sustainable and inclusive mining activities, including the promotion of well-being, participation, and productive diversification, ensuring high environmental standards; and "Good Governance", committed to democracy and decentralization (Grupo Visión Minería). Also, under the leftist president Pedro Castillo (in power from July 2021 to December 2022), despite the initial government's claim to nationalize mining, private "responsible and sustainable" mining investment was promoted (Gobierno Peruano).

In contrast, opposition to those discourses and protests against mining are delegitimized as aiming to destabilize the system, impeding overall development. For instance, forms of disqualification highlight the lack of technical knowledge or their association with left-wing extremist, terrorist ideas – instrumentalizing the population's fear of Peru's violent past. Further, the social benefits and ecological soundness of modern mining are often contrasted with "old" as well as widespread illegal and informal mining with its destructive and devastating ecological and social effects (Representative Consulting Firm; Regional public official).

While discourses and statements such

as “mining becoming a key to maintaining the world’s ecology” (regional public official) remain marginal, they might soon update the dominant discourse on sustainable, green mining (representative mining lobby), and serve as further legitimation for the “sustainable” expansion of mining frontiers for the sake of development and economic growth.

Limits of Greening Institutions

Despite important progress in environmental regulation since the 1990s, public institutions remain weak and lack effectiveness, coordination, and accountability (De Echave 223; representative Environmental Ministry). Economic interests constrain their further progress and - being criticised as disadvantageous for investment - have led to setbacks in times of economic slowdown when the commodities boom’s supercycle ended in 2014 (De Echave 220). Especially on the regional and local scale, its social, democratic, ecological, and ontological limits and thus territorial tensions become evident. Political decision-making, including setting standards and criteria for the definition of sustainability, is widely centralized and influenced by powerful economic actors with extractive interests (regional politician, representative national civil society organization). Durand refers to “state capture” to point to companies’ economic, political, discursive, social, and policing power, receiving privileged treatment by the “benevolent and permissive host state” (10). Proposals and interests of regional and local governments are disregarded (regional politicians) and mechanisms for participation for the local population are limited. Exclusion from decision-making, limited possibilities in rejecting a project, or influencing criteria for the EIA prevail. Further, the design of environmental regulation and instruments such as the EIA has been a rather technical process, supposedly offering politically neutral solutions. Other forms of knowledge, as well as cultural and ontological differences and perspectives, local societal nature relations, or the threat of spiritually important sights, are disregarded, leading to the imposition of a certain worldview, while marginalizing others

(Lanegra Quispe 72). While no strong national environmental movement has formed (148) many local conflicts challenge the environmental discourse and thereby the dominant logic of sustainable development and mining, as we demonstrate next.

Contesting “Sustainable” Mining: Resistance against Tia Maria in the Tambo Valley

A substantial part of the population of the Tambo Valley in the province of Arequipa has been resisting since 2009 the start of the planned extraction of copper in the open-pit mines Tia Maria and La Tapada operated by the Southern Copper Corporation, a subsidiary of the Grupo Mexico. All bureaucratic hurdles have been approved by the central government: Officially following administrative, legal, and technical steps, also the environmental sustainability of the project has been approved after the second EIA in 2015. This should leave no doubt of its technical accuracy and of the project’s economic, social, and environmental sustainability and should serve as legitimization to enforce the project. As company representatives assure, due to convincing development prospects offered by the project with an estimated investment of 1.4 billion USD (Dunlap 15), creating tax income which could be used to advance health services, education, create opportunities for local businesses and the young generation, a growing part of the population could be convinced by its benefits.

Nevertheless, the extraction of mostly copper has not started yet due to the missing social license to operate and strong resistance in defense of the Tambo Valley, one of southern Peru’s most important agricultural areas. Protests are delegitimized by actors in favor of the project, from the company, and national politicians to the media, as being politically motivated, ideologized, and ignorant, and environmental concerns are discarded (Regional public official; Representative company). However, with the slogan “*Agro sí, mina no!*”, the local population - on average 46.4 percent of the economically active population is working in agriculture (Aste 20) - challenges the belief of

the possibility of the harmonious co-existence of mining and the reproduction of their agricultural practice. The population is very aware of the value of their territory, as an activist recaps it: “Defending agriculture represents the defense of their source of work, nature, ecosystems, life, and the people” (regional activist). The local population reproduces their mode of living and level of well-being with their own labor in agriculture, based on their knowledge and social organization. Agriculture forms “a collective memory of achievements and future expectations of many families” (Martínez 4) and has been their principal economic motor. “Here, we are not a low-class village with our agriculture. Look at our buildings, our coasts, our cars (...).” (Local anonymous activist 1), various can afford their children’s higher education. Agriculture further allows for an inclusive social structure by providing opportunities and jobs to diverse groups of farmers and securing “even the humblest access to food from the fields, the river, and the sea” (Local anonymous activist 2).

During the time of field research in 2019 and 2022, various local actors stressed the risk to their livelihood. Many mistrust the promises of economic and social development and better job opportunities proposed by the company. The collective memory is dissuasive: “Our peoples have been living the consequences and the aggression of the extractivist model for many years (...), leaving us with nothing but contamination, criminalization, poverty, and death” (regional activist). Also based on deterrent personal experiences of displacement due to mining and thus migrating to the Tambo Valley, as well as the company’s bad environmental record, a central concern is their fear of negative ecological consequences. Despite the company claiming otherwise with 15 points revealing “the truth about the project”, assuring that agriculture will not be affected (Centro de Información Southern Peru 9), many expect pollution of the soil, water, and air and competition for water use with negative effects on their health, slowly deteriorating lands, and agricultural productivity, eventually endangering their livelihood.

Promised technical solutions and strict technical evaluations, including high environmental standards do not reduce the

threat felt by many locals. The official approval of the EIA has been rejected by many locals, as local interests, knowledge, experience, and understanding of sustainability, including their relation to their surroundings, access to land, tranquillity, and routines have been disregarded. Neither their social and economic structure, culture, and identity closely connected to agricultural practice are considered adequately.

In defense of their Tambo Valley and in rejection of the approved EIA and the license to construct the infrastructure, in 2011, 2015, and 2019 - supported by the regional governor, local mayors, and wide mobilization of civil society in the region - protests emerged and lasted for weeks. In total eight people were killed, and hundreds were injured. Protesters were criminalized and met with violent repression: As the “social license to operate” could not be obtained, in 2019, former president Vizcarra put the project on hold. To date, the mining operation has not started. However, in February 2022, the start of constructing the necessary infrastructure in 2029 was announced, leading to further protests (Redacción La República).

This eco-territorial conflict became an emblematic resistance case against mining in Peru and thus against being the location where the costs of a greening IML are imposed on. It reveals profound territorial tensions based on different understandings of sustainability, desirable development ideas and visions of the future, different societal nature relations, and diverging degrees of trust in institutions. It exemplifies how the greening of extractivism based on developing environmental institutions in the mining sector and dominant sustainability discourse reaches its limits by falling short considering various local contexts in Peru.

4.3 Mexico: The Emergence of a Green Extractivist “Outlier”

As seen in Peru and Chile, extractivist development models and processes of “reprimarization” (Svampa *Las Fronteras*) have intensified over the last decades. However, the Mexican case seems to differ in certain respects (Tetreault 1). The “Mexican miracle” arose from successful import-substitution policies, inward

economic growth, and industrialization after WWII (Bethell) leading to the establishment of the manufacturing industry characterized by *maquilas* (low-wage assembly of goods for export) in the 1960s. Its economic importance increased in the following decades in part because of NAFTA, which reduced extractivist activities to a minor role. In comparison, while oil accounts for 1.4 percent of the GDP, mining rents contribute one percent (World Bank, "Oil rents") but account for only 0.6 percent of taxable income (Fundar *Anuario*). Certainly, its contribution (and the one of manufacture in general) has been decreasing over time (Fini 101), but it is only surpassed by its service sector, a dynamic that is reflected in the fact that it is the most economically complex country in Latin America and second in the Americas (OEC). As a consequence, these key elements may help to explain how Mexico was initially less impacted by the commodities boom and thus considered an "outlier" (Tetreault 2). Mexico does not constitute an extractivist model in a classical sense since its economy is primarily based on services and manufactured goods. Material flows have even recorded more imports than export and more than twice as much silver and 5.7 times as much gold was extracted in the last 30 years than during the 300 years of the colony (Garcia Zamora and Gaspar 5). The term "extractivist offensive" is used to distinguish this kind of dynamics (Linsalata and Navarro).

An examination of the policy framework reveals often violent (greening) extractivist practices (Dunlap and Jakobsen) which contrast with unique environmental laws, such as the General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection in 1988 (LGEEPA). It was amended in 1999 and 2012 to guarantee "the right to a healthy environment". In the same year, Mexico passed a landmark law, the General Law on Climate Change (LGCC), making it the first "major fossil fuel producing" country to adopt a climate change law (Averchenkova and Guzman). LGCC recognized climate change-related internal displacement in 2016 and made it compatible with the Paris Agreement. Lastly, Mexico signed the Escazú Agreement in 2018, the first environmental agreement with provisions for environmental rights defenders.

These policies are usually challenged by overriding laws, legal loopholes, and weak enforcement. After the neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s, private companies were able to "bypass" national legislature and protect themselves against environmental laws that could impact their interests (Holland 127; Tetreault 5). This period became a "cycle of colonization" in which Mexico lost "sovereignty and control" of resources which ended in reforms that enabled the sale and purchase of *ejidos* (the very claim that sparked the Mexican revolution of 1910), aligning it with the Mining Law issued shortly thereafter (Garcia and Gaspar 4). Under the Foreign Investment Law of 1993, foreign capital companies could make investments in Mexico and eventually participate in all mining stages (Fini 100; Tetreault 5). The Energy Reform of 2013 made natural resources a 'social interest', giving preference over other activities (Garcia and Gaspar; Tetreault).

Discourse Strategies of a Green(ing) Extractivist Offensive

An anti-neoliberal rhetoric at the beginning of AMLO's presidency in 2018 presented extractivism as "benefactor extractivism" (Linsalata and Navarro). AMLO's "Fourth Transformation" (2020) seems to reinforce the neoliberal pattern of accumulation, reproduction, and dominance with strong political alliances with its beneficiaries, the mining corporations (Garcia Gaspar). The authoritarian extractivist discourse and practice are coupled with inadequate consultations and the recent decree shielding governmental mega-development projects as of "public interest and national security" (DOF). In light of these characteristics, neo-extractivist offensives are emerging around a green discourse, with the current government playing an increasingly prominent role in supporting policies and social programs to combat poverty to ensure popular support and social license to operate (Tetrault 2). As an example, the Fund for Sustainable Regional Development (Mining Fund) was launched in 2014 to finance programs that "compensate for the social, environmental, and urban development impacts" suffered by mining communities ("Camimex"). Interestingly,

the government finally acknowledged that mining is violent by appealing to sustainable development and pledging to prioritize the preservation of the territory (PN 290; DOF-PND 37). This revised government position even denounces mining companies that destroyed ecosystems during past administrations (Presidencia), whereas recent evidence of this shift to neo-extractivist discourse was the successful nationalization of lithium - and its declaration as a strategic mineral and a “public utility” needed for “energy transition” and “national development” benefitting the nation instead of “mercantilist interests” (Ejecutivo Federal). This position advocates against mining practices while applying an energy transition at the expense of state exploitation of nature in unclear terms, a characteristic of the IML.

The response of the mining companies has emphasized their economic support “for activities to protect the environment, sustainability, and community development” (Milenio). Their discourse strategies also align with green imaginaries through rhetorics of sustainability and green mining: e.g., Almaden Minerals states that their Ixtacamatlán project will not only bring economic prosperity to Mexico and the local communities but also access to drinking water, in accordance with international frameworks (*Presentation*). Additionally, invoking the SDGs, they emphasize silver (and gold) needs for “sustainable energy” technologies, and its subsidiary, the Gorrión Mine, promises the use of green mining techniques that “reduce footprint” and provide “sustainable tailings solutions”. Further, a nascent discourse about “strict compliance” with human rights is identified (Almaden Ixtaca Project), which may be attributed to multiple complaints of human rights violations made to indigenous groups in the region (Consejo).

Institutionalization: Shielding the Extractivist Offensive

As discussed above, the Mexican policy framework has supplied opportunities for the intensification of the (now green) extractivist offensive reflected on changes in public policies to secure a form of institutionalization. Understood

as a “spillover effect” (Gudynas, “Extractivismos” 32), it enables the hegemonization of a certain IML by means of the constitutional reforms, the changes to the Mining Law, the National Waters Law, and the Foreign Investment Law, as well as the Energy Reform. Furthermore, the Mining Fund and the Fund for Hydrocarbon Producing Federal Entities and Municipalities (FEFMPH) have marketed rent-distribution programs which may work as a “strategy to gain the support of the communities near the operations” in response to the claims of being mostly for the benefit of state and municipal governments (Rodríguez; García and Gaspar; Linsalata 357). It has been argued, nevertheless, that the lax mining regulatory framework favors large corporations by helping the government to build “an ideological narrative of the mining as a promoter of development that has no basis in reality” (Olivera, qtd. in García and Gaspar). Moreover, as indicated by Fundar, the lack of transparency and accountability of the funds results in a disproportionate allocation to infrastructure projects (benefiting the companies) and only two percent to education projects, and 0.6 percent to environmental programs. Likewise, Olivera contrasts the persistent conditions of poverty for the population living below the welfare line is 60 percent in communities where precious metals are extracted. An increase in employment, a recurring extractivist argumentation, also falls short to contribute to national employment, since it accounts for 0.66 percent, with jobs usually under “outsourcing” contracts that are known to deny employment benefits and have no career prospects since mines have a short life. Finally, it is reported that many of these projects threaten fragile ecosystems and sacred sites, divert water and its natural cycles, and leave hazardous waste at risk of tailings collapse.

There is a consensus among social scientists (Holland; García and Gaspar; Tetreault; Azamar; Linsalata and Navarro) regarding the problematic characteristics of the Mining Fund and related social programs since they culminate in shielding and facilitating extractivisms. As Navarro claims, “the nuance of extractivism, focused on favoring the most vulnerable sectors, is far from problematizing the logic of sacrifice” by normalizing it, diluting

dissent, and dividing communities (353, 357). The economic compensation measures become control mechanisms and as a consequence, this “Fourth Transformation” seems not that far from a continuation of previous regimes, nor the end of the neoliberal model (Presidencia).

Contestations and Eco-territorial Conflicts

The greening of the neo-extractivist offensive may have intensified the tensions associated with the multiple forms of hegemonic practices and discourses since concessions were reactivated in the 2000s and exploration began (Toledo, “The Struggle”). Admittedly, there seems to be unclear evidence to indicate a precise number of eco-territorial conflicts and direct violence in Mexico (EJAtlas; Fundar). Studies have revealed 560 conflicts until 2020 in Mexican territory (Toledo, “The Struggle”), including 95 criminalization, and seven in the SNP (Fundar). In response to the extractivist offensive, multiple organizations have begun actions against the dispossession of common goods.

As of 2008, many organizations have begun taking action against the extractivism offensive, including the SNP movement “Defense of the Territory and Life”. In a region of significant biocultural diversity in the center-east of Mexico (Albores; Beaucage; Boege; Duran Olguin; Gonzalez; Toledo, *El Kuojtakiyolan*), communities defend their ancestral territories from a variety of mega-development projects. The construction of collective actors appears in diverse identities: indigenous *Maseualmej* and *Totonakús*, mestizos, *Koyomej*, etc. In their traditional system of local politics, cultural symbolisms, negotiations, and commitments based on solidarity and cooperation, such as assemblies and “pay it forward” work (e.g. *tequio*, *mano vuelta*), oppositional forces have been loosed, and political alliances formed. When contesting the projects (Beaucage and Duran), social scaffolding is often observed in the celebration of religious holidays, festivals, and even funerals. It is not unusual for political assemblies to feature similar rituals and dances to major local festivals (Fieldnotes *Fiesta Patronal*).

Throughout their materials (speeches, press

releases) (Beaucage, “Los ordenamientos”; Fieldnotes *Asamblea*), emerging counter-discourses in different forms can be identified. A recurring discursive unit links mega-development projects and the notion of death. When describing a project that involves river diversion in ducts, an informant confirmed, since these “*proyectos de muerte* (death projects), bring nothing but death to the mountains, the plants, and animals, to us” (Interview MEX01). The movement’s name “Defense of the Territory and Life” attempts to contrast death with life and reposition territory as a symbolic space. In the same vein, common slogans used by its movement read “*la lucha es por la vida*” (The fight is for life) and “*No al oro, sí a la vida*” (No to gold, yes to life) (Fieldnotes *Asamblea*), “*Vida sí, Mina no*” (Life yes, Mine no) which emphasize the idea of survival. These phrases serve an important argumentative function, legitimizing the struggle, which is nothing other than the continuation of life and implicitly related to metals as death. It is significant to note that such associations are strongly tied to an intricate system of cultural symbolism in these communities in which, a territory acquires new characteristics, because the land “takes care of us, embraces us”, and its rivers “come to life”, and its wildlife “speak our language” (Interview MEX02). Based on the idea of the *kuojtakiloyan* (a mountain that produces), some communities view the land and its living beings as part of their extended families (Fieldnotes *Vida Cotidiana*).

While Mexico’s environmental laws are lauded, important progress has been made through legal strategies not directly linked to those laws. The SNP has won important victories against *proyectos muerte* based on the constitutional right to autonomy and self-determination and by appealing to the ILO Convention 169. As an example, in 2021 the Cuetzalan electric substation was canceled, Libres was declared mining-free, and Tecoltemi and Ixtacamatlán concessions were revoked in 2022. Their strategies are further strengthened by their traditional knowledge, alliances, articulation in the region, direct actions, and addressing the ecological impact of their territories through “socio-environmental reframings” (Olarte). The success of these cases could be used to challenge

the constitutionality of the Mexican Mining Law. This could reverse neoliberal policies' spillover effects. As a result of such efforts, the national coalition "*Cambiémosla Ya*" (Let's change it now) brings together communities affected by mining, think tanks, NGOs, and other groups to advocate for amendments to the Mining Law (*Cambiémosla*).

5. Conclusion

This paper discussed discursive practices and strategies as crucial mechanisms for greening the extractivist development model and its offensive. Institutionalizing environmental concerns also became transparent. We highlighted resulting eco-territorial conflicts and stressed how they are structurally embedded and reproduced amid an expanding green IML and a climate crisis. In Chile, Mexico, and Peru alike, nature-rich countries relevant for the global provision of the energy-transitions metals lithium, silver, and copper, various principles became evident in regard to the greening of extractivisms. Central governments, companies, and elites emphasize the importance of green extractivism for "progress" and "sustainable development": An idea that is highlighted by the media, believed by a growing middle class, but opposed by critical social groups. In Chile, lithium extractivism is presented by the capitalist producers and the extractivist State as being essential for "sustainable development" and inevitable in responding to climate change. Inasmuch as (trans)national companies act officially as "good neighbors" filling out the governmental void, lithium exploitation - despite the immense water use, degradation of nature, and "death of culture"- seems currently widely accepted at the local scale in Atacama and partly institutionalized at the national level. In Peru, high official environmental standards and environmentally strict corporate practices are contrasted with unsustainable "old" and informal mining. Critics are discarded as technically unsustainable and politically motivated, reflecting the state's authoritarian character. For Mexico, the current government denounces the "past" extractivist offensive pledging to prioritize collective benefits while companies refer to

economic prosperity with a commitment to human rights in green terms which is yet to be seen.

Institutionalizing green extractivism, implementing mining/environmental policies, and completing contracts between the state and (trans)national companies generally deepen extractivist structures. While mining projects labeled as "sustainable" still have ecological impacts, the government in Chile permitted the triplication of lithium extraction, nonetheless, co-opting parts of the *indigenous* population that materially benefit from the new extractivist status quo. Peru's mining sector institutionalized environmental issues primarily due to external forces but ranging from limited implementation of official rules to social and cultural shortcomings. In Mexico, the pioneering environmental policy framework is challenged by overruling mining laws and a lack of enforcement in light of privatization/neoliberalization of the sector, now reinforced by the current "anti-neoliberal" government of AMLO and ongoing "development" programs.

Despite its "greening", extractivism continues to be associated with a high number of conflicts. Each conflict is unique, but a supposedly sustainable or even environmentally friendly mining project poses various changes on the local level. Eco-territoriality conflicts result from the reproduction of inequalities among local communities, disrespect for existing territorialities, local societal-nature relations, ecosystem fragility, and water scarcity, as well as perceptions of threats and risks. Open confrontations and resistance against mining projects and national development goals are expressed in defense of local territories and solidary modes of living. Nonetheless, integrating some demands could ease some of the local communities' concerns about change. As demonstrated in the Salar de Atacama, the conflicts which evolved around the competition for the use of nature, turned from being manifest into latent. By establishing a lithium alliance between the extractivist State, lithium producers, and parts of the Lickanantay, the new agreements supported the formation of a passive lithium consensus by integrating cultural and economic demands of the indigenous

population. There are subtle tensions with the excluded non-indigenous population whose autonomous reproduction modes are equally threatened by water scarcity, amongst others. In contrast, locals in the Tambo Valley have been actively opposed to Tia Maria protecting their agricultural practices, in deep distrust of environmental institutions. While their claims were discarded as technically unsustainable (by the company) and were met with criminalization (by the state), their widely supported actions have so far prevented the start of the project. Furthermore, in the case of the Sierra Norte de Puebla, the regional movement “Defense of the Territory and Life” has been resisting the “death projects”, defending their survival and their ancestral territory, organizational systems, and cultural symbolism achieving relative success by the strategic use of policy (and politics) on the right to self-determination and autonomy.

In all three countries, structures supporting extractivist activities are reproduced and deepened by an expanding IML, which also requires internalization mechanisms and material bases in order to allow the factual exploitation of territories. Despite diverging interests of different actor groups, a certain institutional setting safeguards it by aligning the interests of dominant national groups with the interests of capitalist countries. Through promises of development and participation in its benefits, a degree of hegemonization and subjectivation is acquired to foster social acceptance. The advancement of lithium mining legislation, the foundation of a governmental lithium company, and the partial construction of a lithium consensus in Chile are examples. Likewise, despite a progressive administration that appeals to social inclusion and nationalization, the extractivist offensive moves forward in Mexico. Copper, Peru’s most important export resource, and the mining sector have been “greened” due to technical considerations and continues to expand since privatization and favorable investment conditions in the 1990s.

In light of the climate crisis, the resulting increasing demand for energy transition metals, the concomitant green(ing) of extractivisms in Latin American countries for a green IML in the capitalist centers, extractivist activities

maintain and deepen socio-ecological inequality and consolidate asymmetric racialized power relations. By reiterating dominant discursive practices, continued large investments in mining projects, and the institutionalization of green extractivisms, the extractivist common sense is reproduced and strengthened. The same holds true for the externalization of costs from rather a few countries and the corresponding internalization to a growing number of sacrificed territories *elsewhere*. Based on the findings from this contribution, enlightened by many critical (activist) scholars, we suggest the identification and systematic conflation of existing radical alternatives to eventually permit an equally radical transformation.

Endnotes

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