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Vol. 15 No. 2 (Dec. 2022)

**Struggles over Mining and Territory  
in Latin America**

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**Vol. 15 No. 2 (Dec. 2022):**  
**Struggles over Mining and Territory in Latin America**

Introduction: Struggles over Mining and territory in Latin America. ....	.5
Ann-Kathrin Volmer (Bielefeld University, Germany)	
Anna Preiser (University of Vienna, Austria)	
Tyanif Rico Rodríguez (Bielefeld University, Germany)	
Usos y definiciones del territorio en contextos de explotación minera: miradas al Macizo Colombiano. ....	.9
Tyanif Rico Rodríguez (Bielefeld University, Germany)	
Ann-Kathrin Volmer (Bielefeld University, Germany)	
El avance del neoextractivismo y la defensa por los recursos y patrimonios naturales. El caso del proyecto Minera Dominga en Chile y la lucha por territorio . . . . .	28
Javier Lastra-Bravo (Instituto de Sociología, Gottfried-Wilhelm- Leibniz Universität Hannover (LUH), Alemania)	
Socio-Environmental Conflicts and Institutions in Resource-Based Economies: The Case of Mining in Peru and Colombia. ....	44
Quincy Stemmler (Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany)	
Mining Policy and Subnational Tensions: A New Stage in The Cycle of Environmental Conflict in Twenty-First Century Argentina. ....	67
Jimena Pesquero Bordón (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina)	
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 . . . . .	83
Lorena E. Olarte-Sánchez (University of Vienna, Austria)	
Anna Preiser (University of Vienna, Austria)	
Nina Schlosser (Berlin School of Economics and Law, University of Vienna, Austria)	

- Thinking through Art, Drawing and Performance Ontological  
Conflicts That Are at the Core of Mining Struggles ..... 106
- Imayna Caceres (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria)
- Alfredo Ledesma (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria)

# Introduction: Struggles over Mining and Territory in Latin America.

Ann-Kathrin Volmer (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY, GERMANY)

Anna Preiser (UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA, AUSTRIA)

Tyanif Rico Rodríguez (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY, GERMANY)

The nexus between extractivist activities, mining conflicts and territory has become increasingly visible and discussed both in social movements and local struggles as well as in academic debates, especially in Latin America (Göbel y Ulloa 15). Considering the role and impact of mining as well as the emerging field of research, this special issue sets out to show and analyze the specificities of current struggles in the mining sector and territorial tensions that have been created in Latin America, and develop and change alongside institutional settings and current dynamics of global demand and discourses.

Latin American countries are marked by extractivism which we understand as an economic and development project linked to the appropriation, overexploitation, and extraction of large volumes of natural resources such as minerals, hydrocarbons or agricultural products in order to generate a valuation of these in the global market (Bebbington 23; Gudynas 188). Extractive dynamics and the deepening of development agendas based on extractivism are a sign of the lack of governmental determination facing the socio-environmental conflicts that mining generates. In the region, the struggles for the territory and the resistance of collective actors are related to the defense of life and socio-environmental relations, as well as the definition of mechanisms and institutional agendas to resist exploitation.

Mining as a key element of extractivism is an inherent part of capitalism and the global world market. It has a long history across Latin America and marks countries, their societies, and natural conditions to different degrees. The quest for precious metals and its material value was a propelling force for colonial interest and exploitation starting in the 15th century. It came along with a forceful appropriation of

land, its resources as well as the workforce to extract precious metals enriching the colonizers (Alimonda11-12)

Also nowadays, various countries have committed their economy and development model to the export of metals. Mining and its consequences are manifold. They influence institutional developments, economic orientations, mark dominant discourses about development and bring about profound environmental and territorial changes often leading to conflict. By the invasion of space, the arrival of new social actors changes hierarchies and previous social, economic and power relations. Thereby, living conditions of people are influenced. Also, economic benefits have been distributed unequally, with local populations often at a disadvantage.

On the one hand, some attempts have been made to improve the situation of communities in sites of extraction by environmental and redistribution policies or the implementation of *consulta previa*. On the other hand, territories across the subcontinent have been threatened by an expanding mining frontier, and mining conflicts and struggles on local, regional and global levels have been increasing. These conflicts often go along with negotiation processes between stakeholders that deal with different perspectives on *territorio*. This notion of *territorio* as expressed in Spanish language refers to a space for life and cultural identity, product of struggles and experiences from Latin America, as evidenced by López Sandoval et al. (45). We use this concept to mark a difference from the definition of territory regarding a bounded space related to national sovereignty. [1] *Territorio* goes beyond a physical-geographical space as it is constructed by socio-natural relations influenced by relations of power, composed of material as well as symbolic, cultural, spiritual,

social, political, and identity-marking resources. Despite the dominant discourse, territorio cannot be understood as apolitical or static. Rather, it is dynamic and in constant construction and is marked by constant tensions. Territory is in dispute, negotiated and contested on different scales, and can only be grasped and analyzed in its specific context. The characteristics of territorio are contingent and its meaning, conditions and claims are changing (Devine et al. 6). Different practices of territorial construction overlap, merge, get into conflict and/or are superimposed by force, caused by necessity or due to cultural changes. Through the analysis of the construction of territorio, the heterogeneity of stakeholder groups becomes visible. Therefore, territorio has become a concept which marks the positioning of different actors as well as an analysis of social and political dynamics (Svampa 39) and might make visible political strategies about the appropriation of nature, influenced by power relations. Nevertheless, struggles for territory are not only political, but also epistemic as territories are further connected to knowledge and knowledge is embedded in territories (Porto-Goncalves and 71).

This edition joins contributions addressing particular cases of territory-related struggles in Latin American countries including social and political dynamics related with the extraction of mineral resources. The cases focus on dynamics in different countries, tackling aspects such as institutional developments, discourses, its impact on struggles over territories, and the social construction of *territorio*. It also highlights how social movements contest, appropriate, refuse or engage with stakeholders in different contextualized conflicts over mining and territory.

The distance of the notion of territorio between institutional and local uses makes the conflicts between State institutions and local communities evident and substantial. Defining development strategies based on extractive agendas, or value creation based on the idea of nature as a resource, is a problematic issue, as evidenced by the contribution by Tyanif Rico and Ann-Kathrin Volmer that opens this volume. The authors analyze the multiple meanings of territory in the context of mining. Based on empirical research in the departments of Cauca

and Nariño in the Macizo region of Colombia - officially declared an eco-region, and at the same time strategic for extractivist development. The article illustrates how the institutional understanding of territory contradicts the peasant organization conceptions. The economist, dualistic understanding of the government in which nature is exploited in the form of mining and ecosystem services conflates with an understanding as a complex living space that is constructed and reproduced on a daily basis. From the perspective of peasant organizations, the authors highlight central dimensions of territorio: multiplicity, the identity process and the construction of political subjects as well as its political use in the struggle for the right to recognition of the peasantry.

Javier Lastra-Bravo proposes a discussion on two opposing phenomena: on the one hand, the advance of neo-extractivism in Latin American territories providing a general overview about debates on extractivism and the Anthropocene and, on the other hand, the increase of social movements linked to the defense of resources, territory, cultural heritage and common goods. For this purpose, the article focuses on analyzing the empirical case of the Dominga Mining Project in Chile, with special emphasis on the socio-territorial conflict that has been generated there. The text evaluates the perspectives of the different local and institutional actors in the dispute over territory and the defense of natural resources using discourse analysis and ethnography to focus on the inter-community conflict generated by the project.

The main point of Quincy Stemmler's article is to analyze how the institutional framework of a country affects the socio-environmental conflicts around mining in resource rich countries. His analysis is based on a comparison between Peru and Colombia, which are both resource rich and affected by resource conflicts. Starting with the conflict potentials and strategies of the state and non-state actors as well mining-firms he analyses the political-participatory, the politico-economic and the ecological dimension on the local and national level. His objective is to criticize the approach perceiving natural resources and rent-seeking behavior as given objectivities in mining conflicts by focusing on

the role of institutional settings in those conflicts.

In her contribution, Jimena Pesquero Bordón focuses on the processes of contentious action in rejection of mega-mining in Argentina from 2019-2021 and the transformations of the actor dynamics around state mining policy. In this context, the article shows how the conflicts are product of a new stage in the cycle of social conflict over environmental issues. The author highlights diverse and complex civil-social and political-institutional strategies, which range from the citizen resistance with repertoires of convergent struggle to the provincial government's and transnational corporations' actions. The latter are based on a technocratic vision of society-nature articulations that clash with aspects of the current environmental legal system in Argentina, generating multiple tensions.

Under the term green extractivism, the edition also critically discusses the current climate crisis with respect to the role of energy transition metals, such as lithium, copper, and silver. Referring to an expanding greening imperial mode of life, Lorena Olarte, Anna Preiser, and Nina Schlosser contribute to this emerging field of research by analyzing the renewed discourses along with an institutionalization of green(ing) extractivisms and resulting eco-territorial conflicts in Chile, Mexico, and Peru. They show how mining, sustainability, and climate protection are presented as compatible in the dominant discourse backed by institutions. At the same time, they point out multiple eco-territorial tensions, specifically at the local level in the Salar de Atacama in Chile, in Mexico's Sierra Norte de Puebla region and the Tambo Valley in Peru, and argue that green extractivisms reproduce and legitimize structures of exploitation, dependency, and power asymmetries.

Alfredo Ledesma and Imayna Caceres include videos and drawings in their multimedia essay, exploring other ways of knowledge production and outreach mechanisms. Both provide examples of how artistic practices and performances are auto-ethnographic methods to feel-think the more-than-human and ontological conflicts surrounding mining activities. Alfredo Ledesma addresses imaginaries of nature-human-relationships that have persisted in Peru as alternative horizons to the dominant system in

his scenic performances of human-non-human hybrids. Imayna Caceres approaches an intuitive intersection of ecologic and planetary concerns, drawing works as an alternative method for knowledge production. The resulting drawings show ancient beliefs about the relationships of life, water, mountain, wind, and other important elements of Andean cosmovision. Both artistic practices can contribute to make sense of the ongoing conflicts over mining and territory from alternative perspectives and to open up new imaginaries.

Through case studies, this issue provides interdisciplinary perspectives on the struggles over mining and territory in Latin America. The articles approach different conceptions of territory, institutional practices, and contentious relations with multiple stakeholders, providing a common ground of the facets of understanding socio-environmental conflicts. The experiences and cases present approaches for a more profound and critical understanding of the situated effects of global dynamics.

## Endnotes

[1] For further reference, see McCall et al. 2021.

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## Authors' biographies

Ann-Kathrin Volmer is a geographer from Bonn University and earned a Master of Sciences in Environmental studies from both, the Technical University of Cologne, Germany and the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, respectively. Currently she works as a scientific assistant at Bielefeld University and forms part of the Management of the Maria Sybilla Merian Center of Advanced Latin-American Studies (CALAS) in Guadalajara, Mexico. She also is a doctoral candidate in Political Geography. Her research project analyzes socio-ecological conflicts about water and gold in the Colombian Massive in South-Western Colombia.

Anna Preiser is university assistant (Prae-Doc) at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her PhD project focuses - from the perspective of political economy and political ecology - on socio-ecological conflicts and environmental politics in Peruvian mining sector. She studied International Development (University of Vienna) and International Business Administration (WU Vienna), and has done various research stays in Peru as an exchange student (Universidad del Pacífico), as a visiting researcher (Universidad

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Tyanif Rico Rodríguez is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Advanced Latin American Studies - CALAS at the University of Bielefeld. She is a sociologist from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and she has a Master's in Social Sciences with a mention in Rural Studies from the Colegio de Michoacán, also and a Master's in Agrarian Social Studies from the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO – Argentina). She holds a doctorate with honors in Geography from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her areas of knowledge are framed within the Environmental Humanities as a perspective to make modern approaches to the society-nature relationship more complex. The author is particularly interested in community and peasant strategies for territorial planning from care, political ontology and socio-environmental conflicts, qualitative methodologies and ethnographic research perspectives. Currently, her research focuses on community territorial care strategies and notions of value that configure more than human relationships in coffee production contexts in Mexico and Colombia.

# Usos y definiciones del territorio en contextos de explotación minera: Miradas al Macizo Colombiano.

TYANIF RICO RODRÍGUEZ (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY, GERMANY)

ANN-KATHRIN VOLMER (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY, GERMANY)

## Resumen

*La minería ha sido eje de articulación de políticas de desarrollo del Estado colombiano en la región del Macizo colombiano. Esta región es definida actualmente como “eco-región” por el gobierno nacional a partir de criterios ambientales y políticos en disputa con las definiciones y usos territoriales de las comunidades campesinas que habitan allí. En este artículo analizamos las implicaciones que tienen los modos de comprensión del territorio y sus definiciones en la ejecución de agendas de desarrollo, intervención política, cuidado ambiental y reconocimiento de conflictos socio-ecológicos. Específicamente, contrastamos las formas de comprensión del territorio desde la mirada de las organizaciones comunitarias del Macizo colombiano, particularmente las que se ubican en el núcleo del Macizo en el departamento del Cauca y las que se ubican en la región norte del departamento de Nariño, con las de la institucionalidad del Estado colombiano. A través de entrevistas, observación participativa, revisión bibliográfica y documental, analizamos las definiciones de territorio comunitarias y contrastamos cómo los sentidos de territorio locales evidencian y cuestionan la mirada extractivista de las instituciones del Estado. En las conclusiones reflexionamos sobre la importancia de reconocer las definiciones territoriales comunitarias en las agendas de desarrollo y la importancia de fijar la mirada en las concepciones del territorio en disputa en los contextos de explotación minera. Con ello queremos aportar a un entendimiento más profundo de las consecuencias que tiene la minería para las relaciones socio-ecológicas, y particularmente su impacto en el Macizo Colombiano.*

**Palabras clave:** minería, territorio, Macizo Colombiano.

## Introducción

La minería como estrategia de desarrollo ha sido un pilar fundamental para las políticas de desarrollo del Estado colombiano en las últimas décadas (Toro Pérez et al. 23). El interés en el sector minero energético parte de una concepción extractiva de la naturaleza como fuente de recursos. La presencia de proyectos mineros se ha concentrado en las zonas de montaña con abundante agua y biodiversidad, en las que habitan comunidades indígenas, afro y campesinas, cuyos modos de vida se ponen en riesgo por la presencia y latencia de concesiones mineras, dada su estrecha relación con las fuentes de agua para la agricultura y la subsistencia.

La minería es un sector económico creciente en la eco-región del Macizo Colombiano en

el sur-occidente del país. Esto se muestra en las licencias de oro solicitadas por empresas transnacionales al Estado colombiano, e incluyen grandes extensiones de tierra que atraviesan la división departamental de varios municipios específicos. En departamentos como Cauca y Nariño – donde se sitúa nuestro análisis – además del Valle del Cauca, el Huila e incluso del departamento del Tolima (Fig. 1). A esta escala, hasta el 70% de las tierras de las veredas [1] en los municipios donde hay solicitud de títulos o licencias de explotación minera, están potencialmente autorizadas como parte de las áreas de explotación. Eso quiere decir que incluso las tierras de los campesinos, comunales o privadas, más allá de su estatus de propiedad, están potencialmente incluidas como áreas de explotación.

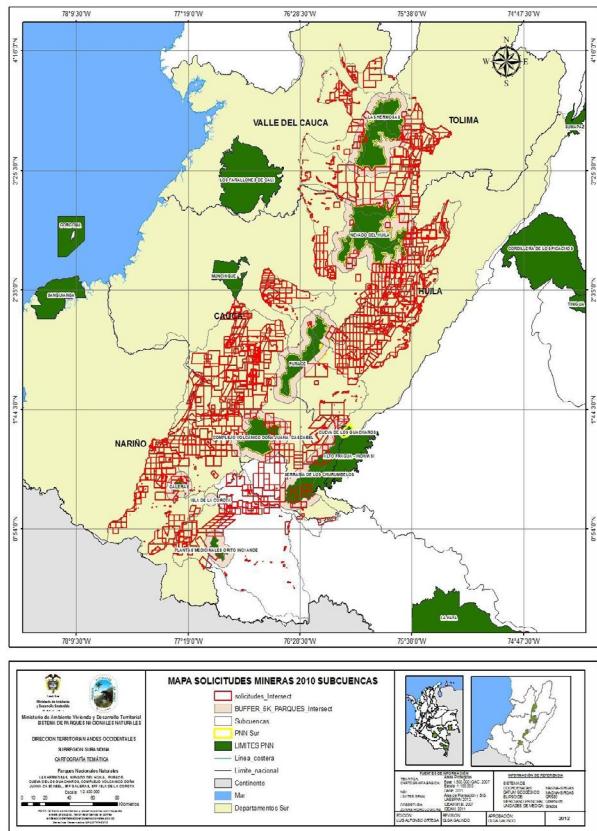


Fig. 1. Mapa concesiones de minería solicitada en el Macizo Colombiano en 2015 (Gómez Cerón)

Al mismo tiempo, el Macizo Colombiano es una región altamente biodiversa, cuya posición es estratégica para la producción de agua en el país. Allí se divide la cordillera de los Andes en ramificaciones que dan paso a múltiples escurreimientos, dando origen a los ríos que definen el paisaje colombiano ecológica y culturalmente (Guhl 143). Es por ello que, desde la institucionalidad del Estado, se le reconoce como una eco-región que forma parte de la Reserva de la Biosfera Constelación Cinturón Andino, promulgada por la UNESCO desde 1978. La visión de la protección sobre esta región reposa en una concepción estratégica para la provisión de recursos naturales que ha omitido la presencia de las comunidades que la habitan y la búsqueda de bienestar para las mismas.

Las políticas ambientales y los mecanismos de planeación de la región se han guiado por estas condiciones. La mayoría se basan en miradas extractivas y economicistas del territorio como fuente de recursos, ya bien sea para la explotación o la conservación, como

veremos en el primer apartado. Desde esta perspectiva, la mirada del gobierno se enfoca en los servicios ecosistémicos, la explotación y el uso de los recursos diversos que ofrece el Macizo Colombiano.

El uso y el acceso a los recursos naturales están en disputa. En la región conviven múltiples modos de vida entre las comunidades campesinas, afro e indígenas, que viven principalmente de la agricultura de subsistencia en interdependencia con los bosques. Las agendas extractivas del gobierno – particularmente los proyectos mineros –, entran en conflicto con los usos comunitarios del territorio. Las comunidades que habitan esta región han sostenido luchas históricas para el reconocimiento de sus derechos territoriales y para la salvaguarda del territorio, no solamente como un espacio de conservación ecológica, sino como un territorio vivo en el que se sostienen modos de vida locales en estrecha interdependencia con las dinámicas ecológicas. Es por esto que las organizaciones campesinas, en las que enfocamos particularmente nuestro análisis, han estado en constante resistencia a estas formas de explotación y definición de la región buscando el reconocimiento de sus derechos territoriales ante el Estado.

Garantizar el reconocimiento y salvaguarda de los modos de vida locales, y por ende derechos territoriales a las comunidades, es uno de los ejes de disputa de las organizaciones campesinas de esta región (Rico y Urquijo 247). El reconocimiento de derechos territoriales pone en evidencia que lo que se disputa también en los conflictos socioecológicos son los sentidos sobre la naturaleza, sobre el territorio y sobre las relaciones que configuran esos espacios. Es decir, evidencia una distancia en los sentidos sobre el territorio entre las instituciones y las comunidades. Particularmente en este caso, es evidente que hay una distancia entre lo que es definido como el Macizo colombiano, la presencia de la minería y de mecanismos institucionales de conservación que reproducen una lectura economicista de la naturaleza que no protege los modos de vida locales interdependientes de las condiciones de biodiversidad del territorio y, por el contrario, los pone en condiciones de alta vulnerabilidad socioecológica (Ramírez e

Ibagón 322).

Las formas de comprensión del territorio tienen implicaciones en la organización y definición de agendas de desarrollo, intervención política, cuidado ambiental y reconocimiento de conflictos socio-ecológicos. En la región del Macizo colombiano, la minería ha sido eje de articulación de políticas de desarrollo del Estado que se basan en una mirada al territorio como superficie explotable donde el control se ejerce a través del extractivismo. Al mismo tiempo, estos usos contrastan con las delimitaciones y agendas del cuidado ambiental, sostenidas en criterios de biodiversidad que definen al Macizo como “eco-región” a partir de criterios ambientales y políticos de la institucionalidad del Estado, en disputa con las definiciones y usos territoriales de las comunidades que allí habitan.

A través de la mirada de las organizaciones campesinas y sus definiciones de territorio, luchas y modos de vida, analizamos cómo los sentidos de territorio locales evidencian y cuestionan la mirada extractivista de las instituciones del Estado. Para las organizaciones campesinas, el agua es un tema articulador del territorio y las relaciones socio-ecológicas, por ende las comunidades reclaman el reconocimiento de mecanismos para la protección de sus modos de vida. Una de sus demandas principales es el reconocimiento del campesinado como sujeto de derecho. Exponemos estos procesos a través de dos casos desde la experiencia de las organizaciones comunitarias campesinas y populares del núcleo del macizo en el departamento del Cauca y de la región norte del departamento de Nariño.

A partir del trabajo de campo realizado para nuestras investigaciones doctorales en la región del Macizo, desarrollamos este documento utilizando métodos cualitativos y etnográficos. Llevamos a cabo entrevistas en múltiples períodos entre 2016 y 2020 con campesinas y campesinos, líderes y miembros de las organizaciones locales, actores gubernamentales y ONGs. El trabajo de campo se realizó en el Cauca en los siguientes períodos: octubre 2016, diciembre 2016 - junio 2017, y abril - junio 2018; y en Nariño entre abril - agosto de 2016, julio - octubre de 2018 y enero de 2020. En los fragmentos citados hemos cambiado los

nombres de las personas entrevistadas para proteger su identidad. Recabamos información sobre la vida cotidiana en las fincas, sobre los espacios de reunión y la movilización interna y política. A partir de entrevistas, historias de vida, observación participante y análisis de fuentes secundarias, exploramos la mirada y definiciones de territorio de las organizaciones, las mismas que complementamos con revisión bibliográfica y documental para contrastar con las definiciones y sentidos del Estado.

### **Concepción teórica de los conflictos socio-ecológicos en el Macizo Colombiano**

En este documento visibilizamos la importancia de una mirada crítica a las formas en cómo se configuran órdenes territoriales en el ámbito local para ampliar nuestras reflexiones y comprensión de las lógicas de extracción de los recursos y los movimientos del capital. Autores como David Harvey han explicado la división productiva de un nuevo orden global basado en la desposesión como producto de modelos de desarrollo sostenidos en la extracción y explotación (113). Se trata de un orden productivo y social basado en las nociones de competencia y ventajas comparativas que sitúan a los países de América Latina como exportadores de recursos naturales por excelencia. Las reformas estructurales de la década de los noventa en el continente, enfocadas en la privatización de la industria nacional, la apertura al comercio internacional y la desregulación estatal, profundizaron las brechas de desigualdad y los sistemas de producción basados en la reprimarización de las economías latinoamericanas. De esta forma se configura un nuevo consenso de los *commodities* en América Latina, los mismos que generan múltiples conflictos socio-ecológicos que Svampa define como:

Conflictos en los que se enfrentan actores con intereses y valores divergentes respecto al acceso y control de los recursos naturales en un contexto de poder asimétrico. En el centro de estos conflictos están las diferentes visiones de la naturaleza, los patrones lingüístico-simbólicos de interpretación y las

percepciones del territorio, así como las ideas sobre su protección y uso futuro. Además, estos conflictos expresan diferentes ideas de desarrollo ... Hay que prestar especial atención al Estado-nación, que desempeña un papel central en la configuración siempre asimétrica de los conflictos socioecológicos (80).

A partir de esta definición, la autora ubica las diferentes percepciones del territorio en el centro de los conflictos socio-ecológicos. Asimismo, brinda pistas sobre qué aspectos relacionar para apuntar estas diferencias que ayudan a marcar las distintas visiones de la naturaleza que generan conflictos socio-ecológicos, particularmente en el caso de la institucionalidad del Estado colombiano, cuyo modelo de desarrollo está basado en una idea de América Latina como exportador de recursos naturales, minimizando sus consecuencias socio-ambientales. Dentro de esa vorágine extractivista también surgen discursos y respuestas a la crisis. Específicamente plantean la necesidad de construir otros modelos de desarrollo, basados en una relación sostenible con la naturaleza o incluso replanteando los principios que sostienen dichos modelos de desarrollo. Estas respuestas surgen desde las comunidades y están ancladas a los territorios que habitan. El territorio ha sido un espacio de resistencia y también, progresivamente, un lugar de resignificación y creación de nuevas relaciones sociales pues es concebido doblemente como hábitat y comunidad de vida (Svampa 11). Esta lectura complejiza las definiciones tradicionales del territorio como espacio de soberanía y control del Estado (Raffestin 173).

Por otra parte, en la mirada de las comunidades al territorio “se sitúa en el centro de los reclamos de las movilizaciones y movimientos campesinos, indígenas y socioambientales [que] conducen a una concepción de la territorialidad opuesta radicalmente al discurso ecoeficientista y la visión desarrollista, propia de la narrativa dominante” (Svampa 11). Desde esas concepciones del territorio, de lo que se considera colectivo y la centralidad del bienestar, las comunidades generan perspectivas de

postdesarrollo (Escobar 20).

Buena parte de los discursos institucionales sobre la sostenibilidad de los recursos naturales han estado relacionados con las nociones de conservación del medio ambiente y la centralidad de su uso para la producción de capital. El papel de los mercados financieros también ha sido fundamental al poner a los recursos naturales dentro de la lógica de inversión y ganancia, basada en beneficios y pagos por servicios ambientales. El capitalismo se amolda a los discursos sobre la sostenibilidad y la conservación sin que se transforme el modelo productivo extractivista. Esa mirada caracteriza la lectura territorial del Estado. Sin embargo, como afirma Svampa, los esfuerzos locales son claves y es urgente atenderlos desde los estudios de los movimientos sociales y la creación de alternativas al paradigma del desarrollo homogéneo.

Aunque los planteamientos alternativos son modestos, localizados y siempre amenazados por las incertidumbres y la posible cooptación, estas experiencias de autorganización dejan su huella creando un nuevo tejido social y un conjunto de posibilidades y perspectivas que hay que explorar y promover. (Svampa 126)

Abordamos esta tensión entre perspectivas territoriales a través de la observación de dos casos en el Macizo Colombiano, en contraste con lo que analizamos como sentidos territoriales de la Institucionalidad del Estado. Estos sentidos se caracterizan por ser reduccionistas, desconociendo la complejidad con la que las comunidades habitan y producen el territorio. Existe una distancia entre estos sentidos territoriales donde radica la ambivalencia entre modos de relacionarse y concebir a la naturaleza, los vínculos comunitarios y, por ende, las relaciones que se establecen con el espacio. Así surgen los conflictos territoriales, a partir del desconocimiento de modos múltiples de habitar y concebir la naturaleza que determinan cómo nos relacionamos y decidimos qué hacer en un territorio.

El texto está organizado en cinco apartados donde presentamos la región y el marco de los

conflictos socio-ecológicos que se generan a partir de sentidos contrapuestos entre las instituciones del Estado y las comunidades campesinas. En el siguiente apartado desarrollamos los sentidos institucionales y las contradicciones sobre las que se sostiene el vínculo entre políticas que favorecen el otorgamiento de concesiones mineras, y a la vez promueven discursivamente la sostenibilidad ambiental en pro de la conservación del capital natural para proveer servicios ambientales. En el cuarto apartado, exponemos por su parte los sentidos territoriales de las comunidades campesinas a través de tres pilares asociados al sostenimiento de los modos de vida, sus interdependencias con el agua, la lucha política, la identidad y su relación con la búsqueda de reconocimiento como sujetos colectivos de derechos. Finalmente, en las conclusiones, señalamos la importancia de reconocer los sentidos contrapuestos sobre territorio como parte de los conflictos socio-ecológicos. Asimismo, evidenciamos el papel de la minería en la disputa por los usos y definición del territorio, además de sus impactos tanto ambientales como sociales.

## 2. El Macizo colombiano, miradas territoriales en disputa.

El Macizo colombiano es considerado por la institucionalidad del Estado como una eco-región que cubre una extensión de 4.8 millones de hectáreas, de las cuales la Reserva de la Biosfera Cinturón Andino ocupa el 47%. Es un área estratégica a nivel nacional e internacional, dado su significado para la producción de agua, la biodiversidad y los ecosistemas (Borsdorf, Mergili y Ortega 8).

Esta delimitación ha sido producto de diversas disputas y procesos de reconocimiento de las dinámicas socio-ecológicas que configuran dicha región. Nates Cruz, en su investigación (25), mostró cómo las delimitaciones institucionales, basadas en criterios geológicos, biofísicos y ecológicos, se transformaron y expandieron a partir de las relaciones territoriales de las comunidades que allí habitan (véase Fig. 2). Actualmente, la región es reconocida y delimitada a partir del documento CONPES 3915 [2] de 2018, que la define como una ecorregión estratégica en función de los servicios ecosistémicos que provee. Sin embargo, a pesar de que reconoce su importancia social y

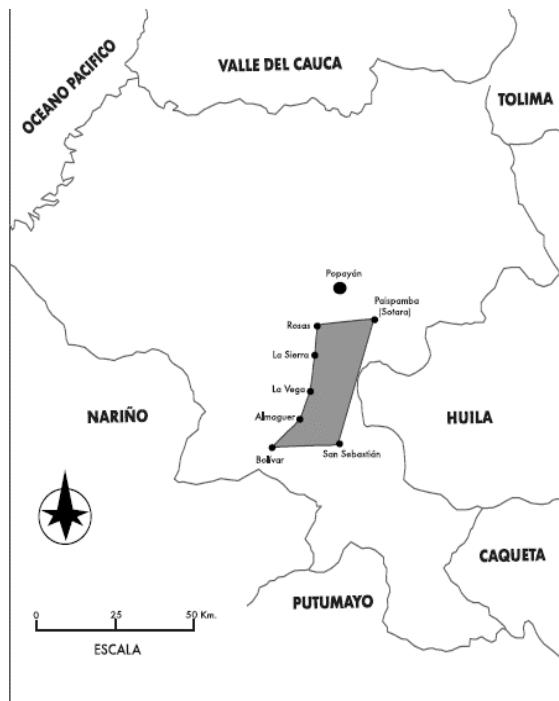
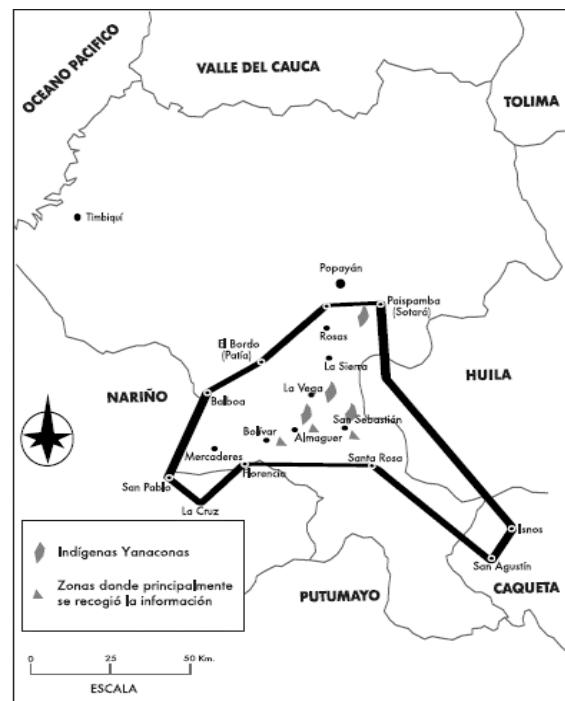


Fig. 2. Delimitación institucional versus delimitación basada en el conocimiento de los habitantes. Fuente: Trabajo etnográfico y de cartografía social de Nates Cruz (25 f.).



ecológica, el centro del interés institucional es la conservación de los recursos y capital natural.

Tomando como referencia la descripción de la eco-región del documento CONPES 3915 de 2018, esta se localiza sobre la cordillera de los Andes, en el suroccidente del país, y cubre una extensión de 4,8 millones de hectáreas (4,2 % del área continental de Colombia). Está conformada por 89 municipios de 7 departamentos, sobre los que tienen jurisdicción 6 Corporaciones Autónomas Regionales y de Desarrollo Sostenible (CARs), que se encargan de vigilar el cumplimiento de las normativas ambientales. Las CARs dependen directamente del ministerio de medioambiente (MADS). La delimitación de la eco-región en el CONPES fue realizada con base en consideraciones de tipo geológico, ambiental, y político -administrativo. Desde 1978, cuando fue declarada por la UNESCO como Reserva de la Biósfera Constelación Cinturón Andino, se ha generado una serie de orientaciones de políticas para promover su desarrollo con base en su capital natural. Esto, no solo para mantener la capacidad de generar servicios ecosistémicos para el Macizo, sino para aquellos territorios hidrográficamente interconectados que se benefician de este. Lo anterior, debido a que en esta región se originan las cordilleras Central y Oriental y confluyen los ecosistemas andino, amazónico y pacífico. Además, en el Macizo nacen las cinco arterias fluviales más importantes del país: los ríos Magdalena, Cauca, Putumayo, Caquetá y Patía, razón por la cual se ha denominado como la Estrella Fluvial Colombiana.

Las relaciones territoriales de quienes allí habitan generan múltiples bordes y delimitaciones en función de sentidos territoriales expresados y sostenidos por relaciones con el agua, la naturaleza y la organización comunitaria, que exceden una mirada sobre estos como recursos y capital. Esos sentidos territoriales tanto locales como institucionales, definen lo que se puede hacer en el territorio y de qué maneras. Este es precisamente el punto nodal que genera conflictos socio-ecológicos en la disputa de sentidos sobre el territorio entre las instituciones del Estado y las comunidades campesinas, a partir de las que construimos nuestro análisis.

Si bien desde la institucionalidad del estado, a través de documentos de política pública y lineamientos de acción, se reconoce el valor de esta región para la biodiversidad y la producción de agua; paralelamente se movilizan agendas económicas basadas en estrategias de explotación del capital natural, específicamente a través de la minería. Estas estrategias ponen en riesgo la producción de agua y conservación de la biodiversidad, además de los modos de vida locales que allí habitan y sostienen en parte aquellos servicios ecosistémicos. Autores como Hernández Barreto (207) han problematizado las delimitaciones que propone la institucionalidad del Estado, centrando su atención en el agua como elemento estructural de los vínculos sociales, institucionales y técnicos. Definiendo al Macizo como territorio hidrosocial el autor explica cómo esta región, además de ser un espacio geográfico delimitado por su importancia ecológica, está delimitado por las relaciones territoriales y discursivas en torno a la biodiversidad, la interculturalidad y - agregaríamos nosotras - la organización y movilización política. Podemos encontrar un ejemplo de esto en palabras de uno de sus habitantes:

Más o menos hacia 1991 cambia el paradigma del CIMA. porque se empieza de hablar del Macizo ya no como una cosa geográfica. Se empieza a ver a través de la movilización, que ahí habita gente, que se está pensando en vivir en medio de ese territorio. Que, si bien se debe conservar, también la gente necesita habitar y pensar otras dinámicas organizativas. El gobierno pone la mirada y descubre que hay un actor social que se está pensando el territorio, y en esa forma de pensar el territorio, el CIMA se ha planteado un ordenamiento territorial. No a partir de los planes de desarrollo que tiene el estado, sino a partir de los planes de vida. Básicamente, pensamos alrededor del agua y de lo ambiental, por eso el plan de vida del CIMA se llama "plan de vida y de dignidad". O sea, sí podemos conservar el agua y podemos conservar la dignidad del campesino que vive ahí. Así realmente podemos hacer un ordenamiento del

territorio. (Wilder, líder local)

Las relaciones territoriales de campesinos, indígenas y afro con el agua, y el espacio geográfico delimitado como parte de la ecorregión Macizo, no son uniformes. Los usos y formas territoriales de habitar y vincularse con el agua, suman a las características que definen sus bordes. Además de las condiciones biofísicas e interculturales que dan matices específicos a la región, las formas de organización política suman a las delimitaciones y bordes de lo que se considera parte del Macizo. En la cita se relaciona el manejo del agua con la lucha por la dignidad. Con base en sus perspectivas sobre el territorio y el agua, así como de manejo y gestión, los campesinos quieren ser reconocidos como sujetos de derecho. En el siguiente apartado analizamos detalladamente cómo estas relaciones se expresan entre los movimientos campesinos en el Macizo Colombiano.

### **3. Sentidos territoriales de la Institucionalidad del Estado sobre el Macizo.**

En este capítulo describimos y analizamos los sentidos territoriales desde la perspectiva del gobierno, para posteriormente compararlos con las perspectivas de los movimientos sociales.

De acuerdo con el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2018 – 2022 “Pacto por Colombia, Pacto por la equidad”, el sector minero energético será uno de los principales motores de crecimiento del país (142). No solo por las dinámicas que genera en materia de inversión extranjera, comercio exterior, y regalías [2], sino por el impacto que tiene en las actividades a nivel local en materia de empleo y desarrollo. En este mismo documento reafirman su compromiso con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, particularmente con los numerales 7 al 17 que son explícitos en temas de protección y conservación de la naturaleza ¿Cómo entender esta mirada ambivalente del Estado entre los planes y lineamientos extractivistas versus las estrategias de conservación ambiental?

Argumentamos que una lectura a los usos y definiciones del territorio nos puede brindar pistas para comprender esta mirada dual, y así evidenciar los conflictos que genera.

Particularmente, nos enfocamos en las instituciones del Estado y las comunidades que habitan los territorios que institucionalmente se ven como espacios rezagados y legibles a partir de estrategias de desarrollo basadas en la explotación, el extractivismo y el aprovechamiento de los recursos naturales, como es el caso del Macizo Colombiano. Como lo hemos observado, esta región es definida por su rol en la prestación de servicios ecosistémicos culturales y de aprovisionamiento, y por la capacidad de uso del capital natural que ofrece. Es decir, por su utilidad económica como espacio natural. La caracterización del territorio por el gobierno se basa en un entendimiento técnico-administrativo con el objetivo de gestionar y regular el acceso y uso de los recursos naturales para convertirlos en capital, ya bien sea por medio de la extracción de bienes minerales o la prestación de servicios para la biodiversidad. Allí radica el conflicto por la tierra al ignorar los conflictos socio-ecológicos. Un ejemplo de ello es el reconocimiento del conflicto de uso del suelo en el documento CONPES 3915 de 2018 que, como concepto técnico-administrativo, ignora conflictos socio-ecológicos que ponen en evidencia las demandas de los movimientos sociales.

Las definiciones institucionales de territorio están atravesadas por el uso económico que se pueda hacer de él. Estos sentidos se expresan claramente en las palabras de un funcionario de Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP) cuando define al territorio como “un área, un espacio geográfico, en el que existe una oferta ambiental que es demandada por las comunidades e instituciones que allí se encuentran” (Javier, funcionario DNP).

Es claro que las características naturales del territorio se definen en términos de su función para la utilización económica de los seres humanos, considerándolas en términos de oferta y demanda. Desde una perspectiva gubernamental, esta aseveración reafirma los supuestos básicos según los cuales funciona el sistema económico y cómo deben atenderse los espacios rezagados del desarrollo. Es por ello que la ambivalencia sobre los usos del territorio entre la minería y la conservación de la biodiversidad tiene asidero en una perspectiva

capitalista y dualista de la relación sociedad-naturaleza. Esta mirada permite reconocer a la naturaleza como recurso o bien explotable, ya bien sea para la obtención de minerales o para proveer servicios ambientales. Una mirada que disocia el espacio de quien lo habita y, por ende, lo entiende como superficie explotable a partir de criterios que pueden ser definidos desde la centralidad de la institucionalidad en las oficinas de planeación, de manera remota y sin consulta a las comunidades que habitan la región.

Colombia ha sido un país sumamente centralista, que ve como periferia a los espacios rurales y los define a partir de la necesidad de incorporación al territorio del Estado desde el control. Se refiere a los espacios rurales como territorios marginales, salvajes, violentos y precarios en comparación con la capital (Bogotá), considerada un espacio de poder centralizado. Desde allí, se permite incorporar la periferia rural a partir de discursos del desarrollo que se traducen en el despliegue de estrategias de explotación económica y aprovechamiento productivo. Las narrativas del rezago y la pobreza de los espacios rurales complementan una lectura dualista de la relación sociedad – naturaleza, haciendo que el territorio sea un espacio de explotación tanto de servicios ecosistémicos como de minerales.

En las últimas tres administraciones presidenciales, la minería se ha considerado eje del desarrollo. Particularmente en el periodo presidencial de Iván Duque (2018-2022), con la reafirmación del *Plan de Desarrollo Minero con Proyección al 2025*. Allí, se identifica y proyecta a la actividad minera como eje de ordenamiento del territorio y se especifica la necesidad de que en Colombia las actividades de aprovechamiento de recursos del subsuelo estén definidas como vocación potencial para el uso del suelo (58). Se transformó así la clasificación actual del Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC), con el objetivo de tener recursos jurídicos para la delimitación de zonas para la explotación minera que actualmente están en disputa con las comunidades que habitan aquellos territorios y que reclaman mecanismos de consulta colectivos y de gestión territorial comunitaria de la naturaleza.

Asimismo, en el estudio del gobierno nacional sobre el impacto de la actividad minera en el territorio colombiano, demandado por la *Sentencia T 445 de 2016* se hace mención sobre la generación de conflictos socioambientales y el papel transformador de esta actividad para la gestión económica del territorio.

El sector minero-energético es un impulsor estratégico del desarrollo del país, su viabilidad, sostenibilidad y competitividad repercuten en las oportunidades de crecimiento económico y bienestar de la población. En este sentido, el sector concibe el conflicto como un elemento inherente al desarrollo de la sociedad y como un elemento positivo y transformador ... En este sentido, el aporte al desarrollo de las comunidades, especialmente aquellas presentes en sus áreas de influencia, se debe realizar a través de acciones concretas que permitan aprovechar las oportunidades que devienen del ejercicio de la actividad minero-energética en varios sentidos: contribuyendo con el fortalecimiento de la capacidad institucional y comunitaria, conocimiento del territorio, formación para el empleo y dinamización de la economía regional. (30)

Esta lectura desconoce los impactos sociales y políticos sobre el territorio, la naturaleza y lo que se define como recurso y estrategia de desarrollo. Claramente evoca un sentido de aprovechamiento económico del territorio y la necesidad de conocerlo a partir de lo que puede ser aprovechable. Por su parte, el *estudio de la comunidad académica*, en respuesta a la misma sentencia, reconoce la importancia de la escala territorial para la implementación y análisis de los impactos de la minería; específicamente a partir de las relaciones comunitarias, ecosistémicas y locales que definen tanto al territorio, como a la comunidad. Ambos se ven afectados por las actividades que se realicen allí (50). Para la región del Macizo, la minería de oro y la exploración de hidrocarburos representan un peligro para las fuentes de agua, puesto que las concesiones en curso proponen la explotación en aluvión, además de procesos de beneficio

con mercurio, lo que deja grandes cantidades de agua contaminada y pone en riesgo a los mantos y acuíferos.

Estos usos potenciales proyectados por una agenda minera en la región contrastan con las problemáticas y objetivos delimitados en el CONPES 3915 de 2018. En el documento, el agua es un eje articulador del territorio por ser uno de los bienes que provee la región, convirtiéndola en un espacio de alta biodiversidad que sostiene múltiples ecosistemas en todo el gradiente altitudinal, desde el páramo alto-andino hasta el piedemonte amazónico. Precisamente el objetivo de este documento de política pública es armonizar los entendimientos del territorio sobre el Macizo, para generar estrategias que permitan “proteger y asegurar el uso sostenible del capital natural y de los servicios de los ecosistemas y promover un crecimiento económico resiliente ante los desastres y el cambio climático” (CONPES 3915 10).

Con ello, la función de esta delimitación es la conservación del capital natural para evitar la pérdida de servicios ecosistémicos, reducir la vulnerabilidad ante eventos de cambio climático y generar estrategias de regulación hídrica para el abastecimiento de centros poblados. La sostenibilidad del territorio es leída a partir de su capacidad de proveer servicios ecosistémicos. Es a partir de allí que se reconocen posibles conflictos. Por ejemplo, el uso del suelo cuando las actividades difieren de su vocación según los planes institucionales. Los conflictos del uso de suelo son cada vez más profundos en la región (CONPES 3915 10). Si bien los mecanismos legales y de planeación como la definición de usos vocacionales generan lineamientos de aprovechamiento, también se convierten en mecanismos para legitimar los intereses de los grupos y agendas de poder en esos territorios. Estos mecanismos técnicos reconocen conflictos administrativos y esconden conflictos socio-ecológicos.

El interés de la agenda minera en el reconocimiento del uso del subsuelo como parte del uso vocacional del suelo es un claro ejemplo de los mecanismos que generan conflictos y tensiones territoriales. Dichas tensiones se basan no solo en sentidos diferenciados, sino en estrategias y balanzas de poder desiguales

en la toma de decisiones sobre el territorio. Ello puesto que desconocen especialmente a las comunidades que habitan la región.

Este desconocimiento radica en una mirada sobre las comunidades como ignorantes sobre las dinámicas de su territorio, y que además prioriza las agendas del desarrollo y las instituciones del Estado y su lectura sobre el crecimiento económico y la producción de bienes y servicios. La definición de territorio por parte de las instituciones gubernamentales permite sacar conclusiones sobre su posicionamiento frente a los habitantes del Macizo.

El conflicto también radica en la autoridad de definición sobre el territorio. La definición del Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP) como institución del Estado hace hincapié en los aspectos económicos, mientras que las definiciones de los movimientos sociales, como veremos, tienen una concepción del territorio como espacio para la vida. Estas diferencias también hacen que las demandas de los movimientos sociales sean más ambiguas. En la exigencia de “no a la minería en nuestros territorios”, se hace una reivindicación más amplia de lo que sería asequible con la definición del DNP. Al identificar los movimientos sociales con el territorio, el enfoque de la eficiencia económica queda despojado de su significado. Al mismo tiempo, otras exigencias, como la dignidad de los residentes, se hacen más comprensibles. Esta concepción del territorio convierte la demanda de “no a la minería en nuestros territorios” en una demanda integral, puesto que va más allá de los aspectos económicos y apunta a los cambios en los modos de vida comunitarios que desencadenaría la minería. Veamos los sentidos del territorio desde la mirada de las comunidades.

#### **4. Sentidos y usos del territorio, definiciones comunitarias.**

En este capítulo describimos y analizamos los sentidos territoriales desde la perspectiva de las organizaciones populares y campesinas para evidenciar las diferencias con la lectura institucional.

Para las comunidades campesinas el territorio no es una superficie explotable. Por

el contrario, es el espacio de vida del que son parte y el cual les define colectivamente. Es allí donde se reproduce la vida individual, familiar y comunitaria. Las dinámicas ecosistémicas, políticas, productivas y organizativas son parte del conjunto de procesos que sostienen los modos de vida locales que definen y delimitan el territorio. Es decir, a sus territorialidades y procesos de territorialización que, parafraseando las definiciones de autores clásicos como Soja (32) o Sack (19), constituyen la capacidad y los esfuerzos que una comunidad desarrolla para afectar un área geográfica específica: el territorio. Siguiendo los elementos que propone la definición de Soja, la territorialidad humana tiene tres elementos: el sentido de la identidad espacial, el sentido de la exclusividad y la compartimentación de la interacción humana en el espacio (33). La territorialidad proporciona, entonces, no sólo un sentimiento de pertenencia a una porción particular de tierra, sino que a través de procesos de territorialización se produce y delimita el territorio desde de códigos y formas de comportamiento.

En el caso de las comunidades campesinas, la territorialidad es una forma de habitar y coproducir el territorio producto de las redes entre lugares y personas; del estrecho vínculo entre el medio ambiente y los seres; de las dinámicas productivas; y de los retos sociales, políticos, económicos y ambientales que atraviesan como colectivo. En los casos que analizamos en el núcleo del Macizo en el Cauca y el norte de Nariño, tomamos elementos que comparten las organizaciones comunitarias en las definiciones y miradas al territorio a partir de sus territorialidades.

Las concepciones de territorio locales que complejizan una mirada extractivista y economicista, que predomina en la narrativa de las instituciones del Estado, las analizamos en tres sentidos. Primero, desarrollamos la mirada comunitaria sobre el territorio desde una perspectiva holística, que lo concibe como una multiplicidad compleja más allá de un espacio geográfico delimitado explotable. Segundo, exponemos cómo el territorio es un proceso identitario y colectivo que se reafirma a través de distintas estrategias discursivas y vínculos socio-ecológicos cotidianos. Tercero, analizamos el

uso político del territorio como una herramienta de legibilidad ante el Estado y reconocimiento del sujeto campesino como categoría política que garantice el reconocimiento de derechos territoriales.

#### **4.1 El territorio como multiplicidad, más allá de una lectura economicista**

En adelante, el análisis se concentra en dos movimientos campesinos: El Proceso Campesino y Popular de La Vega (PCPV) en el Cauca, y las organizaciones campesinas del norte de Nariño.

El PCPV se fundó en la década de 1980 por un grupo de campesinos motivados por el desacuerdo con la corrupción y la cooptación del gobierno municipal. En los planes municipales y cuentas nacionales, hubo fondos que oficialmente se utilizaron en supuestos proyectos de infraestructura o de educación, que nunca se realizaron. Con el tiempo, esta organización se concentró en procesos de defensa del territorio con un interés principal definido en una frase: "Si el macizo vive, vivimos todos, porque allí vive el agua. No a la minería en nuestros territorios." (PCPV). Actualmente el PCPV tiene múltiples campos de acción, como marchas en la defensa del territorio, proyectos de educación ambiental y vinculación con otras organizaciones en niveles locales, regionales y nacionales.

Por su parte, en el norte de Nariño, los grupos que analizamos son producto de varias décadas y procesos organizativos gestionados por los productores de café desde la década de los setenta, la presencia del trabajo pastoral desde la existencia de Acción Cultural Popular desde mediados de la década de los sesenta, e incluso los 'grupos de amas de casas y trabajo amigo', gestados desde las estrategias del Desarrollo Rural de la década de los setenta en el siglo XX. El descontento por el abandono sistemático del Estado y la falta de garantías como productores y ciudadanos presiona a estas organizaciones a participar de las movilizaciones por la vía panamericana en 1999. Esta fecha se convierte en un hito, al ser un espacio de encuentro y articulación de las organizaciones de la región. Desde entonces se reúnen 'como quebradas

que alimentan un río' en el Comité de Integración del Macizo (CIMA) (CNMH et al. 255). A partir de esta experiencia de movilización se han impulsado agendas de lucha por la protección del territorio contra la minería, por la garantía a sus modos de vida y por el desarrollo de una economía propia, basada en la diversificación, la communalidad y el cuidado del territorio. Una propuesta central actualmente, en la que coinciden con el PCPV, es en la búsqueda del reconocimiento del campesinado como sujeto de derecho. En particular a partir de la delimitación y reconocimiento del Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del norte de Nariño y sur del Cauca (TCAM), como mecanismo de defensa territorial.

Las valoraciones económicas del espacio natural, como propone la institucionalidad del Estado, en cambio, juegan un papel menos central en la definición de los movimientos sociales en el Macizo cultural, además que sus sentidos exceden una lectura extractiva. Existen múltiples dimensiones que entran en consideración en la definición del territorio y las formas de habitarlo. Esto se ve expresado en la manera en que los habitantes de la región definen y visualizan el proceso de construcción del territorio, pues se trata de una trayectoria colectiva que se reproduce cotidianamente y se usa para posicionarse políticamente. Como ejemplo, las afirmaciones de dos profesores del PCPV:

Territorio es la totalidad de muchas cosas, es la unidad de la vida, el agua, la tierra, los individuos, los animales, las plantas, su cosmovisión, su identidad, su cultura, su producción, las semillas, la biodiversidad. Creo que se incluyen muchos elementos básicos para hablar del territorio dentro de esta totalidad (Charly y Federico).

Esta amplia gama de atribuciones materiales y simbólicas es completamente distinta a la forma dialéctica de las instituciones del gobierno. No se distingue entre el hombre y el entorno, sino que lo perciben como unidad. Por lo tanto, no se enfoca en la pregunta de cómo se puede beneficiar el hombre por los recursos naturales. Sí es importante la subsistencia de

los habitantes, pero al mismo tiempo no se crea una jerarquía en la que los humanos demandan lo que la naturaleza ofrece. Esto se evidencia en las palabras de un niño de 11 años de la región norte de Nariño, cuando afirma "somos parte del territorio, pero el territorio también sería parte de nosotros, porque también lo hacemos, por medio de los cultivos que sembramos" (John Faber) o incluso en la manera en que Alexandra, también de 11 años, describe a su territorio:

Mi territorio tiene el cielo azul, hace mucho viento y tiene muchas cuencas y árboles. Es limpio y también diría que es divertido. Que hay agricultura, que la gente es muy trabajadora, y que se cultivan cosas que se venden muy distintas y que tiene muchos animales. De la casa, siempre es un gato, un perro, un cerdo y gallinas. Afuera hay hormigas, pajaritos, culebras, lombrices, aves; que a veces amanece con nubes que son blancas, que los árboles son altos y verdes y a veces bajitos. Que hay gente blanca y trigueña y que los colegios son como amarillos y tienen la bandera de Colombia, que hay mujeres muy responsables y, bueno, que los animales son bonitos y cariñosos y nos demuestran todo su amor.

Los sentidos afectivos son claves para la producción constante del territorio, es precisamente esta conexión la que articula la complejidad de procesos y actores que están incluidos en sus límites. Asimismo, por medio de estos procesos se reafirma y reproducen sentidos de pertenencia e identidad que son la base de los posicionamientos políticos que se articulan desde y en torno a la noción de territorio. En una entrevista grupal con un grupo de jóvenes en el municipio de San Lorenzo, una joven de 16 años hacía explícita esta relación:

Yo diría que, si nosotros no conocemos nuestro territorio, es muy poco probable que podamos vivir como hemos venido viviendo, porque, digamos, en el campo sobre todo, como tenemos ahí cerca el agua o los productos, casi no tenemos en cuenta la importancia que estos tienen para otros. Pero digamos, la gente

que ha experimentado esa falta, ya saben valorarlo. Y esto nos serviría para reconocer y apropiar lo que tenemos, tener algo seguro para el futuro. Nosotros no solo estamos pensando en nosotros, sino que estamos pensando en el futuro, en qué pasará con todos (Adriana, joven campesina).

La principal diferencia entre la perspectiva institucional y las comunitarias se encuentra, pues, en un punto fundamental: el territorio no se externaliza ni se dicotomiza como un constructo de recursos naturales que se pueden explotar. Los humanos son vistos como parte del territorio, del proceso que lo produce y lo reafirma al habitarlo, sumada a una relación afectiva que define las relaciones de producción y reproducción. Se posibilita la existencia de distintos elementos naturales sin que la demanda humana sea el elemento dominante.

Asimismo, una mirada sobre la conservación de la naturaleza manifiesta la distancia entre una lectura territorial que reconoce las múltiples afectaciones que tendrían lugar por intervenciones y agendas desarrollistas. Así se generan conflictos socio-ecológicos que, en la lectura del Estado, se traducen en conflictos sobre los usos del suelo y en respuestas economicistas. Cuando, territorialmente, las afectaciones reales a las personas, la naturaleza y las relaciones socio-ecológicas que constituyen al territorio, son más complejas e incluso se invisibilizan. De allí es claro que los movimientos sociales y organizaciones locales se posicionan en contra de ciertos programas que les obligan a someterse a mecanismos de resarcimiento o de pago por servicios ambientales, cuando su interés no es monetario. Por el contrario, trasciende una dimensión transaccional.

[Los movimientos] también están exigiendo cosas políticas, están diciendo ‘revoquen los títulos mineros, no queremos títulos mineros’, y estamos demostrando por qué ... No estamos exigiendo cien millones de pesos, estamos exigiendo que no se afecte el territorio por una norma, o por un permiso que emita el Estado (Yeison, líder del PCPV)

Por lo tanto, los movimientos sociales no se limitan a las intervenciones del Estado, incluso algunos se oponen completamente a su intervención. Esta demanda, por ejemplo, va en contra de las formas de ver a la naturaleza como recursos y de distribuir dinero a cambio. Lo que manifiesta esta demanda es la necesidad de ejercer autonomía para tomar decisiones desde una lectura compleja y múltiple de lo que constituye al territorio. Al pensar en el territorio y en la minería de forma conjunta, las demandas de los movimientos sociales no se refieren únicamente a la no extracción de recursos o a la protección de la naturaleza, sino también a una menor influencia del Estado y a un mayor espacio de decisión para las comunidades.

#### 4.2 Territorio como identidad

Los procesos de territorialización representan mucho más que una estrategia de control geográfico: implican y están implicados con formas de pensar y actuar, así como con cosmovisiones construidas y cimentadas por creencias y formas de conocer cultural e históricamente contingentes (Delaney 12). El territorio es resultado de estos procesos como una entidad espacial que sirve como instrumento de comunicación; visibiliza y hace tangibles estructuras sociales, tales como autoridad, identidad, derechos, aspiraciones, prejuicios, entre otras.

El territorio como un proceso identitario está anclado en sentidos de pertenencia que se construyen a partir de una historia compartida y de vínculos afectivos y cotidianos (Tuan 130). La historicidad de la producción relacional de sujetos y espacio configura lo que en la región del macizo se articula alrededor de una identidad territorial maciceña. Pues es precisamente a través de la cotidianidad que se vincula la trayectoria individual con el espacio físico-geográfico y las dinámicas ecológicas que allí ocurren. Así mismo, se construyen discursos en torno a la pertenencia y los límites de los espacios territoriales a partir de relaciones ambientales, afectivas, productivas, políticas, etc. Esto se expresa en las palabras de docentes de La Vega, Cauca durante una entrevista:

Territorio es vida, ¡sí! Es nuestra forma de ver la vida, es una cosmovisión, es una forma de representarnos en el universo. Entonces sin el territorio, sin el sentimiento que tenemos, sobre el concepto de lo que es territorio, nosotros no actuaríamos así, ni pensaríamos así. No habría proceso campesino sin territorio, no habría procesos indígenas sin territorio. Entonces, es lo que identifica y lo que les da sentido a nuestras vidas: la sacralidad que uno encuentra en esta tierra que le llamamos territorio y, más específicamente, Macizo colombiano. Nosotros, cuando hablamos de Macizo colombiano, es una palabra que nos enorgullece, que sentimos alegría, porque uno debe sentir alegría donde vive. Entonces, uno aquí vive contento, porque es nuestro territorio, nuestra vida, la esencia de lo que somos (Charly y Federico)

Esta declaración es una discusión reflexiva sobre las conexiones entre la importancia del Macizo Colombiano para la identidad de los habitantes y la lucha de los movimientos sociales. Lo que constituye la identificación con el territorio es un fuerte sentimiento de pertenencia. Este sentimiento se refuerza e invoca en los discursos de los movimientos sociales para unir a los grupos heterogéneos que los constituyen comunitariamente. A través de la construcción colectiva del territorio y la identificación con el Macizo Colombiano, hay un denominador común a pesar de todas las diferencias y conflictos: "porque es nuestro territorio, nuestra vida, la esencia de lo que somos." (Yeison)

La construcción activa del territorio y el apego emocional hacen que los diferentes grupos se sientan involucrados en las agendas y demandas de los movimientos sociales. Ello conduce a un sentimiento de pertenencia que es la base de la lucha común. Se trata de convergencias que unen a las comunidades del norte de Nariño, hasta las del núcleo del Macizo en el Cauca a través de la identidad maciceña a pesar de la distancia física.

Este sentido de pertenencia es alimentado a través de estrategias discursivas por las organizaciones y movimientos sociales. En

el caso del norte de Nariño, por ejemplo, los discursos de movilización política han apelado al cuidado del agua, más que a la confrontación directa contra la minería. En esta región, la pertenencia e historia de las montañas es clave en los discursos sobre la identidad territorial asociada a las relaciones socio-ecológicas y el cuidado del territorio. Aquí predomina una dimensión espiritual vinculada con la capacidad de las montañas y la naturaleza de ser actores en la construcción del territorio (De la Cadena 364).

Aquí está a punto de venir un problema, que es la explotación minera. Yo sé que eso viene porque Duque (Presidente en el periodo 2018 - 2022) ya lo dijo, que la plata va a venir de eso. Estos cerros de acá y las cordilleras tienen muchísimos minerales, oro y de todo. Y pues, obviamente van a venir a explotar, por eso las personas que vienen desde el CIMA, la Red de Familias las Gaviotas, han luchado y explicado a la gente que eso no es bueno, porque donde llegue eso, se nos acaba el agua y se acaba todo. (Gabriela, campesina de San Lorenzo)

Las organizaciones campesinas locales tienen claridad de la potencia simbólica de sus cerros y montañas, y del valor que estos tienen para la organización territorial e individual. Es así como uno de los comités del Comité de Integración del Macizo – CIMA, que impulsan la propuesta de Territorios Campesinos Agroalimentarios TCAM en el municipio de San Lorenzo, reafirma que su estrategia para ampliar el alcance de la propuesta entre los campesinos, que desconocen el trabajo de las organizaciones, es a través de esa potencia simbólica de los cerros:

Nuestra metodología y pedagogía es desde lo simbólico, y ahí es donde juega lo que significa. Por lo menos la Unión, lo que la representa es la Jacoba. En San Lorenzo: la quebrada las Juntas y el cerro la Marucha. En Taminango se relacionan mucho con San Lorenzo por el agua. Aparte del volcán Doña Juana, que es el referente mayor para nosotros, hay sitios de referencia simbólica locales. Si usted

toca eso, ya. Eso genera mucho arraigo y mucha pertenencia, entonces si usted habla que van a tocar una quebrada o un cerro, la gente se mueve y, claro, es porque en esas partes está ubicado lo que es la vida: el agua. (Robert y Alba)

En las narrativas de los actores, las montañas y el agua tienen una conexión fundamental para los modos de vida campesinos, no solamente en términos productivos sino culturales y espirituales. Los ciclos de reproducción del agua hacen que no sólo sea necesaria para la cobertura forestal en las montañas y las zonas más altas, sino para el cuidado de los cauces de las quebradas y los suelos para afrontar períodos de sequía. Esa sagrada ambiental se transforma en estrategia política a través distintas herramientas simbólicas o espirituales, tales como las capillas o figuras religiosas en las cimas para marcar su relevancia, protegerlas y así mismo crear vínculos afectivos con el territorio. La minería, la tala y la prospección de hidrocarburos son las amenazas para las montañas y el agua, por ende, para la vida campesina, el territorio y los sentidos de pertenencia comunitarios. Las propuestas de las organizaciones campesinas tienen su eje de resistencia en este punto, como evidencian dos docentes y dirigentes del PCPV:

Llevamos seis años haciendo estas marchas. Y estas marchas por la vida y por el agua, es cuando todos nos unimos con la cultura, simbolizando el territorio, pintando piedras, los muros, los árboles. Explicamos a la gente que amamos el agua, que amamos el territorio, que sentimos que también somos agua y que también somos tierra. Venimos del agua y de la tierra. Explicamos esto a la gente y tomamos estas ideas para exigir que el agua sea para el consumo humano, para la producción agrícola y ganadera, y también la tierra para la producción. (Charly y Federico)

Otro miembro de la misma organización explica que las acciones de protesta no son sólo para defender el territorio, “sino también [para] caminarlo” (Lupe). En este contexto, queda

claro que las acciones de los movimientos también sirven para la educación ambiental. Los habitantes no asumen que la identificación con el territorio surja de forma natural o esté definida por las fronteras, que siempre son difusas y maleables, sino que se trata del desarrollo conjunto del significado del territorio al habitarlo y reconocerlo.

Por lo tanto, los significados del territorio en los movimientos sociales no se toman como algo intrínsecamente dado, sino al contrario, se construye activamente. Así, además de una identificación como macizo, donde hay un proceso consciente de organización, se trata de un proceso reflexivo, que por un lado se basa en la cuestión de lo que significa ser macizo. Por otro lado, a través de la experiencia física de entrar, de caminar por el territorio, se crea una experiencia corpórea que permite un nivel de identificación profundo y afectivo.

El aspecto corpóreo de la experiencia del territorio es importante porque apoya el proceso de simbolización. Las cualidades físicas que constituyen el territorio están relacionadas con las propias personas. En este sentido, la producción y reproducción del cuerpo está relacionada con el territorio que lo rodea. De este modo, los niveles simbólicos y materiales se unen y consiguen el efecto deseado de una relación más profunda con el territorio que se quiere defender. Esto forma parte de la autocomprensión y el autoconocimiento sobre los que se organizan los movimientos sociales y sus procesos de territorialización. Es por ello que las prácticas al interior de las fincas como la preparación de fertilizantes naturales, la protección de especies nativas de árboles, el sostén de sistemas de producción en agroforestería, la protección y reproducción de semillas nativas y la resistencia a la utilización de agrotóxicos de muchos campesinos son centrales para materializar las luchas, las formas alternativas de gestión de la naturaleza o de cuidado del agua.

Inclusive, los mecanismos que utilizan los movimientos sociales son persuasivos y estratégicos. Se sostienen en estos vínculos afectivos y corpóreos de los habitantes del territorio. Construir empatía y pertenencia territorial se hace a partir del cuidado del agua

y de la resistencia a la minería como amenaza a los modos de vida y las montañas. Un líder en Nariño explica precisamente este vínculo:

Para nosotros, el eje central del pleito y todas nuestras propuestas es el agua. Porque el agua la utiliza la gente tanto de allá, como de acá. Ahora, si usted les habla de ir en contra de la minería, eso genera mucho rechazo. Lo que sí genera identidad y lo que le preocupa a la gente, es el agua. (Ciro)

En palabras de Enrique Leff, desde una lectura de la ecología política, están surgiendo nuevas identidades culturales en torno a la defensa de las naturalezas culturalmente significadas y estrategias novedosas de aprovechamiento sustentable. “Estas identidades y proyectos se han configurado a través de luchas de resistencia, afirmación y reconstrucción identitaria frente a procesos de apropiación y transformación de la naturaleza, inducidos por la globalización económica” (Leff 26). En el Macizo, el reclamo por el territorio es un proceso de resistencia a los conflictos socio-ecológicos generados no solamente por la minería, sino por las agendas de desarrollo y las maneras en las que el Estado se ha hecho presente en estas regiones de formas violentas, ambivalentes y extractivistas.

### 4.3 Territorio como espacio de lucha política

El territorio no es un polígono físico dado, estático y unificado; se trata justamente de un intersticio entre el espacio físico, el espacio social y las narrativas sobre las dimensiones culturales de lo colectivo (Lefebvre 164). Un aspecto fundamental en las luchas campesinas, tanto en la construcción discursiva como en la dimensión política y práctica, es el reclamo por la tierra, lo que se hace en ella y quiénes deciden sobre estos usos. En el contexto del Macizo este reclamo es por la territorialidad. Es decir, la posibilidad de construir un proyecto colectivo a partir de prácticas y discursos con un objetivo común; posicionar al campesinado como un sujeto político de derechos anclados al territorio que habitan; donde el elemento central

no solamente sea el acceso a la tierra, sino a la toma de decisiones sobre cómo habitar y producir ese espacio. Comprender el territorio como el producto visible del vínculo entre el hombre y la tierra es una manera de abonar conocimiento a las formas de organización local del espacio y la naturaleza, y sumar elementos para entender, de formas cada vez más claras, esas otras formas de vivir y habitar que se dan en los espacios rurales en Colombia.

La minería es en el Macizo, sin duda, un eje de disputa y tensión. Precisamente las luchas campesinas se enfrentan a la agenda minera y extractivista que las instituciones del Estado promocionan en sus territorios como mecanismos de desarrollo y salidas del atraso. Es allí donde el reclamo, por y desde el territorio, tiene sentidos políticos profundos, tanto en la autonomía y las decisiones sobre los usos del espacio, hasta los derechos por la tierra y el territorio que le son garantizados o negados a las comunidades campesinas.

#### 4.3.1. El reconocimiento político del campesinado.

Ante estas demandas los movimientos sociales campesinos han generado propuestas para llegar a cierto reconocimiento político y de derechos. En este apartado mostramos uno de los caminos propuestos en sus luchas por la dignidad campesina.

Uno de los grandes problemas territoriales de los campesinos no solamente es la propiedad y el acceso a la tierra, sino su uso. En el país, desde mediados de los noventa con la Ley 160 de 1993, existen antecedentes para el reconocimiento de territorios indígenas (resguardos) y afros (comunidades), que les garantizan la consulta previa sobre sus territorios. Este mecanismo les ampara ante cualquier intervención y reconoce sus derechos territoriales y colectivos. En el caso de los campesinos esta salvaguarda no existe.

La construcción del territorio por los campesinos tiene implicaciones políticas. El campesinado en Colombia no está reconocido como sujeto de derecho. En cambio, en la constitución del 1991, el país reconoce la autodeterminación de los pueblos a partir de

la definición de criterios étnicos para afros e indígenas, basados en el reconocimiento de cosmovisiones, prácticas culturales y esquemas de interpretación del mundo propios que generan una manera de ver y vivir el mundo. Esto incluye el derecho a la consulta previa, lo que implica que antes de dar una licencia ambiental para cualquier proyecto minero-energético, las instituciones tienen que consultar al cabildo.

Un objetivo de los movimientos campesinos en el Macizo Colombiano es ser reconocidos como sujetos de derecho. Un camino posible es el reconocimiento como colectivo con herencia y tradiciones culturales propias ancladas al territorio. Por lo tanto, la construcción del territorio es un acto político, que posibilita el reconocimiento y autodeterminación de las comunidades campesinas. Asimismo, podrían garantizar el derecho a la consulta previa, que aplica tanto para resguardos indígenas como para comunidades afros.

En la ley existen mecanismos como las Zonas de Reserva Campesina (ZRC) [3] como mecanismos para proteger el acceso, uso y propiedad de la tierra en algunas regiones específicas del país para los campesinos. La mayoría de estas zonas decretadas se encuentran en espacios de colonización, dotados y reconocidos, entre las décadas del setenta y ochenta del siglo XX. Sin embargo, la salvaguarda y reconocimiento de los derechos territoriales campesinos como grupo social con prácticas comunes y una trayectoria de conocimiento agrícola y ecológico no existen. Actualmente, esta es la lucha central de las organizaciones campesinas en el país; el reconocimiento del sujeto campesino como una categoría política de derechos, que implica garantías a sus territorialidades y territorio. En el norte de Nariño las organizaciones comunitarias generaron una propuesta de delimitación territorial en función de las cuencas hidrográficas y la presencia de movimientos sociales que se reúnen en torno CIMA. Esta propuesta se articula a una identidad regional maciceña y propone una delimitación en función de la protección del agua, los modos de vida campesinos en resistencia contra la minería.

La propuesta TCAM (Fig. 3.) busca delimitar un espacio de autonomía territorial basado

en la premisa de la protección a la agricultura campesina contra el avance de la minería (Cely Muñoz 56). A través de esta figura, se busca el reconocimiento del campesinado como una categoría política, de ciudadanía y de derechos agrarios y territoriales. El TCAM busca priorizar el uso alimentario de los suelos y del trabajo agrícola, por ende, de la actividad productiva y de sustento de los campesinos, por encima de los intereses extractivos minero-energéticos de grandes empresas. Estas actividades están amparadas en la agenda desarrollista del Estado expresada en el actual Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, como vimos anteriormente.

La distancia entre sentidos y agendas estatales y comunitarias muestra el conflicto entre las definiciones y sentidos sobre el territorio. Los sentidos locales están profundamente asociados a las relaciones sociales y ecológicas, no solo a una definición técnica que permita el aprovechamiento económico. Los límites del TCAM los marca la estructura de las cuencas de los ríos Mayo y Juanambú de los que se aprovisionan y a los que confluyen las quebradas y cuerpos de agua de la región. Así como los municipios en los que tienen presencia los movimientos sociales y organizaciones comunitarias. En el mapa se identifican claramente, en sombreado rojo, los espacios amenazados por proyectos de prospección minera ubicados en los espacios de recarga hídrica que coinciden con montañas y cerros emblemáticos culturalmente. La construcción del carácter político del sujeto campesino se ha convertido en el móvil de esa idea de territorio compartido, que en el norte de Nariño ha tomado forma a partir de esta (Véase Fig. 3).

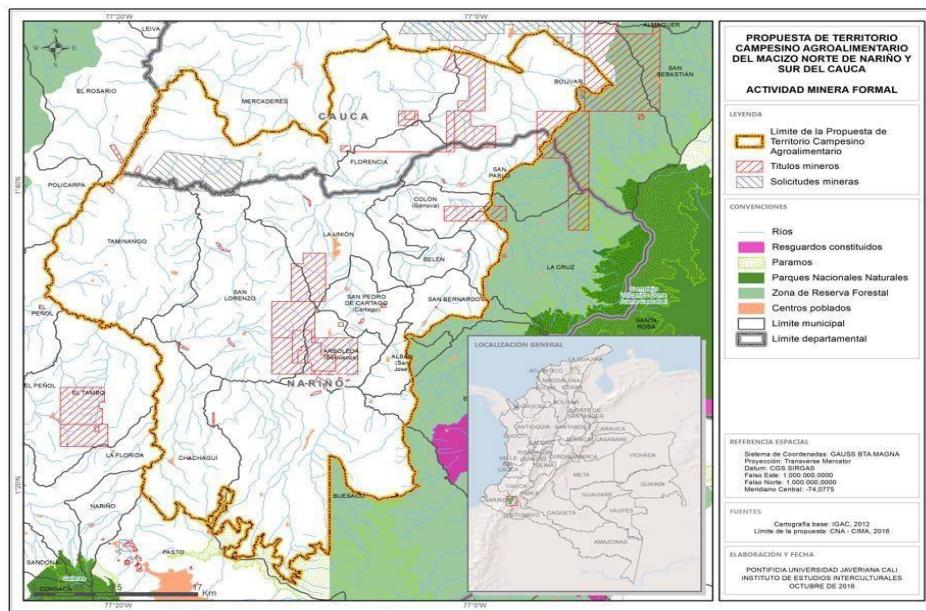


Fig. 3. Mapa Territorio Campesinos Agroalimentario (Betancourt, citado en Duarte)

## Conclusiones

En este artículo evidenciamos las diferencias entre los usos y sentidos del territorio entre las comunidades campesinas del Macizo cultural y las instituciones del Estado Colombiano. Particularmente, nos centramos en aquellas que generan conflictos socio-ecológicos a partir de sentidos ambivalentes sobre la naturaleza, la tierra y el agua. Evidenciamos que las estrategias extractivistas de las agendas de desarrollo del Estado van de la mano de estrategias y planes de la conservación del agua a partir del entendimiento de la naturaleza como recurso y sus valores como capital natural.

Asimismo, contrastamos cómo, por el contrario, las estrategias, sentidos y usos del territorio de las comunidades campesinas, se sostienen en una lectura no mercantilista de la naturaleza. Se trata de un proceso del que se participa y en el que el territorio cumple un papel fundamental, al ser el espacio de vida colectiva que a través de procesos de territorialización se construye y reproduce a partir de vínculos socio-ecológicos. Esta distancia entre miradas al territorio institucionales y comunitarias evidencian, además, en el contexto colombiano, la distancia entre el reconocimiento de derechos ciudadanos y territoriales para los campesinos y el desconocimiento de conflictos territoriales en el marco de los contextos de explotación minera.

Queremos señalar la importancia de reconocer las definiciones territoriales comunitarias en las agendas de desarrollo y la importancia de fijar la mirada en las concepciones del territorio en disputa en los contextos de explotación minera, para aportar a un entendimiento más profundo de las consecuencias que tiene la minería para las relaciones socio-ecológicas y particularmente su impacto en el Macizo Colombiano. Del mismo modo, es importante reconocer cómo estas dinámicas complejizan aún más el conflicto armado en el país, donde el territorio es un eje de disputa. Si bien esta arista de análisis excede los alcances de este documento, no podemos dejar de señalar su importancia y la conexión entre los repertorios de la violencia, los actores involucrados y los intereses económicos que subyacen a la guerra en Colombia. Los territorios colectivos de campesinos, indígenas y afros han sido objetos de disputa y múltiples violencias por actores armados. El interés en sus territorios es la explotación de recursos y el control de rutas para el transporte de distintos tipos de mercancías, legales e ilegales. Esta situación les pone en vulnerabilidad, particularmente cuando el Estado no vela por el bienestar y la integridad de las personas. Por el contrario, su interés es sostener una idea de desarrollo basada en la explotación, la desposesión y el extractivismo.

En este sentido, es fundamental visibilizar las lecturas y sentidos territoriales de las

comunidades que se ven afectadas y atravesadas por la guerra y las lógicas extractivistas que la sostienen. Como vimos en este documento, el territorio se convierte en un eje político de disputa al materializar las relaciones vitales que sostienen los mundos campesinos y su vulnerabilidad ante actores y balanzas de poder desiguales.

El territorio es un término clave en los procesos de negociación, con el que se asocian numerosas asociaciones y significados. Los movimientos sociales y las instituciones estatales aplican criterios diferentes para describir el territorio. Su análisis proporciona una visión profunda de cómo se negocian los conflictos, las especificidades de estas diferentes formas de interpretación y construcción y la influencia de éstas en las acciones de los grupos de interés.

En el Macizo cultural, el territorio para las comunidades campesinas tiene tres dimensiones clave: multiplicidad, identidad y política. Analizamos estas dimensiones a partir de una lectura a las territorialidades campesinas, evidenciando que el territorio es un proceso de construcción constante donde los humanos son parte del proceso que lo produce y reafirma al habitarlo. El territorio se hace en todo lo que se hace colectiva, comunitaria y cotidianamente. El territorio no se externaliza ni se dicotomiza como un constructo de recursos naturales que se pueden explotar, por el contrario, es un proceso que posibilita la existencia de distintos elementos naturales, sin que la demanda humana sea el elemento dominante.

Por otra parte, analizamos la dimensión identitaria del territorio a partir de la resistencia a los conflictos socio-ecológicos generados no solamente por la minería, sino por las agendas de desarrollo y las maneras en las que el Estado se ha hecho presente en estas regiones de formas violentas, ambivalentes y extractivistas. En la identificación como maciceño hay un proceso consciente de organización, sostenido en un proceso reflexivo de lucha y de reconocimiento corpóreo a través de la experiencia física de caminar habitar el territorio que configura vínculos afectivos con el territorio.

Finalmente, la dimensión política está claramente relacionada con las estrategias que se llevan a cabo para enfrentar y proponer

a la mirada del Estado, la necesidad de reconocimiento de una ciudadanía con garantías y derechos. Es decir, la posibilidad de construir un proyecto colectivo a partir de prácticas y discursos con un objetivo común; y de posicionar al campesinado como un sujeto político de derechos anclados al territorio que habitan, donde el elemento central no solamente es el acceso a la tierra, sino a la toma de decisiones sobre ese espacio que, en este caso, es vital en un contexto de prospección y explotación minera.

## Autores

*Las investigaciones en las que se basa este artículo forman parte de la tesis doctoral de las autoras. Es material inédito parte de las investigaciones de sus proyectos doctorales. No declaramos ningún conflicto de intereses o propiedad intelectual.*

## Notas

[1] Colombia divide el territorio administrativamente en Departamentos, Municipios, Corregimientos y Veredas. Estas últimas son la unidad territorial más pequeña del área rural y concentra una agrupación de fincas y viviendas dispersas dentro de un corregimiento o municipio.

[2] Un CONPES es un documento emitido por El Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social como organismo asesor del Gobierno Nacional en materia de desarrollo económico y social. Es el encargado de estudiar y recomendar políticas generales en esas áreas. Esos documentos se pueden consultar en línea: <https://www.dnp.gov.co/CONPES/documentos-conpes/Paginas/documentos-conpes.aspx>

[3] Las regalías del gobierno son un pago que realizan las compañías por la extracción de petróleo y minerales como recursos naturales no renovables al Estado colombiano.

[4] A partir de la Ley 160 de 1994, una zona de reserva campesina se define como “figura preferencial para fomentar la pequeña propiedad rural, regular la ocupación y aprovechamiento de las tierras baldías de la Nación –de la mano de la titulación a campesinos de escasos recursos–, en el marco de la conservación ambiental y de los recursos naturales y el ordenamiento territorial” (Artículo 1).

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estrategias de cuidado territorial comunitarias y las nociones de valor que configuran relaciones más que humanas en contextos de producción de café en México y Colombia.

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# El avance del neoextractivismo y la defensa por los recursos y patrimonios naturales. El caso del proyecto Minera Dominga en Chile y la lucha por territorio

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## Resumen

*El presente artículo tiene como fin profundizar la discusión científica en torno a dos fenómenos contrapuestos: por un lado, el avance del neoextractivismo en los territorios de Latinoamérica y, por otro, el aumento de movimientos sociales vinculados a la defensa de los recursos, el territorio, los patrimonios culturales y los bienes comunes. Para esto, el artículo se centra en analizar el caso empírico del Proyecto Minero Dominga en Chile, poniendo especial énfasis en el conflicto socio-territorial que allí se ha generado, para lo cual se analizan las perspectivas de los diferentes actores en la disputa por el territorio y la defensa de los recursos naturales. Se ha usado el análisis del discurso y la etnografía como herramientas metodológicas complementarias, con las cuales se ha podido ampliar el análisis del conflicto vinculado a la minería. El artículo se estructura, en primer lugar, en torno a la descripción del neoextractivismo en América Latina y el Caribe en el contexto del Antropoceno y el cambio climático. Posteriormente, se analiza los conflictos territoriales vinculados al extractivismo, generando una propia concepción de lo que corresponde a conflicto socio-territorial en el contexto de América Latina. A continuación, el artículo se centra en analizar la industria extractiva en Chile, poniendo en especial consideración a la industria minera, sus efectos económicos, así como las consecuencias socio-ambientales que esta actividad ha generado. En este sentido, y a partir de los efectos negativos de la industria extractiva, se pasa a conceptualizar el concepto de “zonas de sacrificio” como un concepto analítico descriptivo pertinente para el estudio de los conflictos socio-territoriales vinculados al neoextractivismo. Por último, el artículo sustenta el trabajo teórico a partir del ejemplo empírico del Proyecto Minero Dominga, analizando los conflictos socio-territoriales que ha generado, así como también los efectos futuros en el ámbito socio-ambiental vinculados a este proyecto. Sustentado en el análisis del discurso, el artículo pasa a enfocarse en el conflicto intercomunidad que ha generado este proyecto, analizando la perspectiva de los distintos actores.*

**Palabras clave:** neoextractivismo; zonas de sacrificio; antropoceno; Norte-Sur Global; conflictos socio-territoriales.

## 1. Introducción

El avance del neoextractivismo se ha visto acrecentado en las últimas tres décadas, con la consolidación y aceptación de este modelo económico en el *consenso de commodities* de los diversos gobiernos latinoamericanos, quienes vieron en este proceso la generación de un milagro económico (Gudynas, *Extractivismos y Corrupción* 13), pero también un salto en la reprimarización de las economías

y matrices productivas de los países de Latinoamérica. Por otra parte, esta expansión del neoextractivismo se ha traducido también en una serie de desventajas, como la baja de precios de las materias primas, el aumento de los endeudamientos en los gobiernos, la multiplicación de los proyectos extractivos, la destrucción de la naturaleza y la generación de conflictos sociales. Lo que ha dado como resultado la “*consolidación de un patrón primario-exportador dependiente*” (Svampa, “El

Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 120, énfasis del autor), que ha desembocado en un creciente proceso de violación de Derechos Humanos y la agudización de los conflictos socio-territoriales.

Chile, por ejemplo, se ha posicionado como uno de los países modelo en lo que respecta al extractivismo minero, demostrando así su dependencia respecto al sistema. Sin embargo, esta dependencia –potenciada por el modelo neoliberal allí presente- ha generado diversos impactos negativos, tanto sociales, como territoriales, ambientales y económicos, los cuales han producido una creciente conflictividad social. De esta manera, surgen dos problemáticas significantes, por un lado, el avance del neoextractivismo en los territorios y en su contraparte, el aumento de movimientos sociales vinculados a la defensa de los recursos, el territorio, los patrimonios culturales y los bienes comunes.

Es por esta razón, y haciéndose cargo de la necesidad de ahondar en torno a la problemática de defensa de los territorios y el avance del neoextractivismo, que el artículo se propone analizar el caso empírico del *Proyecto Minero Dominga* en Chile, poniendo especial énfasis en el conflicto socio-territorial que allí se ha generado, para lo cual se analizan las perspectivas de los diferentes actores en la disputa por el territorio y la defensa de los recursos naturales. El proyecto Dominga constituye un mega proyecto de minería de hierro y cobre, emplazado en la Región de Coquimbo en la costa centro-norte de Chile. El proyecto incluye dos minas a cielo abierto y la construcción de un puerto que permita la extracción de los recursos. Dicho proyecto se encuentra directamente emplazado en la Reserva Nacional Pingüino de Humboldt, lo cual ha generado un fuerte rechazo por parte de la población, debido al potencial impacto que podría generar a la biodiversidad de la zona.

Para analizar este conflicto social y las implicancias de la expansión del neoextractivismo, este artículo utiliza como marco teórico de referencia el análisis de los conflictos socio-territoriales desde la perspectiva sociológica, por otra parte, se analiza el neoextractivismo partiendo de autores como Gudynas, Svampa, Burchardt, Acosta, Peters, entre otros. Lo cual

nos permite generar articulación entre el análisis macro del neoextractivismo en América Latina y su vinculación micro a los procesos comunitarios y los conflictos locales.

Como se ha mencionado, el artículo se fundamenta además sobre el análisis empírico del conflicto en torno al Proyecto Minero Portuario Dominga, para lo cual se ha analizado entrevistas a diversos actores involucrados en el conflicto, haciendo uso del análisis del discurso y la etnografía como herramientas metodológicas complementarias con las cuales abordar el estudio del conflicto social, permitiendo analizar las diversas prácticas, estrategias y posiciones de los distintos actores sociales.

## 2. El avance del extractivismo en América Latina y el Caribe en la era del Antropoceno

En las últimas décadas, se ha generado en América Latina y el Caribe (ALC) un aumento exponencial en el desarrollo de actividades extractivas –las cuales encontraron su consolidación en la década de los 90– aumentando no solo en el número de operaciones, sino que también, en su magnitud y expansión, desarrollándose ahora no solo en áreas “tradicionales” de extracción, sino también en otros lugares donde habitualmente la industria extractiva no había incursionado.

Cabe mencionar que Latinoamérica ha estado históricamente asociada a procesos vinculados a la explotación de recursos naturales, procesos que se remontan desde 1492 y la época de conquista, expandiéndose junto al colonialismo (Quijano 781-786; Machado 126; Neyra 6) y la división internacional del trabajo globalizado, manteniendo a la región sumida a un modelo económico basado en la sobreexplotación de materias primas para la exportación (Wallerstein 493; Dussel 41-47; Quijano 777-781; Lander 76-80). De esta manera, la extracción de recursos naturales se funda como columna central de las economías actuales de la región. Dicho proceso se terminó de consolidar a partir de las décadas de 1980 y 1990, en la que, con los cambios estructurales basados en el modelo neoliberal, la actividad extractivista se fortaleció en la región con la llegada de un nuevo milenio y el establecimiento de un modelo de desarrollo

tanto de gobiernos de izquierdas como de derechas, basado en la extracción y exportación de materias primas.

En este sentido, el neoextractivismo lo podemos definir como aquel proyecto económico vinculado a la apropiación, sobreexplotación y extracción de grandes volúmenes de recursos naturales, como por ejemplo minerales, hidrocarburos o productos agropecuarios, con el fin de generar una valoración de estos en el mercado global (Acosta 2; Bebbington, *Minería, movimientos sociales y respuestas campesinas* 23; Gudynas, “Diez tesis urgentes” 188; Haarstad 1-2; Lander 76; Svampa, “Resource Extractivism and Alternatives” 117; Veltmeyer 82; Burchardt 55). La particularidad de este proceso se encuentra en que, en la mayoría de los casos, estos recursos son exportados sin generar un procesamiento o industrialización en los países de donde son extraídos, por lo cual cuentan con un muy limitado valor agregado, siendo exportados como *commodities*.

Otra característica importante del neoextractivismo, es que durante el proceso de extracción de los recursos naturales, se generan paralelamente diversos efectos socio-ambientales negativos, implicando una alta destrucción ecológica, así como también un aumento de la desigualdad social, la exclusión social y la modificación de las relaciones sociales de los grupos que habitan los territorios de extracción (Burchardt 76).

El neoextractivismo está estrechamente vinculado también a las demandas del mercado internacional, generando una relación de dependencia de las economías extractivas de Latinoamérica con el mercado global y las dinámicas *Norte-Sur de Consumo-Producción*, generando a su vez interdependencia entre los procesos nacionales locales y las transformaciones globales (Coronado y Dietz 96). En este sentido, la demanda global y el consumo intensivo de recursos naturales se transforma en el motor del extractivismo, respondiendo en gran medida a las demandas de los países del Norte Global.

Por otra parte, el auge de las exportaciones de materias primas ha permitido a los estados latinoamericanos generar rentas crecientes, lo que ha establecido también un aumento

del margen financiero para las actividades de desarrollo y la generación de políticas públicas de dimensión social, evidenciando así una relación entre el neoextractivismo y los intentos de los Estados latinoamericanos de resolver a través de estas rentas los problemas sociales de sus poblaciones (Gudynas, “Diez tesis urgentes” 209; “Die neue alte Entwicklungsstrategie” 38; Burchardt y Dietz 194). Sin embargo, se ha mantenido una dependencia económica con el Norte Global, ya que bajo la lógica del neoextractivismo, los países latinoamericanos se mantienen en una posición de subordinación exportadora, dependientes de las demandas de los mercados internacionales y de la regulación que estos generan respectos a los precios de las materias primas, manteniendo además una dependencia creciente respecto a la inversión extranjera y la asistencia financiera (Gudynas, “Agropecuaria y nuevo extractivismo” 43).

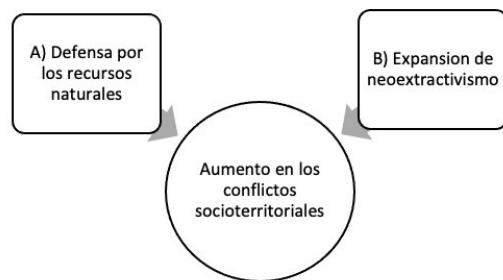
A este escenario se le suma además el discurso-diagnóstico epistemológico actual vinculado al *Antropoceno*, como aquella era en la que nos encontramos actualmente, en la cual el cambio climático, el calentamiento global y la pérdida de biodiversidad producida por la especie humana y en particular por el capitalismo (Moore), han generado estragos nunca antes vistos en nuestro planeta, poniendo en riesgo nuestra sobrevivencia, así como también la sobrevivencia de otras especies. Esto se configura entonces como una crisis múltiple, que afecta a diversos aspectos, entre ellos la pérdida de ecosistemas tanto terrestres como acuáticos, así como también afecciones a los sistemas de vida de las personas, produciéndose migraciones forzadas y la generación de diversos conflictos socio-territoriales que han generado una descomposición del tejido social.

El *Antropoceno* se ve caracterizado además por la expansión de las fronteras del Capital, como consecuencia del aumento de la actividad extractivista (Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 33, 39), generando a su vez una expansión sobre la desposesión ya no solo sobre bienes, sino que también sobre personas y territorios (Harvey 104). De esta manera, la expansión del neoextractivismo y el capital han generado una crisis de larga duración, en donde dicho proceso de expansión se ha

enfocado en avanzar hacia nuevos territorios y nuevas fuentes regionales, expandiéndose a su vez geográficamente (Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 39). Por otra parte, esta expansión del *Capitalismo-Antropocénico*, está estrechamente vinculada a un aumento y profundización de las desigualdades sociales y ambientales, incrementando la insostenibilidad del sistema y, finalmente, posicionándonos en una *crisis civilizatoria* vinculada al cuestionamiento de las formas de desarrollo, consumo y depredación de los recursos naturales.

Estas dos aristas del *Antropoceno*, por un lado, a) la defensa de los recursos naturales y la tierra, los movimientos sociales locales e internacionales vinculados al cambio climático y por otro lado, en su contra parte, b) el aumento exponencial de la industria extractiva ha generado también un aumento de conflictos territoriales. Lo cual se puede evidenciar en la siguiente ilustración (Ilustración 1):

**Ilustración 1**



Elaboración propia

Así, el avance del neoextractivismo en América Latina ha generado un aumento desmedido de la actividad industrial, destruyendo tanto los sistemas ambientales terrestres como acuáticos, pero también descomponiendo el tejido social y aumentando la desigualdad en la región. Esto se suma además a que la huella ecológica de consumo del Norte Global ha excedido la capacidad de los ecosistemas en América Latina, consumiendo más de lo que el planeta puede proveer de manera sustentable (Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 35), generando finalmente insostenibilidad en términos medioambientales.

### 3. Conflictos socio-territoriales vinculados al neoextractivismo

Entendemos y definimos el conflicto socio-territorial como aquella disputa por agencia o poder dentro de un territorio determinado. Se trata por tanto de un fenómeno relacional, es decir, que es generado por la relación de distintos actores o grupos sociales, los cuales poseen sus propios intereses –muchas veces totalmente opuestos– y que ejercen su poder en un esfuerzo por conseguir sus metas y orientaciones propias (Collins 56, 87; Coser 201-203; Goodwin y Jasper 3-8; Wieviorka 609-701). En este sentido, el territorio adquiere gran importancia, ya que es este el que se encuentra en disputa, siendo un elemento de posesión y conflicto, específicamente se disputan elementos como la tierra, los bienes naturales, bienes comunes y sus usos (Bebbington, Minería, *movimientos sociales y respuestas campesinas* 23; Bebbington y Humphreys Bebbington 442-443; Delamaza 140-143; Fernández-Labbe 230-231; Svampa, “Resource Extractivism and Alternatives” 119; Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 47)

En este sentido, los conflictos socio-territoriales están relacionados directamente a las externalidades negativas que la industria neoextractiva genera en los territorios y las comunidades en América Latina y el Caribe. De esta manera, los actores que se encuentran en conflicto son, por una parte, los colectivos subalternos, específicamente las comunidades indígenas, campesinos y pobladores de sectores desplazados y, por otra parte, aparece el Estado como un actor importante en la regulación de los conflictos y, por último, la industria extractiva vinculada al sector privado, el cual en la mayoría de los casos corresponde a empresas transnacionales. Por tanto, los conflictos vinculados a la industria extractiva están estrechamente relacionados con la calidad de vida de los grupos vulnerables, su acceso al manejo autónomo de los territorios y el uso de bienes comunes (Rojas y Lastra-Bravo 9-10).

Como hemos señalado, esta constelación de altas reservas de materias primas en Latinoamérica y la enorme importancia económica y sociopolítica de la industria

extractiva da lugar a una compleja red de diversos efectos ecológicos y económicos, pero también socioculturales y políticos, teniendo en cuenta que toda extracción de recursos naturales a gran escala representa también una importante intervención en la naturaleza y en la vida de las comunidades cercanas. De esta manera, como consecuencias de la creciente actividad extractiva en América Latina y el Caribe, se ha generado en las últimas décadas una explosión significativa de conflictos sociales en los territorios en los cuales el neoextractivismo actúa, territorios habitados por poblaciones especialmente vulnerables. Estos conflictos son de especial atención, ya que poseen distintos niveles de análisis, pues afecta no solo a la estructura y composición social de los territorios, sino también, a elementos ecológicos y territoriales.

Esto genera entonces una dicotomía respecto a la actividad extractivista en América Latina y el Caribe, ya que a raíz del *boom de las materias primas* se han generado significativas ganancias en los países vinculados al extractivismo, ganancias que han permitido la generación de políticas públicas importantes, relacionadas a mejorar la calidad de vida de la población. Sin embargo, como diversos análisis señalan (Burchardt; Peters, “Fin del ciclo” 28-31; Peters, *Rentengesellschaften* 32-40; Matthes 43; Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 46), estas ganancias solo se ven reflejadas a nivel estructural, siendo por medio de tributos, royalties e impuestos específicos, siendo en su conjunto una mínima parte de las ganancias que la industria genera, demostrando así un desbalance entre la ganancia real y la tributación al Estado.

Por otra parte, es necesario señalar que las actividades extractivas no generan significativas actividades de desarrollo en aquellos territorios en los cuales se encuentran, puesto que al contener un alto grado de tecnología y mecanización, la incorporación de mano de obra en la mayoría de los casos no es significativa. Por el contrario, estudios como los de Bebbington e Hinojosa nos demuestran que las actividades extractivas no generan polos de desarrollo como lo sería una actividad industrial, sino que generan territorios desplazados y sacrificados a

la actividad extractiva, produciendo un quiebre en el tejido social e importantes cambios en la composición ambiental y de biodiversidad de los territorios afectados.

En América Latina y el Caribe, la industria extractiva se ha caracterizado especialmente por provocar –como uno de sus efectos– desplazamientos forzados de aquellas poblaciones cercanas, generando vulnerabilidad eco-social, es decir, afectando a sus formas de vida cotidiana. Se debe mencionar que la expansión del modelo extractivista en esta región se ha generado en gran medida en territorios donde habitan grupos humanos vulnerables en la mayoría de los casos, y donde el Estado no posee una presencia significativa; específicamente se trata de sectores en los cuales la infraestructura y los servicios son de difícil acceso. Estos territorios son ocupados por estas poblaciones de forma legal, avalados por derechos formales o ya sea de manera consuetudinaria, como lo hacen los grupos indígenas (Coronado y Dietz 100; Burchardt, *El neo-extractivismo en el siglo XXI* 76), lo cual choca con la imagen tradicional de presentar a los territorios del extractivismo como zonas inhabitadas, inutilizadas o degradadas (Nalepa y Bauer 404) antes de la llegada de la industria extractiva.

De esta manera, junto con los desplazamientos y los conflictos socio-territoriales, la industria extractiva genera una re-estructuración sobre los territorios y sus dinámicas de control. Se trata de la generación de procesos desiguales y asimétricos de poder, en donde los pobladores, campesinos y comunidades indígenas quedan en desventaja respecto a las industrias extractivas, en lo que respecta a las decisiones territoriales. De esta manera, tanto la industria extractiva, como los procesos globales de producción y consumo, influyen de manera indirecta en las decisiones locales y nacionales de los territorios (Coronado y Dietz 95). Así, el extractivismo condiciona por ejemplo los planes y proyectos de ordenamiento territorial locales, la formación y destrucción de áreas naturales protegidas, o los proyectos de reforma agraria o distribución de tierras (Gudynas, *Extractivismos y Corrupción* 202). De esta manera, se hace manifiesto el actuar de las dinámicas globales

sobre la estructuración de los territorios y las localidades, generando dinámicas relacionales que afectan de manera proporcional a dichos espacios vulnerables.

Estos cambios territoriales producidos por el extractivismo son profundos e importantes, ya que transforman la configuración del espacio, los actores que los construyen y sus formas de relación. Por ejemplo, investigaciones de Bebbington e Hinojosa señalan que la industria minera genera cambios notables en la geografía, así como también cambios institucionales y desintegración comunal, modificando de esta manera las relaciones entre los espacios locales, los nacionales e internacionales. Por otra parte, grupos históricamente vulnerables, como las comunidades indígenas, se ven particularmente afectados tanto por la industria extractiva, como por los Estados, ya que muchas veces los gobiernos latinoamericanos entregan territorios indígenas para la explotación de recursos naturales, ignorando e invisibilizando la existencia de grupos originarios y su uso de los territorios, usos vinculados a cosmovisiones específicas, con cargas simbólicas, culturales y espirituales importantes para dichas comunidades (Lastra-Bravo 152).

Por último, es necesario mencionar que muchas veces las consecuencias negativas de la extracción de materias primas son generalmente justificadas por los gobiernos y las empresas en torno al discurso de la lucha contra la pobreza y la desigualdad social, o con el desarrollo económico resultante y las posibilidades sociopolíticas de reducir la deuda nacional, ampliar la infraestructura, modernizar el Estado y obtener ingresos estables de divisas. En este sentido, podemos señalar que el neoextractivismo tiene un fuerte apoyo en las sociedades latinoamericanas, está legitimado y cuenta con el apoyo de una amplia alianza interclasista de diferentes segmentos de la población que experimentaron un avance social durante el *boom* de las materias primas, por lo que el modelo económico representa un vehículo de desarrollo social para diversos grupos. Esto ha generado una constante tensión social en América Latina, que ha llevado al surgimiento de diversos conflictos sociales, ecológicos y culturales relacionados con las

industrias extractivas (Gudynas, *Conflictos y extractivismos* 86-87).

#### 4. Chile y la industria neo extractiva

Chile se ha posicionado históricamente en América Latina como un país exportador de recursos mineros, lo cual se consolida a finales del siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX en torno a la industria extractiva del salitre y el carbón. Actualmente, Chile se posiciona como el país ícono de la minería latinoamericana, teniendo como principal actividad extractiva a la industria del cobre, con un creciente aumento en sus exportaciones a mercados emergentes como China. Sin embargo, también se encuentran presentes otras actividades extractivas como la industria forestal, la energía hidroeléctrica y la pesca industrial.

Por otra parte, Chile se ha posicionado como un Estado en el cual las desigualdades postcoloniales se han ido agravando aún más con la instauración del modelo neoliberal de mercado, a partir de la dictadura de Pinochet (1973-1989). El objetivo de la dictadura era instalar el sistema neoliberal como política económica, reivindicando el sentido de “mercado” como organismo autónomo capaz de regularse por sí mismo. Bajo esta premisa, se generó una fase expansiva de la economía chilena, orientada básicamente hacia la privatización de recursos naturales, la sobre-explotación de recursos y la destrucción del medio ambiente (Lastra-Bravo 155).

Estas transformaciones económicas de carácter neoliberal se centraron en la privatización del sector productivo e industrial del país, de los servicios básicos, y también de algunos recursos naturales como el agua. Este proceso se vio sumado a una drástica reducción del gasto público y una estrategia internacional de fomento de inversiones extranjeras en proyectos extractivos, lo cual tenía como objetivo integrar a Chile en el mercado global. Como resultado de estas políticas, se produjo la llegada de grandes consorcios internacionales que comenzaron a construir mega proyectos enfocados en la extracción de recursos naturales, muchos de ellos desarrollados en territorios indígenas, provocando serios problemas con

las comunidades que allí habitan (Lastra-Bravo 156).

Posteriormente, con la llegada de la democracia en Chile (1989), el panorama no cambió demasiado, ya que los gobiernos de la Concertación de Partidos de Izquierda mantuvieron la lógica extractiva y la exportación de materias primas como estrategia económica que les permitiera generar recursos. En este sentido, los gobiernos progresistas se mantuvieron en una permanente lógica de liberación de la economía nacional a la inversión extranjera (Gudynas, “Diez tesis urgentes sobre el nuevo extractivismo” 196), estimulando la inversión privada, especialmente en la industria minera del cobre, oro y energías.

Actualmente, la matriz extractiva de Chile se puede agrupar en 5 grandes categorías:

**Minería:** La industria minera se concentra en el norte del territorio chileno, en las regiones XV, I, II, III y IV. Los efectos de esta industria están vinculados principalmente a un uso excesivo de agua y energía, la contaminación de tierras, ríos y salares y la destrucción de ecosistemas y glaciares.

**Energía:** La industria energética está asentada en todo el territorio nacional, ya que es necesaria para la generación de energía para los otros procesos extractivos. Los principales proyectos están enfocados en la producción de energía a base de termoeléctricas, hidroeléctricas,

parques eólicos y solares.

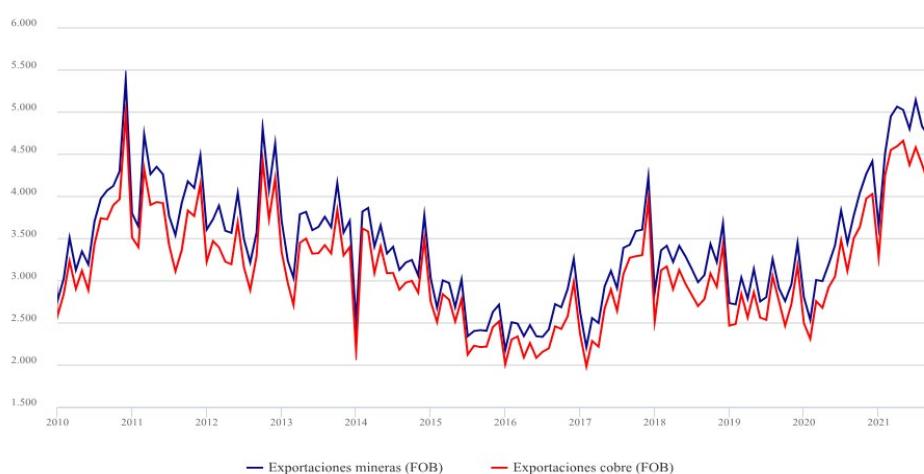
**Agroindustria:** La industria agro extractiva se encuentra ubicada en la zona centro-sur de Chile entre la IV y VIII región. Esta principalmente enfocada en la explotación de monocultivos frutícolas y hortícolas. Para estos monocultivos agrícolas es necesario la utilización de extensos territorios, perdiendo la biodiversidad de la zona y generando desplazamientos forzados de comunidades y campesinos.

**Forestal:** La industria forestal está emplazada entre la VII a X región, se trata de monocultivo de eucaliptus y pino destinados a la producción de celulosa de exportación. La generación de monocultivos forestales ha originado diversos problemas socio-territorial como la pérdida de biodiversidad, problemas de tierra con comunidades indígenas mapuches y la generación de una crisis hídrica en la región.

**Pesca:** La pesca industrial se desarrolla en toda la costa nacional, se trata tanto de la pesca de arrastre industrial para la generación de harina de pescado así como también la acuicultura de salmones y mariscos para la exportación. Esta actividad extractiva genera la degradación del ecosistema marino, la pérdida de biodiversidad costera, así como también problemas de usos de zonas artesanales de pesca y usos tradicionales indígenas de la costa.

Gráfico N°1

Comercio exterior (millones de dólares)



Fuente Banco Central de Chile

Banco Central de Chile.

De igual manera, como podemos evidenciar en el gráfico anterior, las exportaciones mineras de Chile se han mantenido en un crecimiento relativamente constante en los últimos años, siendo esta la mayor actividad extractiva del país. Dependiendo una parte importante del presupuesto de la nación a la exportación minera.

Es así que resulta sumamente complejo poder imaginar a Chile sin la industria minera o fuera de la primarización de su economía, ya que el país no cuenta con una industria que genere líneas de producción tecnológica que lo posicione en el escenario mundial. Por lo que resulta difícil ver alternativas de producción y alternativas al modelo extractivo, lo cual, sumado a la creciente demanda mundial de minerales, mantienen a Chile como un país exportador de minerales, en constante expansión extractiva en su territorio.

#### **4.1 La creación de zonas de sacrificio**

En este contexto, es que se produce entonces un dilema en cuanto a la sostenibilidad económica, ambiental y social y la pertinencia de un modelo de desarrollo basado en la sobre explotación de recursos naturales, que ha desembocado en la generación de diversos conflictos socio-territoriales, vinculados a las iniciativas privadas de inversión, que con el apoyo del Estado y la particular privatización de los recursos en Chile permite la generación de un escenario propicio para la creación de megaproyectos extractivos produciendo impactos ambientales considerables en la vida de las poblaciones aledañas, originando las denominadas *zonas de sacrificio*.

Cabe mencionar que el concepto de *zonas de sacrificio* proviene desde las propias comunidades afectadas y es resultado de su trabajo y actuar político, con el cual han querido hacer visible su propia realidad y los efectos que el extractivismo ha generado en sus territorios. El concepto surge en primera instancia en los años setenta en Estados Unidos, como forma de hacer visible los efectos de las minas de carbón en las comunidades afectadas. Sin embargo, en la última década este concepto ha sido apropiado por los movimientos medioambientales latinoamericanos.

En particular, *las zonas de sacrificio* se tratan de territorios en los cuales existen una gran concentración de industrias extractivas y contaminantes, significando un gran problema para la salud, bienestar y calidad de vida de las poblaciones y comunidades que co-habitan esos territorios. En este sentido, las *zonas de sacrificio* se configuran como aquellos territorios víctimas de los patrones de consumo y producción global. Específicamente, se posicionan como aquellos territorios en donde las dinámicas y redes sociales, así como también el medioambiente, han sido modificados en base a procesos globales, generando así externalidades negativas sobre dichas zonas, siendo sacrificadas ambiental y socialmente.

La Unión de Comunas de Zonas de Sacrificio, definió esta situación como:

aquellos territorios de asentamiento humano devastados ambientalmente por causa del desarrollo industrial. Esta devastación tiene implicancias directas en el ejercicio pleno de los derechos fundamentales de las personas: derecho a la vida, a la salud, a la educación, al trabajo, a la alimentación, a la vivienda, etc.

De esta manera, el modelo neo-extractivista se posiciona como un generador de *zonas de sacrificio*, que transforma los territorios en lugares en donde las comunidades son obligadas a vivir en territorios contaminados, muchas veces con desechos industriales peligrosos; produciendo procesos de injusticia ambiental y generando vulnerabilidad.

Visto desde el discurso del “desarrollo”, esta industria neoextractiva genera “polos de desarrollo”; sin embargo, cabe preguntarse ¿desarrollo para quién y a qué costo? Así, cuando nos preguntamos sobre el desarrollo y el progreso, debemos también preguntarnos y considerar a quién beneficiará ese progreso y qué costo tendrá en los territorios, ya que cuando hablamos de zonas de sacrificio, en la mayoría de los casos hablamos de territorios desplazados, pobres o marginados, en los cuales además no recae el beneficio de las actividades extractivas que allí se desarrollan.

Por otra parte, se da un fenómeno particular en los territorios del neoextractivismo, en donde el Estado no se hace presente en las regiones “*desterritorializadas*”, no generando una presencia adecuada y homogénea, existiendo falencia en la cobertura de servicios básicos, como la salud, la seguridad o la aplicación de justicia. Esto genera una ausencia del Estado en estos territorios, quienes además de ser afectados social y ambientalmente, deben convivir con falta de regulaciones políticas y gubernamentales que aseguren su calidad de vida. Ejemplos de ello los podemos encontrar en Chile, en comunas como Puchuncavi, Quintero, Huasco, Tocopilla o Coronel, donde las regulaciones estatales son débiles o ausentes, no asegurando sus derechos básicos y, sin embargo, el Estado se presenta activo al apoyar y proteger actividades extractivas.

## 5. El proyecto minero portuario Dominga

El proyecto Portuario-Minero Dominga es dirigido por la empresa *Andes Iron SpA*, quien el 13 de septiembre de 2013 ingresa el proyecto al Sistema de Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental

(SEIA) para su aprobación. Este proyecto está integrado por una mina y un puerto marítimo, con una inversión de alrededor de 2.500 millones de dólares, que busca la producción anual de 12 millones de toneladas de concentrado de hierro y 15.000 toneladas de concentrado de cobre, los cuales serían transportado por ductos de 26 kilómetros que llegarán a la terminal de embarque ubicado en la localidad de *Totoralillo Norte* (Ver Gráfico N°2). En este lugar se encontraría además una planta desalinizadora para que la mina opere. El mega proyecto de la empresa *Andes Iron* tiene una estimación de extracción de 26,5 años, y se ubicará en una zona única en biodiversidad tanto terrestre como marítima.

Como podemos ver en la ilustración anterior, el proyecto Portuario Minero Dominga busca emplazarse entre la Caleta Chañaral en la región de Atacama y la Caleta Hornos en la región de Coquimbo, esta área corresponde a un sector geográfico de gran importancia, ya que se encuentra dentro del *Sistema de la Corriente de Humboldt*, lo cual significa un gran valor para la biodiversidad de la zona, al ser un importante lugar de hábitat y tránsito para diversos

**Gráfico N°2**  
**Mapa Ubicación Proyecto Dominga**



ABC Fuente: Andes Iron

Fuente (AndesIron SpA)

animales. Al estar en la *Corriente de Humboldt*, el área compone un alto grado de especies productivas y recursos pelágicos y bentónicos, transformándose en las áreas de manejo más productivas del centro norte del país, por lo que poseen un especial significado para actividades de pesca artesanal y recolección de mariscos de las comunidades adyacentes.

Por otra parte, el valor ambiental de esta área se engrandece aún más con la visita de especies cetáceas de tránsito, como la ballena azul, fin y la jorobada, las cuales visitan regularmente estas costas en busca de alimentación. En este mismo sentido, el área es habitada por importantes especies como el pingüino de Humboldt y el delfín de nariz de botella (OCEANA 5).

El Proyecto Dominga se ha visto extensamente cuestionado, en cuanto a los impactos irreversibles que este provocará al medioambiente y a la biodiversidad de la zona. Ello porque, además de la construcción de un puerto, se espera la construcción de una planta desalinizadora que captará agua del mar, extraerá la salmuera y la devolverá a la Bahía Totoralillo Norte, lo cual impactará negativamente el equilibrio osmótico y los recursos marinos de la zona, aumentando su salinidad y afectando también la cadena alimenticia de las aves del sector (Urbina, Guerrero y Jerez 1208).

En primera instancia, el Sistema de Evaluación Ambiental (SEA) aprobó el proyecto Dominga, ya que, según consta en el informe, “se estableció un detallado plan de medidas para la mitigación, reparación y compensación, considerando las fases de construcción, operación y cierre, para los aspectos ambientales relativos al ruido, recursos hídricos, suelo, flora y vegetación, fauna terrestre, medio marino, paisaje, medio humano y patrimonio cultural”. (SEA)

Sin embargo, como se ha mencionado, el proyecto traerá consigo notables cambios en la flora y fauna del territorio, así como también en los ecosistemas marítimos allí presentes. No solo destruyendo lugares de anidación, sino generando además un alto nivel de contaminación acústica que afectará negativamente a los mamíferos marinos, peces y otras especies. Por otra parte, el funcionamiento del puerto generará también residuos combustibles de los motores, reduciendo la bio-productividad de la zona, y

afectado de manera directa a los pescadores y recolectores artesanales de la misma.

Por otra parte, la empresa ha posicionado un discurso particular que se ha vinculado especialmente a la generación de un polo de desarrollo en la zona. Sin embargo, los datos señalan que los empleos que este proyecto producirá serán de 9.800 en su fase de construcción, y se reducirá drásticamente a 1.450 empleos en su fase de operación. Esto debido a la alta tecnologización del proyecto, por lo cual los empleos disponibles para los pobladores aledaños son sumamente escasos. Esto se condice con investigaciones realizadas por Bebbington e Hinojosa, quienes han señalado que las actividades extractivas no generan *polos de desarrollo* en las zonas en las cuales desarrollan sus actividades, sino que, por el contrario, generan territorios desplazados y sacrificados a la actividad extractivista, produciendo un quiebre en el tejido social e importantes cambios en la composición ambiental y la biodiversidad de los territorios afectados.

En este sentido, el *Proyecto Portuario Minero* se ha posicionado como un importante conflicto socio-territorial, siendo cancelado en diversas ocasiones, judicializando de esta manera el proceso. Así es como el 18 de mayo de 2022, la Corte Suprema de Justicia en Chile resolvió rechazar los recursos de casación de las comunidades y organizaciones de la sociedad civil, argumentando que el órgano posterior que decidirá sobre el proyecto será el Comité de Ministros [1].

## 5.1 Efectos en la población y en la generación de un conflicto intercomunidades

La historia del proyecto *Dominga* ha estado marcada por la encrucijada entre proteger el medio ambiente y fomentar el “desarrollo” y la actividad industrial en una región que tiene altos índices de cesantía (Gobierno Regional de Coquimbo). De igual manera, esta zona posee un déficit en cuanto a la calidad de vida de sus habitantes: según la última encuesta CASEN 2017, el 50 por ciento de los hogares de la comuna de La Higuera carecen de servicios básicos y la tasa de pobreza alcanza

un 40% (27). Es en este contexto que muchas personas que viven en esta localidad tienen las esperanzas puestas en el proyecto y la oferta de trabajo que esto significa. Sin embargo, existen posiciones divididas entre la comunidad y los poblados aledaños al proyecto, ya que en la otra vereda se encuentra otros grupos de la misma comuna que buscan defender el medio ambiente sin negociar [2].

Sin embargo, en octubre del año 2016 *Iron Andes*, en el contexto de su proyecto Dominga, firmó un Acuerdo Marco con la comunidad de La Higuera, con el fin de generar condiciones socio-económicas de beneficio para la comunidad, como un acto reparatorio por la eventual instalación del proyecto. En este sentido, el Acuerdo reconocía como socios a los miembros de la comunidad, y se comprometía a trabajar por el desarrollo integral de la comuna (Minera Dominga). Por medio de este acuerdo, se comprometía además en la generación de tres proyectos vinculados al mejoramiento de la calidad de vida de los pobladores: 1) Proyecto de gestión hídrica integrada; 2) Proyecto de Educación, capacitación y empleo; 3) Proyecto de apoyo a sectores productivos.

Es en este contexto que se han generado importantes conflictos entre las comunidades y los pobladores, ya que existen opiniones divididas respecto del proyecto. Así lo señala por ejemplo un entrevistado:

... hoy día el pueblo está dividido lamentablemente y hay casos en que nosotros no podemos nombrar de Dominga porque inmediatamente las familias se separan. Y hemos tenido que llegar algunas conversaciones de que no vamos a nombrar eso, porque esa palabra, solamente decir esa palabra solo nos separa.

Por otra parte, un dirigente del “*movimiento no + desempleo*” señala:

Cerca de 35 mil desempleados de la región, que no deja de ser y detrás de ellos la familia, el número es mucho más grande, gente que necesita hoy día ... necesita llevar el pan a la mesa de su casa y no la tiene. Por todo lo que ha

pasado últimamente y Dominga hoy día es la herramienta que le va a dar, para poder tener el día de mañana el sustento a sus hijos y a la familia de todos los desempleados en la región.

Por otra parte, el dirigente de la Asociación comunal de La Higuera señala:

Nosotros como parte de lo que es la asociación comunal de La Higuera, nosotros tenemos un Acuerdo Marco firmado con la empresa, en la cual ella reconoce que nosotros tenemos ... debieran darnos parte de las ganancias para poder nosotros invertir en nuestra comuna. En estos momentos, la comuna de La Higuera carece de lo más mínimo, que es una farmacia, que es un supermercado, una bomba de bencina. Todos tenemos que ir hacia La Serena, no tenemos nada, con suerte con la gestión que hizo el alcalde en el municipio se logró un cajero automático, después de muchos años.

Según lo expuesto, el Acuerdo Marco firmado con la empresa *Andes Iron* es considerado por un sector de la comunidad como una gran oportunidad para generar “desarrollo en la zona”, específicamente, esto vendría a solucionar problemas vinculados con la falta de atención de parte del Estado, como es la ausencia de servicios.

Por otra parte, el movimiento social MODEMA se posiciona en contra de aquellas soluciones de reparación previstas en dicho Acuerdo Marco, considerándolas insuficientes respecto a los daños que este proyecto puede generar en la zona. Al respecto, señala:

La verdad es que nunca quedamos conforme con todas las mitigaciones y todas las soluciones que se nos proponían, es difícil cómo generar empleos oportunidades de empleo cierto, en esta comuna creando una nueva zona de sacrificio que es lo que nosotros vemos acá. Porque existen otras actividades en esta comuna que son la pesca artesanal, acá la agricultura de los olivos, la producción de aceite de oliva

y aceituna; está el turismo, que también es muy importante en esta zona, con el avistamiento de la reserva nacional, con el alojamiento, la carta gastronómica que ofrece, desde Caleta de Hornos hasta el Chañaral de Aceituno. Entonces, es inviable que este proyecto se haga acá, ¿cierto?, existiendo otras vías y otras actividades sustentables y sostenibles en el tiempo.

En el mismo sentido, el Gremio de Pescadores Artesanales de “Los Choros” señala:

Acá se desarrollan la pesca, el buceo, el turismo. Teniendo todos esos rubros de trabajo no tienes para qué moverte. ¿Cuál es el problema que ha generado Dominga en algunos pescadores? Porque aquí, hablando específicamente, ellos tienen trato con la asociación de Totoralillo Norte, que es la zona que quieren sacrificar. Pero a ellos no le han pasado la información del daño que se produce a través de la polución de los metales en el fondo marino, ni tampoco del daño que se produce con la salmuera de la desaladora. Entonces, nosotros vamos a ser afectados en el corto plazo, porque devolver una salmuera de concentración con químicos va a matar todo lo que es el proceso larval de microalga, que se beneficia esta zona de chile por la agua de surgencia de la corriente de Humboldt

Es así como este gremio de pescadores artesanales señala la importancia que posee esta zona de pesca:

Somos 62 pescadores que tenemos al manejo, administramos mil 300 hectáreas de manejo dentro en este lugar. Damos mucho empleo en la comuna, tenemos los bancos de macha más grande de la región y producimos alrededor de una cantidad de 300, 400 toneladas de alga al año; y así paulatinamente cada gremio tiene sus cuotas, y hemos sabido llevar en el tiempo trabajando con los servicios, como SERNAPESCA. La productividad que tiene La Higuera no la tiene ningún otro lugar, por eso también el rechazo a

lo que se quiere instalar, lo que es minera Dominga en nuestro sitio de pesca y de trabajo. Más que nada, ese gran rechazo que tenemos nosotros, ya que producimos 60% de los locos en la región, producimos el 30 por ciento de la pesquería para el país, entonces no es poco lo que producimos en alimentación.

De esta manera, este actor del conflicto socio-territorial con Dominga hace notar la importancia que posee esta zona en cuanto producción de alimentos, generación de empleos y soberanía alimentaria de la región, por lo cual, la instalación de esta mina vendría a destruir estas actividades de pesca y recolección, las cuales se han desarrollado por generaciones en la comunidad.

Como hemos podido evidenciar por medio de estos relatos, el *Proyecto Portuario Minero Dominga* ha generado un deterioro en las relaciones sociales del territorio, generando distintas posturas sobre su instalación, los beneficios y costos que esta traerá. De esta manera, se ha resquebrajado el tejido social de comunidades, generando un conflicto socio-territorial que ha desestructurado a la comunidad. Por otra parte, un sector de la comunidad ha levantado un proceso de resistencia al proyecto Dominga, realizando un trabajo constante de visibilización de los efectos que este proyecto puede traer al territorio.

El proyecto Dominga pretende –bajo las lógicas de consumo global– generar en el territorio una *zona de sacrificio*, generando además conflictos entre las comunidades allí presente, demostrándonos cómo las dinámicas del neoextractivismo generan procesos de deterioro de las relaciones sociales y de los territorios, además de generar daños ambientales que traerán también grandes problemas para el uso sustentable de recursos marinos. En esta lógica, la empresa minera busca generar ganancias y entregar empleo a costa de sacrificar zonas de gran importancia medioambiental, pero también cultural y social. Esto es lo que Svampa ha señalado como la expansión extractivista (“El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 33), ahora ya no solo en sectores tradicionales de extracción, sino llegando en este caso a suceder en una reserva

natural de importancia mundial, afectando de manera irreversible el ecosistema de la zona.

## 5.2 Política y corrupción

A los argumentos anteriormente presentados se le suman, además, los vínculos ligados a la corrupción. A pesar de ser Chile uno de los países de Latinoamérica con buenos indicadores respecto a transparencia y corrupción (Gudynas, *Extractivismos y Corrupción* 59), el proyecto minero Dominga se ha presentado como un proyecto estrechamente vinculado con la corrupción y la relación político-empresarial. Es así que investigaciones iniciadas en 2014 han señalado una relación existente entre el grupo empresarial *Penta* y políticos y asesores de servicios de la administración del ex Presidente Piñera. Por ejemplo, se demostraron pagos realizados por el grupo *Penta* al Subsecretario de Minería, por la posible aprobación del proyecto Dominga.

Por otra parte, con la exposición de los *Pandora Papers*, el ex Presidente Piñera se vio directamente involucrado en la venta de Minera Dominga en el paraíso fiscal de *Islas Vírgenes Británicas*, ya que, originalmente, la familia del presidente era la mayor accionista del proyecto Dominga hasta el año 2010, en que fue vendida por medio de un contrato que establecía un pago en tres cuotas, dependiendo la última de que no hubiera cambios regulatorios que obstaculizaran la instalación del proyecto. El problema se suscitaba en que dichos cambios dependían de decisiones del gobierno del propio presidente Sebastián Piñera (Skoknic y Arellano). Esta situación contribuyó a incrementar el conflicto social contra el proyecto Dominga.

## 6. La ausencia del Estado y la industria extractiva como suplente de carencias públicas

Como hemos evidenciado en el apartado anterior, la base del conflicto entre las comunidades adyacentes al proyecto extractivista ha generado posiciones opuestas en cuanto a la percepción de los beneficios que el proyecto traerá. Específicamente, las comunidades y organizaciones sociales con una

posición a favor del proyecto fundamentan su discurso en entender la relación de la industria extractiva como un suplente de carencias públicas. De este modo, dichos actores perciben la industria extractiva como un agente que permitirá mejorar su calidad de vida, esto es, a través de la generación de empleos, o proyectos vinculados al desarrollo de la región.

En este sentido, se debe mencionar que el Proyecto Portuario Minero Dominga sí se posiciona como un suplente de carencias públicas, ya que, por medio del Acuerdo Marco, se generan diversas propuestas enfocadas a mejorar los servicios presentes en la zona, pero también a generar medidas reparatorias y compensatorias por los altos costos ecológicos, sociales y medioambientales que traerá con su funcionamiento. Sin embargo, estas compensaciones son insuficientes, ya que como hemos analizado anteriormente, los costos asociados al funcionamiento de este proyecto extractivo son considerablemente mayores e incuantificables –por ejemplo, la destrucción de la colonia y reserva de pingüinos de Humboldt– respecto a los beneficios monetarios que este proyecto traerá.

De esta manera, se genera una cierta relación entre las industrias extractivas y los gobiernos respecto a la “ausencia” del Estado en sectores que han sido históricamente aplazados; esto debido especialmente a la administración centralizada de los Estados, lo cual produce que estos territorios posean una calidad de vida menor que otras regiones, significando en términos prácticos la falta de servicios básicos. Así, las industrias extractivas aprovechan esta oportunidad para generar por medio de coartaciones económicas y la generación de “proyectos de desarrollo” el apoyo de pobladores y comunidades aledañas. Algunas veces, estas coartaciones económicas se aceptan de manera voluntaria, pero en otros casos se ha hecho uso de la violencia y el amedrentamiento para lograr estos objetivos.

Podemos finalizar señalando que la ausencia del Estado y la presencia de la industria extractiva como suplente de carencias públicas, viene a responder a una falencia estructural de los estados latinoamericanos, puesto que tanto la falta de regulación como la presente

y activa exclusión de territorios permite la generación de una brecha en la cual actúan las industrias extractivas. Sin embargo, como ya hemos señalado, los ejemplos empíricos en América Latina y el Caribe nos demuestran que las empresas extractivas no generan polos de desarrollo en los territorios en los cuales se posicionan. Por otra parte, la destrucción de sistemas medioambientales tanto terrestres como acuáticos no puede ser cuantificada, por lo cual, las medidas reparatorias o las ganancias provenientes de estas industrias no pueden ser equiparadas con las pérdidas incalculables de territorios y *bienes comunes*.

## 7. Conclusiones

Como hemos podido evidenciar a través del análisis anteriormente expuesto, el avance de la industria extractiva en América Latina ha ido aumentando exponencialmente en cuanto al uso de nuevos territorios, los cuales antes no habían sido considerados “tradicionalmente aptos” para estas actividades. Esto es lo que autores han llamado la expansión del neoextractivismo y capital (Harvey 101-102; Svampa, “El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma” 33). En el caso de Chile, esta expansión de las actividades extractivistas –en especial la minería– se ha visto influenciado además por la creciente demanda mundial de minerales estratégicos para la *transición energética*. Por lo cual ya no existe interés por eliminar las industrias, sino más bien por generar un consenso nacional de cómo reducir sus impactos en los territorios donde se ubican las actividades del neoextractivismo.

Por otra parte, debemos contribuir en señalar que este avance o expansión de las actividades extractivas se ha generado también hacia espacios considerados como *patrimonios naturales*. Este es el caso, por ejemplo, del Proyecto Dominga y su impacto en la reserva de pingüinos de Humboldt. Este punto nos hace considerar la importancia que poseen los *bienes comunes* y la imposibilidad de valorarlos en el mercado comercial, haciéndonos cuestionar y reflexionar si vale la pena la destrucción de tan importantes ecosistemas marinos a fin posibilitar la extracción de hierro y cobre para

los mercados internacionales.

En este sentido, se hace necesario y pertinente generar una regulación efectiva, que permita proteger aquellos *patrimonios naturales* y *bienes comunes* de la destrucción por medio de actividades humanas, entre ellas, los proyectos extractivistas. De esta manera, se vuelve pertinente generar políticas internacionales fuertes, que por medio de tratados, regulen el actuar de los extractivismos en contextos de interés mundial, como lo es la reserva Humboldt en Chile.

En el ámbito local, surge además la necesidad de generar procesos rápidos y efectivos para la regulación de proyectos extractivos, evitando la perduración de conflictos durante un largo tiempo. Para esto, además, se vuelve relevante generar procesos participativos efectivos, en los cuales los habitantes de los territorios afectados puedan participar en las decisiones que les afecten. Un claro ejemplo de ello sería el mejoramiento de la implementación del Convenio 169 de la OIT y el Derecho a la Consulta.

Por último, los patrones de consumo y producción global han influenciado directamente en el avance expansivo del extractivismo en América Latina y el Caribe, generando conflictos socio-territoriales locales. Es decir, el consumo global, constituido particularmente por el Norte Global, genera directamente problemas locales, en particular sobre aquellas comunidades y agrupaciones históricamente desplazadas – permitiendo de esta manera una continuidad de la colonialidad–, en las cuales se establecen los proyectos extractivos con el objetivo de extraer recursos para satisfacer las necesidades de los mercados globales de consumo. Ello genera a su paso *zonas de sacrificios*: territorios víctimas de patrones de consumo y producción global, en donde las dinámicas, tejidos sociales y el medio ambiente son modificados a partir de procesos globales, generando externalidades negativas.

Por tanto, es necesario también repensar nuestro consumo, reflexionar sobre el origen de los productos que consumimos, su producción y los efectos que estos generan en las zonas de sacrificio y los territorios en los cuales se desarrollan las actividades neoextractivistas.

## Notas

[1] El comité de ministros se encuentra presidido por la ministra de medio ambiente Dra. Maisa Rojas y compuesto por los ministros de salud, economía, agricultura, energía y minería. El comité de ministro tiene la tarea de revisar las observaciones de la ciudadanía, los organismos técnicos y los alegatos del Proyecto Dominga.

[2] Cabe señalar que en esta sección se presentan extractos de entrevistas realizados a actores relevantes del conflicto socio-territorial vinculado al proyecto Dominga, como una manera de caracterizar las distintas posiciones y los conflictos que se han generado intercomunidades.

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Actualmente se encuentra realizando su trabajo postdoctoral centrado en el estudio de conflictos socio-territoriales en América Latina.

# Socio-Environmental Conflicts and Institutions in Resource-Based Economies: The Case of Mining in Peru and Colombia

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## Abstract

*The academic debate on the “resource curse” frequently presents social conflicts as one of many negative consequences of a resource-based development model. By contrast, critics argue that it is the institutional framework within a state that causes these problems. With this assumption as a starting point, I show in this paper how different institutional settings in structurally similar countries cause different types of conflicts using the examples of mining policies in Peru and Colombia. I argue that social conflicts in the context of resource extraction must be understood as multi-dimensional socio-environmental conflicts. I thereby criticize common approaches that perceive natural resources and rent-seeking behavior as given objectivities. I conclude that even though armed non-state actors impede the orderly function of Colombia’s institutions, these institutions provide more effective conflict management tools than those in neighboring Peru.*

**Keywords:** mining, socio-environmental conflicts, institutions, Peru, Colombia

## Introduction

Mining is often considered one of the most environmentally invasive industries there are. It is not surprising then that mining regularly causes socio-environmental conflicts. The Environmental Justice Atlas counts 707 active mining conflicts worldwide (EJAtlas) – 336, about half of them, in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2019 alone, 25 anti-mining activists died in the region (Global Witness).

One of the countries with the most conflicts in Latin America is Peru. The Mining Conflicts Observatory for Latin America (OCMAL) counts 46 mining conflicts for the Andean country (OCMAL). Human rights organization Global Witness registered 27 killed mining opponents for the period 2012-2020 – 19 of them by state security forces, making Peru one of the countries in the region with most deaths linked to socio-environmental conflicts (see Betancourt 37-8).

Another country with a high death toll in the context of extractive activities is Colombia. OCMAL observes only 19 active mining conflicts there. According to Global Witness, on the other hand, there were 42 fatalities among anti-

mining activists between 2012 and 2020. What is striking about this significantly higher number of victims, however, is that only one person was killed by state security forces, whereas 41 people were murdered by non-state actors in this context (*ibid.*).

The violence in both cases manifests itself in very different ways, even though Peru and Colombia are characterized primarily by their structural similarities: Both countries pursue the same neoliberal strategy in their natural resource policies by attracting foreign direct investment into the extractive sector with favorable conditions and deregulation. In both countries, mining is one of the most important export sectors. Peru and Colombia furthermore display a comparable per capita economic output. The two Andean countries also have similarities in terms of social policy: As two of only a few countries in Latin America, neither state experienced a post-neoliberal turn during the phase of the regional shift to the left generally known as the pink tide of the 2000s and early 2010s (see Fernandes and Casas). [1] Colombia’s history of internal armed conflict, which came to a supposed end with the peace agreement in 2016, is often cited

as a distinctive feature of the country. However, Peru also experienced an internal armed conflict with a high number of victims until 2000, which left its mark on many parts of the country. In both states, there are still active remnants of combatant groups today. Accordingly, the post-conflict thesis can only in part explain the Colombian peculiarity of the high murder rate against social activists and environmentalists in the context of resource extraction in comparison with neighboring Peru (see Hamilton).

Peru and Colombia are thus two countries in which a clear link can be observed between the extraction of raw materials – especially mining – and violent socio-environmental conflicts. They represent classic empirical examples of the resource curse hypotheses. The resource curse hypothesis assumes that the abundance of (non-renewable) natural resources brings predominantly negative consequences for a country or region (overview: Abubakr et al.). These consequences can be of economic (Gelb; Auty; Sachs and Warner) or political nature. Abundance of resources can furthermore lead to social conflicts and even civil wars (Collier and Hoeffler). Nevertheless, it can be observed that in these discussions social conflicts over environmental concerns are mostly neglected. Instead, the Social Sciences consider conflicts and natural resources from a security policy perspective. [2] This threatens not only to narrow the view of a broad field of phenomena, but often also to misjudge the object of conflict itself. Representatives of Social and Political Ecology have long pointed out that natural resources are not objects external to society (Görg; Watts; Robbins). Rather, they are socially constructed and embedded in social power structures.

Critics of the resource curse hypothesis mostly point out that it is not the natural resources themselves that produce the problems, but “bad” or “weak” institutions (Mehlum et al.; Menaldo). Natural resources could thus bring positive effects to a country, provided that “good” or “strong” institutions channel this potential in the right directions. Differing institutions might also produce different kinds of conflicts. [3] Existing systematic approaches to the study of structural conditions of socio-environmental conflicts have so far remained entrenched within the framework

of individual nation-states (Arellano Yanguas) or completely ignored nation-state embedded institutions (Haslam and Tanimoune; Conde and Le Billon). Peters (408-409) instead points to the advantages of comparing countries in terms of “comparative extractivism” in order to avoid “one-size-fits-all notions” among explanatory patterns on the one hand, as well as to be able to identify generalizable characteristics of commodity-dependent societies on the basis of empirical case studies. Accordingly, this paper aims to fill this gap of systematic country case studies on the structural causes of socio-environmental conflicts in resource-based economies.

In this context, a comparison of Peru and Colombia can serve as a suitable empirical basis for a more in-depth analysis of their institutional structure and its impact on the intensity of socio-environmental conflicts in the context of mining. In contrast to previous work that focused on the relationship between institutions and negative impacts of a resource-based development model (Bulte et al.; Mehlum et al.; Arezki and Van der Ploeg; Brunschweiler; Sarmidi et al.; Paredes et al.; Orihuela; Amundsen), the aim of this paper is to develop a deeper understanding of institutions and their influence on social actors.

Building on the theoretical research gap identified above and the empirical problem statement of the two country examples, the following questions arise. How do institutions affect social actors in a resource-based economy? And: How do socio-environmental conflicts arise from this? These questions will be answered by means of an empirical study of the mining sectors in Peru and Colombia building on existing literature on individual conflicts as well as expert interviews with representatives of the mining sector, the state and civil society.

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, the basic concepts ‘(socio-environmental) conflict’ and ‘institutions’ will be explained. These concepts will be operationalized for the methodological approach of the empirical study of the country cases Peru and Colombia. This will be followed by an actor analysis. For methodological reasons as well as for clearer structuring the main section is divided into three analytical dimensions for each country: the political-participative, the politico-economic and

the ecological dimension. In the third section I will present the overall research results drawn from this analysis.

## 1 Theoretical and Methodological Premises

This paper focuses on social conflicts over nature, i.e. conflicts between actors over the use of natural resources in an institutionally embedded context. Following Arellano Yanguas (111), social conflicts are manifest local conflicts that do not fall within the definition of war. They take place within a stately regulated system, so they are not anarchic, and they are usually asymmetrical because they occur within social structures of domination.

Meanwhile, nature as an object of conflict is not an object of dispute like any other. The basic assumption of Political Ecology approaches is that nature is not simply a materiality external to society, but already an intrinsically political sphere (Watts; Robbins). In this context, nature and society stand in a dialectical relationship that is subsumed in German Political Ecology approaches under the term “societal relationships with nature” (SRN) (Görg). These relations must always be thought “plurally”, because “society and nature are not related to each other as wholes, as undifferentiated entities, rather different social and natural elements are selectively and dynamically linked” (Becker and Jahn 12). Especially in postcolonial societies – such as those of Latin America – widespread alternative conceptions to the hegemonic, capitalist SRN can be observed to this day, for example in indigenous or peasant communities (Astor Aguilera).

Mining conflicts as social conflicts over the use (and interpretative dominance) of natural resources in a given territory can be subsumed under socio-environmental conflicts. Empirical evidence, however, reveals the complexity and simultaneous vagueness of this concept. In an empirical mixed methods study of mining conflicts in Peru, Arellano Yanguas discovers a wide variety of conflict triggers that lead him to an analytical typologization: First, conflicts as the cause of a fundamental rejection of a mining project by the population. Second, conflicts as escalated negotiations over the distribution

of resource rents or economic compensation for negative impacts of mining on certain economic sectors, and third, conflicts over the state distribution of resource rents (151-3). In an analysis of the causes of mining conflicts, Oxfam (5-7) also recognizes not primarily environmental damage, but also local economic effects and the lack of effective communication opportunities between the local population, the state and mining companies. Haslam and Tanimoune underpin these qualitative analyses with quantitative data on mining conflicts in Latin America, where they identify economic rather than ecological issues of contention as the most common conflict triggers.

Purely ecological issues are thus reflected in only one dimension of mining conflicts. Economic distributional struggles are another important component of mining conflicts, as is political participation. Accordingly, mining conflicts should not only be subsumed under conflicts about nature in the narrow sense, but should be understood as multidimensional socio-environmental conflicts, which, in addition to the ecological dimension, also have a politico-economic as well as a political-participative dimension. This distinction is purely analytical, for political, economic as well as ecological factors are usually closely interrelated. However, such a perspective can serve to structure the research field and thus provide a schematic guide for the actor analysis.

The political-participatory dimension encompasses all institutions that concern the planning a specific project. The politico-economic dimension subsumes those institutions that affect the distribution of resource rents as well as those economic interests that see themselves threatened by mining. Finally, the ecological dimension focuses on the institutions that shape SRN.

In the Social Sciences, institutions are generally understood to be the regulatory systems of a society. In neo-institutionalist approaches, these include not only formalized rules such as codified laws or policies, but also informal rules such as practices, social norms, or implicit conventions (see March and Olsen; North; Hall and Taylor). While unified definition of ‘institutions’ cannot be found within the New Institutionalism, North (3)

offers a widely accepted definition:

"Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic."

In this paper, I will distinguish between three different types of institutions: formal institutions, practices, and norms.

Formal or formalized institutions are systems of rules that are explicitly formulated and articulated, and whose violation is followed by clearly defined sanctions. These include laws or contract-based regulations. In addition to formal institutions, there are informal institutions. These include practices. Practices are usually not made explicit, but are unconsciously followed, internalized patterns of action. The third type of institution to be examined here is social norms. Norms can be defined as interpretive horizons and value systems that determine actors' actions. Unlike practices, these norms are usually quite explicitly articulated, but violations of them are not uniformly sanctioned.

In a macro-analysis such as the one carried out here, social actors are not only individuals, but also organizations such as ministries, courts or authorities (March and Olsen 738). Such entities can be captured as "corporate actors" if they are composed of a group of individuals pursuing the same purpose under a common sign (Mayntz and Scharpf 49-51).

Just because institutions, by definition, provide actors with a common framework for action that they accept, does not mean that they make conflict impossible (Thelen 387). Rather, institutions shape the way in which conflicts are carried out and can even be the object of conflict themselves (see *ibid.*). Accordingly, they also have a significant influence on the intensity of the conflict.

A basic question of institutionalist conflict theories is how institutions can induce actors to behave either conflictively or cooperatively. In this context, the focus is on conflict management (Spindler 146-9). Conflict management occurs when a conflict between actors with different

goals and interests is first regulated and channeled through commonly accepted rules – an escalation is to be avoided. Conflict resolution would be achieved when the incompatibility of positional differences is eliminated and all actors can achieve their goals. This would be an ideal case, which, however, is often not what happens: An end to the manifest conflict, can already occur if the incompatibilities regarding the actors' objectives remain, but they have been able to agree on the establishment of joint decision-making mechanisms (*ibid.* 148). In this case, the causes of conflict themselves are not eliminated; it is merely a matter of constructive conflict management that succeeds in significantly reducing the intensity of conflict.

Thus, institutions can reduce conflict intensity by providing instruments for effective conflict management. These are formal or informal rules that actors accept to moderate differences of interest.

In this paper I conduct a qualitative small-N country comparison based on an actors analysis (see Collier 105). In addition to a pure description of the actors involved, the actor analysis will ask about the institutions and the actor-institution interrelationship. Such an actor-centered institutionalist approach was designed by Mayntz and Scharpf. They combine actor analysis with the study of the institutional structures that condition their actions (Scharpf 36). Actors are determined by institutions insofar as they provide them with a stimulating, enabling or also restricting context for action (Mayntz and Scharpf 43). In this context, a certain autonomy of actors and a clearly limited concept of institutions has to be assumed in order to avoid a „crypto-determinism“ that assumes actors are completely determined by their environment. At the same time, such an actor analysis should also not do without a reference to structures, as other actor-centered approaches do (*ibid.* 45-6). In contrast to game-theoretical interpretations of actor-centered institutionalism (see Scharpf), whose analyses include model calculations, elements of this approach will be integrated into a qualitative actor analysis here.

The qualitative actor analysis draws from the extensive, predominantly local academic literature that exists on individual cases of socio-

environmental conflicts as well as from expert interviews I conducted between 2019 and 2021. Developments after 2019 will not be considered, as the ‘state of emergency’ of the pandemic years 2020 and 2021 could distort the results.

## 2. Actors and Institutions of the Mining sectors in Peru and Colombia

### 2.1 Peru: Protest as Means of Participation

#### The political-participatory dimension

##### *Local non-state actors*

When confronted with a large-scale project, opponents of mining in Peru join together in temporarily organized civil society associations such as “frentes de defensa” or “comités de lucha”, which are dedicated to information work and the organization of protest actions (see Paredes and De la Puente 82-6). These groups are not necessarily representative of the entire population of a municipality or province, but derive their legitimacy from broad popular support. However, it is a long process to reach such mobilizations, which is preceded by lengthy information campaigns by a few committed people.

The major communication tool between local non-state actors and other actor groups is the “round table”. It brings together representatives of the local population, the central government, the mining companies and possibly the regional government. Yet they are scheduled only in exceptional cases. Such exceptional cases arise in response to local protests. Because of the lack of other, formal channels of communication, this paradoxically creates an incentive for local populations to resort to means of civil disobedience. Forms of civil disobedience, such as road blockades, have thus become a popular means of exerting pressure to get state actors to make concessions and enter dialogue (see Durand 31). Marle Livaque, one of the protest leaders against the Conga project in the Cajamarca region, describes it this way:

“The gentlemen in Lima don’t know the reality on the ground, ‘yes just let them protest for a year.’ Because they don’t feel it, they don’t see it, so you have to make them feel it by blocking the highways and informing them what is being protested.”  
[4]

Ultimately, however, round tables once established are only effective to a limited extent. On the one hand, this is due to a fundamental lack of trust between the actors, and on the other hand, a dialogue can only help if there is a certain amount of room for negotiation (see Brandt 233). In many cases, the parties are not willing to make any concessions. Furthermore, power asymmetries are not eliminated in these spaces, but are rather being reproduced, thus blocking a fair participatory process (Paredes and De la Puente 95). Short-term solutions or agreements that are broken shortly after are among the constant weaknesses of these negotiations. Moreover, no fundamental and legally binding decisions can be made there.

The only formal institution of participation is the “prior consultation” (PC) of indigenous peoples. Its application remains limited to a narrow definition of indigenous communities, making the very question of its applicability a subject of dispute. If PC does come to be applied, in practice this usually does not mean genuine co-determination in the sense of the ILO’s proclaimed principle of “prior, informed and free consensus” (see MINCUL). Rather, PCs function as an additional communication channel for the affected population, in which some legally non-binding agreements can be reached, but no fundamental right of veto exists. Active consent from the consulted groups is only required in the case of hard interventions such as resettlement. The timing and nature of its application remain largely unregulated. Consulted populations also usually lack knowledge about the exact process of PC, and there is also disagreement on the part of the central state about the exact responsibilities and the role that companies should assume within the consultation processes (Bebbington et al. 94-5).

### *Mining companies*

Mining companies do not have to apply for licenses for initial analyses of geological conditions and accordingly begin planning potential projects before any communication with the population affected by the consequences of the project takes place. Only when they conduct the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the official exploration phase do they have to inform the local population. Next to the presentation of technical aspects, companies early on promise the implementation of social development projects. In doing so, companies specifically involve local authority figures and try to win them over – in some cases through open bribery as activists report:

“When [the mining companies] go to a community, they grab the president or the local council first, buying them with money or things.” [5]

The incentives and supposed benefits of a project presented in the early stages often turn out to be misinformation. In the public discourse, companies benefit from the hegemony of capitalist development ideals in the national media. Mining projects are usually assumed to have a ‘silent majority’ of supporters among the population, while project opponents are portrayed as radical forces (see Silva Santisteban). In addition, there are close ties between the mining industry and the central State, especially the Ministry of Mines, through ‘revolving door effects’.

### *Central state actors*

Legally, the central government is the administrator of all natural resources on its territory. When it comes to the actual implementation of mining projects, however, it is largely left out of the picture. Only in the case of PC, the supervision and implementation of which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, are central government actors directly involved (see Bebbington et al. 94-5).

The local population communicates with central government authorities only in cases of conflict, i.e., in response to provocation by

protests and civil disobedience. Since only the central state actors have the authority to license mining projects, protesters demand talks with high-ranking representatives of the state authorities. Mediation through intermediate administrative levels cannot take place because of a general lack of decentralization of the Peruvian State.

Dialogue with the local population is not always the immediate response to protests. It is usually preceded by a phase of repression by police or military forces. Both are also directly subordinate to the central state, that is, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. Repression is regularly reinforced by the imposition of a state of emergency, within which the central state can suspend the fundamental rights of the local population (Const. Art. 137). The president can declare a state of emergency for up to 60 days to “restore public order”. The state also deliberately resorts to the narrative of “fighting terrorism” to legitimize repression. Sporadically, however, there are also solidarizations by members of Congress. Audiences before parliament are also possible in cases of national radiance, although their effect appears more symbolic.

### *Local state actors*

Regional, provincial and municipal governments take different positions depending on the case. Despite a decentralization process initiated in 2002, subnational governments have few powers. While regional governments are primarily responsible for economic development at the departmental level and for carrying out administrative tasks, provincial and municipal governments have authority over spatial planning and local public services (Ley 27783 de 2002). With respect to mining, subnational governments have little say. With the Regional Directorates of Energy and Mining, they only assume some administrative functions for small-scale mining. In certain cases, concessions can also be granted. Traditional authority structures such as the “peasant rounds” or indigenous self-governments exist parallel to the subnational state administrations. The degree of cooperation between these informal but constitutionally recognized structures and local state actors

varies considerably and depends on the respective political position of the officeholders.

Depending on the political constellation, subnational governments side with the mining opponents or the companies. The exact responsibilities are sometimes unclear. 80 percent of all municipalities and 92 percent of all provinces in Peru have no clear delimitations (Thiery 150). Mining companies deliberately exploit these inconsistencies to play off local governments competing for territory against each other. The regional party landscape exists virtually detached from the national one, which is why subnational authorities are more responsive to changing local power relations (see *ibid.* 151). As a result, some regional politicians are easily influenced by mining companies, while others sometimes use solidarity with mining opponents to profit politically (see Arellano Yanguas 102-4). Thus, when the open conflict of interests with the central state erupts, resistance on the part of subnational governments can occur in individual cases.

## The Politico-Economic Dimension

### *Local non-state actors*

The establishment of a mining project in a region produces economic winners and losers. Mining companies usually employ workers or contractors from outside the region, since only they have the desired professional skills. Thus, only a few local companies benefit directly from the newly emerging economic linkages. Only over time and through experience of conflict has the sector attempted to counteract this dynamic. This has been explicitly required by law since the early 2000s: According to Decreto Supremo 042/2003, mining companies are obliged to employ local staff when possible. For 2018, according to estimates from the Ministry of Mines, 52.2 percent of employees in the mining sector were hired from the respective departments, while 47.8 percent came from outside (MINEM 107). Local workers are mostly assigned to simple and lower-paid tasks, while well-paid professionals are brought in from Lima or other major cities.

Local jobs become a bargaining chip in the conflicts. Clientelistic relationships develop between mining companies and the population, which can be exploited by both sides. Former advisor to the Ministry of Finance, Carlos Adrianzen, comments:

“I see the conflicts as a kind of private business, [...] given unclear property rights, those who invest run the risk and those who live near a project receive a lot of money as looters, as systematic besiegers.” [6]

The sudden increase in demand with the construction of a mine leads to local inflation (see Aragón & Rud 3), from which those who cannot profit directly from the mining business suffer – especially small informal businesses or people living in subsistence structures. This is accompanied by socio-cultural uprooting processes. Land acquisitions by mining companies often lead to displacement of the local population. Smallholders who sell their land – often under unfair conditions – abandon their traditional way of life and find themselves in unfamiliar contexts. Others, such as small business owners and employees in service sectors such as hotels or transport companies welcome the arrival of mining companies. A small number of well educated people as well as business-savvy peasants can profit, too. [7]

### *Mining companies*

Mining companies are important shapers of the political economy at the local level. The multiplier effect on the local economy of a mining project is characterized by forward and backward linkages. Forward linkages are processing procedures of natural resources. Although a small part of the refining process already takes place locally in large-scale mining, major processing plants are rarely found in mining regions. Backward linkages result from increased demand for labor, services, and land. In industrial mining, CSR programs are being designed to reinforce these backward linkages (Bebington 16-20).

The mining industry in Peru invests directly in

public infrastructure locally to facilitate its own transport and supply chains. It also benefits from the “Constructions for Taxes” program established in 2008. When a company undertakes the construction of a public infrastructure project, it can offset the expenditure against corporate tax. Accordingly, the amount spent no longer has to be paid as tax. In addition, there are also ‘voluntary’ investments in public infrastructure as part of CSR strategies (see Arellano-Yanguas: 37). Thus, there is not only a fiscal economic dependence on mining, but in addition, quite directly, a dependence on the industry as a guarantor of public infrastructure.

Mining companies must make a “preliminary commitment” on social development projects prior to their activities. The scope and manner of these development projects are left up to the companies. Local development projects include projects to diversify and strengthen the local economy, education, environmental protection, nutrition, culture, infrastructure and health. Skills training programs for local entrepreneurs and continuing education programs for workers are also offered. In 2018, these projects included USD \$205 million nationwide. Also, since 2008, the rule for each major project (Decreto Legislativo 996) has been to create a social fund under the care of a management body. In 2019, the estimated amount of all active social funds was USD \$618 million (MINEM 120-5).

The population welcomes such projects because the state can hardly guarantee general basic services, let alone local development programs. Thus, many accept mining in their vicinity in order to benefit from social investment projects that provide them with basic services for the first time. Nevertheless, the focus on external effects often prevails in the case of company-led development programs, because there is neither a legal guarantee nor a monitoring authority for their actual benefits. Moreover, CSR strategies repeatedly fail in their claim to reduce conflicts through local economic development. Instead, they intensify patronage-based dependency relationships that provide negotiating leverage for a protesting local population. [8]

### *Local state actors*

The largest investment program for local development is through the state distribution mechanism of the Mining Canon (MC). This was originally conceived as a means of decentralizing state resources (Arellano Yanguas 116). Through this mechanism, half of the mining sector’s corporate tax goes directly to the respective region where the revenue was generated. 10 percent of the transferred funds goes to the municipalities where the commodities are extracted, 25 percent to the municipal governments of the affected province, 40 percent to the municipal governments of the entire department, 20 percent to the regional government, and 5 percent to the department’s public universities (see Dargent et al. 10-1).

Meanwhile, 100 percent of the mining royalties go to the mining regions, where they are distributed among regional, provincial, and municipal governments (Flores Unzaga et al. 47). In 2019, mining sector transfers to subnational governments (MC, royalties, concession fees) amounted to USD \$1.4 billion. But benefits vary significantly from year to year and by department. The MC itself is all the more volatile: in 2012, at the height of the commodity boom, it comprised USD \$1.55 billion nationwide, dropped to USD \$462 million by 2016, and reached USD \$870 million again in 2019.

Often, regional governments lack the technical skills to manage and invest the finances transferred to them by the MC in a meaningful way. The National System for Public Investment created for this purpose is considered ineffective and provides little oversight of regional government spending (Ghezzi and Gallardo 77). While some departments certainly benefit from the MC, others lack the capacity to manage the decentralized financial resources (Sexton 643).

Moreover, transfer payments are usually not used to make or attract sustainable investments. Narrow guidelines from the central state limit the subnational governments’ room for maneuver in this regard. At the same time, the population presses for rapid results in public investments because trust in local administrations is low (Arellano Yanguas 28). This effect is reinforced by participatory processes. But mining companies

also exert pressure as they, too, are interested in quick results (*ibid.* 216). This leads to short-term prestige projects, while long-term projects are not tackled. Juan Rozas, an employee of the municipal government of Velille, which is located near the Las Bambas mine, reports large-scale waste:

“A bullring was built. Nevertheless, in the same municipality, the sewage system is full of defects.” [9]

A statistical analysis of the impact of the MC on living standards data by Arellano Yanguas found that there were no improvements at the municipal level. The only positive feature was a slight increase in schooling rates at the departmental level (213). Although the MC led to higher incomes, this effect worked against the local economy: If people in mining regions earn more, they are less inclined to buy local products, preferring more expensive manufactured goods. This weakens domestic production (*ibid.* 262). The MC also leads to a bloated public sector typical of rentier societies (see Peters 486). The oversupply of jobs counteracts an effective increase in the schooling rate (Arellano Yanguas 262). Accordingly, transfer mechanisms such as the MC, but also the royalties to the regions, prove to be less effective and do not meet their goal of local economic development (see *ibid.* 26).

## The Ecological Dimension

### *Local non-state actors*

Local populations have diverse relationships with their environment. Rural Peru is very agrarian, and accordingly the quality of soils and waters is an important constant in the lives of many subsistence smallholder farmers. Medium-sized and large agricultural enterprises depend on these elements, too. Environmental pollution from mining thus poses a threat to the livelihoods of many people in rural areas. According to estimates, more than half of all peasant communities in Peru are affected in some way by environmental impacts of mining (Bebington and Williams 190). This results in

displacement and threat scenarios that are not limited to local dynamics but have nationwide implications. Pollution of water bodies can also affect regions that lie far outside the actual mining zones.

Mining consumes large quantities of water. This is becoming a problem in Peru in particular, as the country's water supply is considered one of the most vulnerable on the continent (*ibid.* 191). [10] At the height of the mining boom in the 2000s, the sector used five percent of the national freshwater. In this context, mining activity poses a risk to the water supply of large parts of the country due to its location in source areas at high altitude. Entire river systems and water reservoirs are at risk due to acid mine drainage and chemical additives entering groundwater. Contamination causes permanent damage here. 13 billion m<sup>3</sup> of industrially used water was released into the water cycle annually by the mining industry in the 2000s (*ibid.*). Additionally, the contamination of drinking water by heavy metals or chemicals has strong implications for the health of local consumers. Especially in children, such contamination can lead to serious deformities or cancer. Studies near the Antamina mine, for example, showed elevated levels of lead and cadmium in the blood and urine of local residents (Cooperación).

In addition to being a purely physical threat to the environment, mining also leads to cultural damage through changes in the SRN. In many places in Peru, especially among traditionally Andean populations, nature has a metaphysical meaning and is subjectified, for example, in the form of ‘mountain spirits’. The alteration of the landscape leads to an impairment of this spiritual connection (see Li 110). In the constitution, this plurality of SRN is only partially taken into account. According to Art. 89, the “cultural identity” of small farmers and indigenous populations should be respected. However, issues of identity and its connection to territory or nature in practice are reduced to economic parameters. State actors recurrently argue in cost-benefit categories (see *ibid.* 24).

### *Mining companies*

When planning a project, companies must involve the population in the preparation of the EIA and provide detailed information. However, this information is effectively inaccessible to lay people. Milton Sánchez, protest leader in the Conga conflict, recounts his experience:

“We started to study the environmental impact study [...]. It was very large though, we only read the executive summary, which was about 8,000 pages, but in total there were 17 volumes with about 22,000 pages.” [11]

After the company has carried out an EIA that is accepted, it is issued an environmental license by the National Service for Environmental Certification (SENACE). One problem with the EIA is that its validity is fixed for the entire duration of the project. Tightening of environmental standards or minor changes in the project design do not require updating the EIA (see Wiener Ramos 69-75).

Mining companies, through sustainability discourses and ‘green washing’ strategies, overplay in their communication strategies the fact that a mine is a strong permanent intervention in nature. Complex ecosystems are irrevocably damaged. It also leaves out the fact that most companies lobby against stricter regulations (Merino 6). Instead, the image of modern, clean, large-scale industrial mining is used, in stark contrast to informal small-scale mining. Some companies though go really beyond mere rhetoric in this regard and invest in higher environmental standards.

### *Central state actors*

The Environmental Evaluation and Sanctioning Body (OEFA) is the responsible actor to check the maximum permissible levels of emitted substances or materials. These checks are carried out twice a year, unannounced, and take place to the exclusion of third parties (Godfrid et al. 33). If a mine operator violates requirements, a sanction process begins that can last up to six months and before the end of which the

public may not be informed. The National Water Authority (ANA) is responsible for measuring water quality. Both authorities are required to carry out announced participatory inspections twice a year as part of large-scale mining projects, accompanied by a comprehensive information program where representatives of the mining company, State authorities and the local population are present. However, the population’s trust in the authorities is low. The population generally perceives State actors – whether the Mining Ministry or the environmental authorities – as a unified block that stands together behind decisions.

There are also criticisms that the controls do not do justice to the complexity of the controlled ecosystems (*ibid.* 33-6). NGOs also conduct measurements and train local populations to conduct their own measurements. In turn, the contamination perceived by the population or that measured by NGOs is not accepted by state actors. Instead, the environmental authorities resort to exclusionary, highly technical discourses in their communication with the local population, which make a more open dialogue with laypersons impossible (*ibid.* 44). Discussions about environmental consequences are thus reduced to technical problems in a depoliticized way. Non-technological, ‘local’ knowledge linked to alternative SRN is delegitimized (see Li 75-6).

### *Local state actors*

Regional and municipal governments have little authority in environmental regulation. In addition, subnational administrations lack qualified personnel in environmental matters. In contrast to the national level, there is no technocratic tradition at the local administrative levels, which leads to a massive exchange of personnel in the administrations with a change of government, preventing the establishment of an expert tradition. Accordingly, local government actors are easily influenced by short-term incentives and economic interests.

Rather, there are top-down relationships in environmental management between national authorities in Lima and regional and local governments. The centralized environmental authorities doubt independently conducted

measurements by local governments. Both OEFA and ANA have their own local offices (Godfrid et al. 32). Thus, although OEFA and ANA formally try to strive for more inclusive structures and to integrate local populations, in practice the relationship between central and local state actors remains asymmetrical (see Ulloa et al. 55).

### Conclusion

In the political-participatory dimension formal processes of political participation in the planning and implementation of mining projects hardly exist in Peru. In this vacuum of formal structures, informal practices emerge as substitutes. These practices are characterized on the one hand by their conflictual nature (civil disobedience, police repression), and on the other by approaches of cooperation (round tables). Effective channels for cooperative action among actors are lacking. This creates incentives for protest practices of civil disobedience by populations affected by mining making escalation more probable.

As seen in the politico-economic dimension, mining creates few economic links with the rest of the local economy. Measures designed to counteract this effect show only limited positive effects. State rent distributions also fail to achieve the goal of local development. Clientelistic structures emerge that, instead of pacifying conflicting interests, exacerbate distribution conflicts.

In the ecological dimension negative environmental impacts are – in practice – accepted by state actors. Alternative SRN are only in part formally recognized by state actors and in practice not at all. Both state actors and mining companies exclude the concerns of local populations from the environmental discourse by referring to technical arguments. This monopolization of SRN on the extractivist model radicalizes local actors as the livelihood of those affected is fundamentally at stake.

## 2.2 Colombia: Between Participation and “Grey Zones of State Violence”

### The Political-Participatory Dimension

#### *Local non-state actors*

Like in Peru, mining projects in Colombia do not always immediately face an existing local civil society. While the constitutionally recognized ethnic minority groups [12] (EMG) generally already have existing structures of representation, in many cases protest alliances first have to form (see Dietz, “Politics” 138-9).

In Colombia, all EMG have the right to PC in cases where their territory or way of life could be affected by a project. In these cases, a preliminary consultation of the communities is required, involving representatives, considering their traditional authority structures (see Amparo Rodríguez). This is not always easy as the authority structures of the EMG are not always clear and in some cases disputed, which means that sometimes several representatives display contradictory opinions. Also present in this process, which is supervised by the Ministry of the Interior, are, in the case of mining projects, the company operating the project and the responsible environmental authority. During the entire consultation process, standards of interculturality and, if necessary, correct translation into vernacular languages must be taken into account (Amparo Rodríguez and Muñoz Ávila 122-3). The extent to which PC includes a veto function remains controversial. In 2009, the Constitutional Court ruled (T-769) in favor of a veto in the Mandé Norte case, building on the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of Saramaka v. Suriname in 2007. In 2011, the Constitutional Court again strengthened the PC by establishing respect for the “life plans” of EMGs as a discretionary criterion (T-129).

Despite this strong legal foundation, PC is relatively weak in practice. On the part of executive bodies, there is a lack of political will to implement it and in many cases it is simply ignored (DPLF and Oxfam 9). [13] The procedure of PC is not always entirely clear and often consensus cannot be reached (DPLF

and Oxfam 9). Instead, a “transactional” logic sets in, where the PC converts into ‘horse-trading’. The PC is thus used as a mouthpiece to demand state-guaranteed but unimplemented infrastructure projects, as described by Laura Galvis of the dialogue group GDIAM:

“In Colombia, there are no spaces for dialogue at a significant level for the ethnic minority groups [...]. So because the communities don't have a space, where they can say ‘listen, I have this health problem, I have this education problem,’ it's like a catharsis when the prior consultation comes.” [14]

Another instrument that endured during the 2010s was the popular referendum (PR) on a municipal, regional, or national level. It could be initiated by the central government, a governor, or a mayor – depending on its scope. Its results could act as a veto against a particular project and were considered legally binding (Ley 134/1994; Amparo Rodríguez and Muñoz Ávila 138). PRs usually had a turnout of over 33 percent and achieved clear results of over 90 percent (Dietz, “Consultas” 95). As the case of La Colosa mine makes clear, in many cases they led to a pacification of conflicts. Nevertheless, the way the PRs were used was legally controversial from the beginning and it was considered more an instrument of resistance than an official participatory element in the project planning process (see Dietz, “Demokratie” 20-1). In this context, national environmental NGOs played a crucial role by providing legal assistance to the respective communities. On the other hand, a number of central state actors tried to prevent the implementation of PRs (Le Billon et al. 6). In 2018, the dispute culminated in the Constitutional Court’s decision that mining projects are excluded as subjects of PRs (SU-095). How this institutional change will affect mining conflicts in Colombia could not be determined at the time of the 2019 study. However, in the affected conflicts, the decision led to a great deal of uncertainty among anti-mining movements.

Legal instruments are also available to opponents of mining in Colombia. Through individual or collective constitutional claims, they

can take action against a project if they see their basic constitutional rights impaired by direct consequences. Legal action can often channel discontent in this way and sometimes results in a demobilization of the protest movement.

### *Mining companies*

Mining companies initially carry out their planning independently of the local population. They do not yet have to inform them about the project during the exploration phase. Mining titles are granted without explicitly contacting or consulting the affected communities. Only when the project applies for an environmental license does the population have to be informed (see Amparo Rodríguez and Muñoz Ávila 166-72). Once communities become aware of a project that could greatly alter or even completely threaten their way of life, the local population mobilizes. To avoid this, initial activities and contacts are often not conducted by the mining company itself, but by generally unknown subsidiaries. This may buy time for the company before it encounters resistance.

To prevent resistance as far as possible, the companies try to buy sympathy from the population through financial contributions, leading to splits in the communities. This happens even or especially in the course of PC, as Galvis explains:

“There are international mining companies that arrive with a transactional logic, so to speak: ‘How much do you want? I'll pay you and that's how we'll come to an agreement.’”

Early on, social projects and elaborate image campaigns are initiated to highlight the benefits of mining for a region. In the process, local media are also influenced in their reporting, for example by generous benefits for journalists provided by mining companies (see Dietz “Demokratie” 21).

### *Central state actors*

Compared to Peru, the Colombian central state behaves relatively passively toward mining conflicts. Direct dialogue between executive

bodies and the local population is rare. In contrast to the executive central state organs, the judiciary often intervenes in mining conflicts – especially the Constitutional Court (see Dietz “Demokratie” 17). Nevertheless, in recent years the government has shown an interest in improving participatory processes in mining projects. Since 2012, the Ministry of Mines has had a central office for social affairs, after these tasks were previously distributed among smaller offices within subdivisions. This is intended to facilitate better communication with local stakeholders, for which additional regional offices have been established.

This paradoxical position of the central state actors, who on the one hand block direct dialogue opportunities and active participation, but on the other hand create new authorities for communication in mining conflicts, shows the technocratic understanding that prevails in the central state: the handling of conflicts is understood merely as enforcing industry standards, but not as real conflict management (González Espinoza 588-9).

#### *Local state actors*

Regarding the regulation of mining, local governments are responsible up to a point through their spatial planning competencies. However, since the competences for spatial planning and natural resource management are set at different administrative levels, a legal contradiction arises here, which has been repeatedly addressed by the Constitutional Court, which granted local governments a limited say (Bastida and Bustos 251-2). Regional governments are left out in terms of competence. They are responsible for carrying out public services and control functions at the regional level, which means they can hardly act autonomously vis-à-vis the mining sector (Const. Art. 300). Municipal governments in particular can easily be taken over by mining companies. However, the mobilization of the population can lead to the election of mining critics into office. In other cases, local governments are consistently close to local associations critical of mining. It is clear that positioning ultimately depends on the political calculations of the individual actors. [15]

#### *Armed non-state actors*

In Colombia, a separate group of actors in the political-participatory dimension of mining are the Armed non-state actors (ANSA). Often grouped together under one collective term due to blurred dividing lines and similar tactics, in reality ANSA cover a broad spectrum of groups.

On the one hand, there are the guerrilla groups that are still active, such as the ELN or units of FARC dissidents. In the guerrillas' ideology, mining companies are perceived as enemies, while they see themselves as fighters on the side of the social movements. As can be observed in the Cerrejón case, this is expressed in bomb attacks, but also in the extortion of protection money or ransom demands for kidnapped company employees. In turn, supporters of mining projects use the guerrillas' self-portrayal as the enemy of industrial mining to delegitimize mining opponents across the board like in the case the Colosa project, where civil society opponents of mining were stigmatized as guerrilla allies. The operating company AngloGold Ashanti had deliberately spread misinformation (Le Billon et al. 14).

ANSA that do not belong to the guerrillas but are rather hostile to them are commonly grouped under the term ‘paramilitaries’. [16] Today they exist as diverse ANSA without a clear political position, but with at times concrete connections to political actors. In contrast to guerrillas, they are not rebels whose goal is to overthrow the government, but rather actors who fight autonomously on the side of the state's regulatory power and are motivated by economic profit. They are involved both in illegal economies-drug trafficking or illegal mining and in the formalized economy (Zelik). Individual private companies are said to have financed paramilitary forces – either directly or through security firms.[17]

Along with guerrillas and paramilitaries, drug cartels represent a third group of ANSA. Here, the distinction is more difficult and is commonly disputed because paramilitaries and drug gangs are historically closely linked (see Rettberg et al. 16). A trend can be identified for drug gangs in Colombia in recent years, according to which the drug business is increasingly being

supplemented or displaced by illegal mining (Ambos 387). The same trends can be observed for guerrillas and paramilitary groups (Álvarez 58). This way, mining opponents of all kinds are increasingly becoming targets in this context.

Links between mining and ANSA are not always direct. Companies often benefit indirectly from a climate of threat and violence against civil society actors and accordingly tolerate the status quo. In this context, the violent practices appear diffuse and cannot be clearly attributed. A general threat situation is constructed, which also influences formal participation mechanisms. Jenss, refers here to a statehood outside of state institutions in which accumulation processes are secured precisely through such “grey zones of state violence”. Le Billon et al. (6) describe this as a shadow state governance in which parastatal actors assume public order functions according to their own purposes.

## The Politico-Economic Dimension

### *Local non-state actors*

Mining – in all its forms – has a generally positive impact on the local economy in Colombia, according to a model calculation by Cárdenas Estupiñán and Reina. However, this does not always translate into a noticeable improvement in the living conditions. Cárdenas Estupiñán and Reina (xi) also make qualifications in their analysis: In particular, the «quality of institutions» and the human capital of a particular department determine whether the economic effect of mining is positive or negative. Inflation effects can also make growth unrecognizable. Local Dutch disease phenomena are occurring: mining and its contractors are becoming the most lucrative employer, drawing labor away from other sectors such as agriculture. At the same time, prices for consumer goods are rising, which further harms the other sectors and the people employed in them. Thus, a clear distinction can be made here between winners and losers of the economic effects of mining.

The latter clearly includes agriculture: Industrial mining in particular impairs any agricultural activities in its vicinity through the large-scale conversion of land. This effect is

particularly evident in the context of Colombian coal mining, whose large-scale open-pit projects sometimes cover hundreds of square kilometers. Considering the environmental impact this has on surrounding areas, the loss of arable land for the affected regions is enormous. In 2017, for example, mining titles existed for 1,330 km<sup>2</sup> in the department of La Guajira alone, with a total area of 20,800 km<sup>2</sup> (ANM). In addition to the economic damage, these displacement processes also provoke social uprooting phenomena that cannot be fully mitigated by newly created jobs and monetary compensation.

Not only agriculture and mining compete with each other in Colombia, but also different types of mining. In addition to large-scale mining, which is dominated by multinational companies, there are also medium-sized and small mining operations, most of which are owned by Colombians, as well as traditional informal mining, which is a traditional source of income in many regions. Among Afrocolombian communities, for example, this has a centuries-old tradition and is considered a form of subsistence economy (see Álvarez 36). This is also recognized in mining law, which is why, in purely legal terms, the mining activities of EMG must be given preference over other interested parties (Bastida and Bustos 249). However, former smallholders also sometimes devote themselves to this activity if they have lost their old income due to industrial mining projects. In addition to traditional informal mining, there is also illegal mining, which is used by ANSA and criminal organizations to generate additional income or launder drug money. Geologist Julio Fierro explains the rational behind this:

“If they catch you with a kilo of cocaine, that’s illegal. But if they catch you with a kilo of gold, there’s an assumption that that might be legal.” [18]

This competition between mining types often itself becomes the subject of conflict, as happened in the case of Santurban. There, opposition to a large-scale industrial mine on the border of a páramo led to a conflict with informal miners who opposed the large-scale mine on one side and environmentalists on the other

(see Le Billon et al. 9).

#### *Mining companies*

In Colombia, mining companies have only recently begun to take on more important roles in local development. A regulation introduced in 2015 (Ley 1753) stipulates that social programs, in scope proportionate to project size, are mandatory for new industrial mining projects. This is intended to pre-empt “social risks.” This is the first time that state actors are setting more precise requirements for the CSR strategies of the mining industry. For a long time, these depended on the voluntary nature of the mining companies. Accordingly, development programs remained severely limited and companies referred to state responsibility in local development. Demands from the population were not addressed. Rather, programs and smaller one-time gifts were primarily for PR purposes.

Companies also invest in “gifts” such as travel or job guarantees for family members of local authorities. The intended shift toward more sustainable local development initiatives is not yet fully evident: in 2019, the mining industry in Colombia reported spending USD \$30.3 million – a small amount compared to similar programs in Peru. Of this, only 29 percent was part of mandatory social programs, while the vast majority, 71 percent, was voluntary (EITI 156). In 2017, Colombia also adopted the Construction for Taxes format (Decreto 1915). In certain regions particularly affected by poverty and a history of conflict, companies can directly finance infrastructure projects and write them off from the corporate tax (*ibid.* 105). In 2018 (Ley 1942), the principle was extended to mining royalties (*ibid.* 107).

The Colombian model has so far prevented an intensification of conflict through open struggles on matters of rent distribution. This is due to the fact that companies have long played a rather restrained role in local development. The new system, with strictly regulated state requirements and thus little room for negotiation, also seems to perpetuate this tendency.

#### *Local state actors*

A similar situation applies to the state-led rent distribution: since 2012, only a small amount of the extraction royalties have gone directly to the extracting municipalities, but instead is distributed to the departments as part of a biannual budget. The budget is drafted by the National Planning Department (DNP). The DNP consults with representatives from all levels of government: national, departmental and municipal. The funds themselves are distributed through the General System of Royalties (SGR) (Amézquita 54).

The SGR consists of five funds as well as several smaller distribution quotas. More than half of the royalties is distributed to all departments according to need. This share is divided into two funds: one for local development and for general compensation. In addition, there are direct allocations of funds to selected departmental and municipal governments. EMG also receive a small share of the funds. 25 to 30 percent goes to a Savings and Stability Fund, which is based on international standards for commodity funds. Other funds include the Science and Technology Fund (10 percent) and the Pension Fund for State Employees (7 percent). The remaining resources go directly to a peace fund (7 percent), to management and control authorities, or are distributed as direct allocations (20 percent) (DNP 8-14).

The administration of the funds is the responsibility of the Collegial Administration and Decision Bodies (OCAD) (*ibid.* 5). Their purpose is to prevent the misallocation of funds by local authorities. OCADs specifically select projects into which the funds are to flow. Despite the complex design, some problems persist. For example, despite all the institutional precautions, there are still cases of corruption in the awarding of projects. The introduction of the SGR led to great resistance from municipalities and departments in mining regions, which now had to share their royalties with other subnational entities. In addition, local state actors in mining regions now had significantly fewer funds at their free disposal.

The royalties that end up with municipalities from the distribution formula have a positive

effect on local development only in some areas. In many cases, they only serve to finance the maintenance of infrastructure, while long-term effects such as increased productivity, improved living standard indicators or a diversified economy do not materialize. At the same time, clientelistic structures are built up or intensified. To counteract this, local state actors lack not only the will, but also the expertise. Lack of expertise at the municipal level is not the only problem. Projects often fail because of contractors who do not deliver, due to a lack of sanction mechanisms (cf. Le Billon et al. 7).

## The Ecological Dimension

### *Local non-state actors*

Due to Colombia's specific geography, the country's hydric cycles are particularly vulnerable (see Ramos and Restrepo-Calle). The Páramos, a type of alpine tundra ecosystems, represent one of these extraordinary geographic features. Despite legal protection, mining concessions have also been granted in Páramo areas in the past (see Colombia Solidarity Campaign 14). Although projects in these zones cannot acquire an environmental license as things stand, the very definition of the boundaries of a Páramo is often considered controversial and opens up legal loopholes for concession holders. Informal miners are also active in Páramo areas. Mining activity in these ecologically sensitive areas threatens the water supply of entire regions – not only by contaminating water bodies, but by affecting the ecosystem itself, which is in active water exchange with the atmosphere. The Andean high forests, typical of Colombia, also store a lot of water, but unlike the Páramos, they are not under absolute protection. However, even forests under conservation may be exempted from their protective function with the approval of the Ministry of Environment, as long as this serves a strategic mining project (Colombia Solidarity Campaign. 148).

Before a mining company can obtain an environmental license, it must inform the population about the environmental consequences in a "socialization meeting." This is purely informational in nature and not

comparable to a PC. Among local populations, there is much mistrust of government environmental controls, as it is assumed that the environmental authorities are acting in the interests of the mining companies. For this reason, NGOs in Colombia also carry out inspections together with the local population (Godfrid et al. 50-5). Such cooperation helps to provide local actors with alternative sources of information as well as technical knowledge.

Beyond the distrust in the rigor of state controls and the information presented by the company, there is also a polarization of fundamentally different normative understandings of nature that shape SRN. Indigenous communities, for example, perceive nature not only as an object, but as an independent subject. Other EMG or smallholder communities also have world views that differ from the SRN of the prevailing extractivist model. Mining therefore not only changes the physical shape of a territory, but also reconfigures the identity relations associated with it (Ulloa 439-40).

De jure, these alternative SRN are recognized by the Colombian state through the legal protection of EMG territories. This was also underpinned by the jurisprudence in some emblematic cases. As in the case of the Río Atrato, which was recognized as a legal entity by the Constitutional Court in 2016 in response to a constitutional complaint, gaining worldwide notoriety. The court required the responsible state actors, who were appointed "guardians" of the river – next to local EMG authorities, to protect it as well as restore it (Del Castillo and Sulé Ortega). The river in the department of Chocó plays a crucial role as both a biological and spiritual-cultural livelihood for local indigenous and Afrocolombian communities. Nonetheless, mining titles continue to exist for gold mining in the river basin and traditional informal, as well as illegal, small-scale mining is already taking place there (*ibid.*). An effective implementation of this landmark judgment is thus still pending (Ciesielski et al. 113-4).

It becomes clear that although a plurality of SRN is legally recognized, this recognition is not articulated in changed environmental practices. Gloria Amparo Rodríguez, legal scholar and judge for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace,

comments this discrepancy between formal institutionalization and practice:

“Why do we say that the Río Atrato has rights when we don’t have the means to enforce those rights?” [19]

#### *Mining companies*

Companies must submit an application to the National Mining Agency (ANM) for the exploration of a new mining project, after which they are granted a concession following an assessment of their technical and financial capabilities. If a company is issued a concession, it is allowed to geologically test a zone. For the exploration phase, environmental licenses only need to be obtained if there will be an environmental impact due to the construction of infrastructure or if the exploration work will take place in nature reserves. In practice though, such licenses are often not obtained and exploration is carried out illegally or informally. Although the exploration phase is limited to twelve years according to the concession agreement, it can be further extended upon application.

The applying company must have an EIA prepared in order to obtain a license. In Colombia, EIAs must not only take environmental issues into account, but also cultural aspects (Amparo Rodríguez and Muñoz Ávila 118). In addition to an EIA, an Environmental Management Plan must also be prepared. The company must establish its own control mechanisms within this framework (Contraloría 9). Some large projects also impose additional sustainability standards on themselves, such as the Towards Sustainable Mining Initiative, in which some mining companies operating in Colombia are active (Fitzpatrick et al.).

#### *Central state actors*

The environmental license for the mining phase of an industrial mine is issued by the National Environmental Licensing Authority (ANLA); for smaller projects, the Regional Autonomous Corporations (CAR) of each department are directly responsible. The ANLA reviews the application for the granting of the environmental

license in the course of the aforementioned citizen participation. This is more elaborate for EMG and involves further information sessions and training. If the application meets the requirements, the environmental license is granted (Contraloría 19). Rejection does not usually occur, as Julio Fierro, former consultant for the Ministry of Environment, explains:

“[T]he studies are submitted to a government institution and in that government institution there are a few people [...] who have to evaluate that information. And what do they have to say? ‘Yes’ that everything is very good and that the project is feasible. If they say ‘no,’ well then they probably won’t work in that agency any longer.”

Overall, mining companies have a lot of leeway in the licensing process. No strict selection is made. Rather, ANM and ANLA cooperate openly with the companies, while they only have to go through purely formal bureaucratic hurdles. Thus, despite the complex institutional framework, the environmental licensing process does not really function as an effective control mechanism to determine the environmental impact of a project.

#### *Local state actors*

In Colombia the departments are responsible for environmental controls. The executing actor is the respective CAR (see Rodríguez Becerra and Espinoza 113). However, they are severely restricted by private property rights, which in practice means that unannounced inspections cannot be carried out. The CARs are formally autonomous and have a board of directors consisting of representatives from the private sector, academia, civil society, representatives of the EMG, the Ministry of Environment, and the national and regional governments. The board is chaired by the governor of the department (Uribe 24). CARs vary in strength as environmental authorities, and some lack staff or technical equipment. In some cases, they are supplemented by regional environmental inspectors from ANLA.

In environmental protection, the CARs are the

primary executive bodies. Their autonomous position provides them with certain powers to act, because national and regional interests often conflict with mining and environmental protection. In the case of mining concessions in regionally protected areas, for example, the CAR is allowed to object to the ANM or even stop projects. The CARs can take advantage of the principle of subsidiarity to deny licenses to disagreeable projects (Rodríguez Becerra and Espinoza 113). This in turn leads to tensions with national regulators.

CARs, through their autonomy, develop into a real counterweight to the interests of the mining industry – a function that ANM and ANLA do not occupy through their practical ‘complicity’. Nevertheless, this autonomy is ultimately limited by the powers of the central government, which can override the decisions of local environmental protection agencies for the purpose of ‘public benefit’.

### Conclusion

In the political-participatory dimension there is a gap between the extensive participatory institutions on the one hand and a precarious practice of political participation on the other. Formally, there are numerous participatory mechanisms and channels of communication, but their application is hampered by several factors. Following formal institutional channels becomes a resistance practice itself, as central state actors attempt to undermine existing rules. Since central state actors have little presence in large parts of the country, ANSA function in these zones as a form of substitute for the state, defending their own economic interests, but sometimes also those of other powerful economic actors. Through violent practices, they create “gray zones” in which effective participation is made impossible.

In the politico-economic dimension, it can be observed that mining has hardly any positive economic impact on its surroundings. Rather, there are dangers from local Dutch diseases or local resource curses. Mandatory, company-led social programs as well as a state-coordinated distribution of resource rents to subnational administrations have so far proven unsuitable to counteract these effects.

In the ecological dimension both civil society actors and affected communities are demanding recognition of pluralistic natural conditions. On the one hand, they succeed in doing so in the form of groundbreaking case law, which has so far had little effect in practice, however. On the other hand, companies and the state use the internal contradictions of the different SRN of a territory in conflict with the local population to assert their own interests, thus enhancing conflictual constellations.

### 3. Socio-Environmental Conflicts, Institutions and Conflict Management: Analytical Results

It can be said, institutions, both formal and informal, have a significant impact on social actors and in this context the origin as well as the intensity of socio-environmental conflicts in Peru and Colombia. They can either mitigate conflicts by enabling conflict management through moderating the interests of actors, or they can exacerbate them if they provide actors with incentives to escalate conflicts and lack alternative options for action to assert their interests.

In the political-participatory dimension, it is clear that participatory institutions can channel conflicts and reduce conflict intensity by providing communication channels and binding co-determination mechanisms. On the other hand, the lack of such conflict management tools leads to the exclusion of certain actors, who subsequently can only articulate themselves through protest.

In Peru, the latter scenario is particularly evident. Due to the de facto exclusion from formal decision-making processes through the absence of participatory mechanisms local populations have hardly any possibilities to express their interests in the context of a mining project. Therefore, they resort to protest practices, often characterized by civil disobedience or direct use of violence. This way, they can at least force informal participation. State actors usually respond initially with repressive practices, but ultimately often ‘reward’ the behavior of local protesting actors by setting up round tables. Such an instrument of communication between the conflict parties remains in Peru only as a last

resort for conflict management.

Colombia is different: Based on the 1991 constitution, there is a whole range of participatory institutions. Their implementation is enforced at the national level by the courts. At the local level, this is expressed on the one hand in the fact that the implementation of mining projects could be decided democratically by means of PR, and on the other hand in the fact that courts can be involved in mining conflicts by means of constitutional complaints as mediating, conflict-defusing actors. This participatory constellation in Colombia, which at times has earned international recognition (see Dietz “Demokratie”) and whose future currently remains uncertain due to the end of the PR in the mining sector, is, however, clouded by the presence of ANSA. They create «grey zones of state violence» (Jenss) that in many cases prevent local actors from taking critical positions toward mining.

The politico-economic dimension shows a similar pattern: within an extractivist economy, access to natural resource rents is a crucial element for economic and social success (see Peters). This creates patronage relationships and dependencies.

This is particularly evident in Peruvian mining regions: On the one hand, mining companies themselves create dependency relationships through the extensive funding of local social, infrastructure, and development projects – a practice that is encouraged in Peru through state tax incentives (Constructions for Taxes) or regulations establishing social funds. On the other hand, the distribution formula of the MC, which transfers state resource rents directly to local state actors, creates very direct domestic dependencies. Both the distribution of natural resource rents by mining companies in the form of social funds and those by state actors generate a bargaining chip. Conflict-escalating behavior is institutionally rewarded and actors – local populations, but also the central state and companies – can obtain better conditions for themselves through increased resistance or repressive practices.

In Colombia, on the other hand, mining companies do not play a central role in local development apart from CSR programs

(although there has been a recent trend reversal toward greater private involvement). State resource rents here are distributed through a coordinated system of funds and only a small portion is directly available to local state actors. As a result, formal institutions reduce incentives for protest practices, but at the same time for local state actors to support extractive projects. In contrast to Peru, however, Colombia has concrete situations of competition between informal miners and companies that result in conflict due to the absence of formal distribution institutions. The presence of ANSA, their economic involvement and their partisanship in the specific cases further drive the escalation of such conflicts.

The ecological dimension shows the importance of a possible politicization of SRN. Based on the purely physical characteristics of mining alone, an industrial mine inevitably means a strong intervention in the environment and an inevitable shift in the SRN of an entire region. Although state environmental protection actors regulate compliance with limits and attempt to control risks, the interests of local populations are largely excluded in the process, as environmental concerns are reduced to technical discourse and thus depoliticized.

In Peru, this exclusion is clearly manifested through formal institutions and practices, while in Colombia, at least formal institutions – including, for example, the constitution, but also individual exemplary court rulings – recognize alternative SRN. However, this formal recognition has not yet been reflected in the practices of state actors. Nonetheless, it offers possible points of connection for legal claims by local actors and thus for formalized resistance practices such as legal suits. Still, the lack of trust of the local populations in the state environmental protection authorities and in their effective regulation of environmental impacts by mining means that resistance through protest remains the only means for the former to prevent serious environmental damage and thus the impairment of local ways of life.

## Conclusion

Aptly put: The intensity of the conflicts in a resource-based economy can be significantly reduced by institutions if they provide means of conflict management, as was empirically elaborated in this paper. However, the immense socio-environmental and socio-economic footprint of mining activity, as well as the power dynamics associated with it at local, national and global levels, generally remain. Mining should be understood as a burning glass of tensions around SRN. Social-environmental conflicts are of special importance within the institution-conflict-complex, because nature, due to its dialectical relation to society, is not an object of conflict like any other. Formal, but also informal institutions can potentially succeed in democratically containing such conflicts, because “despite the very material character of environmental struggles around the world, it is often concepts and constructions of community and nature that propel or suppress conflict” (Robbins 208).

## Endnotes

[1] Newer developments are to be neglected here as they occurred after this study was carried out (2019-2021). However, they offer interesting inputs for future studies.

[2] One can thus apply to research what Schneckener (12) postulates for politics: “In one way or another, resource and commodity policy is subject to a process of securitization. That is to say: security policy references and considerations – irrespective of relevant social, economic, and ecological aspects – are given a higher priority that becomes a guiding factor for political action.” (own translation)

[3] Sexton (642) argues that “although the literature broadly suggests that ‘institutions matter’ for resolving this type of resource curse, there has been limited examination of how this may work in detail.”

[4] Interview with Marle Livaque (anti-mining protest leader) – October 7, 2021, Celendín.

[5] Interview with Raquel Neyra and Rosa Alvarado (anti-mining activists) – April 15, 2019, Lima.

[6] Interview with Carlos Adrianzen (former advisor to the Ministry of Finance) – June 22, 2020, phone call

[7] See interview with Luis Chávez (anti-mining activist) – October 10, 2021, Celendín

[8] For example, Xstrata’s Espinar mine was long considered a best practice model. There, the local population was

supposed to participate in the profits of the project with a share of 3 percent. The local population took advantage of the situation and demanded a profit share of 30 percent during a blockade of the mine in 2012 – a demand that in the end wasn’t met by the company (Ghezzi and Gallardo 94).

[9] Interview with Juan Rozas (clerk at the municipality of Velille) – July 3, 2019, phone call.

[10] At the height of the mining boom in the 2000s, the sector used five percent of the national freshwater (*ibid.*).

[11] Interview with Milton Sánchez – October 9, 2021, Bambamarca

[12] Indigenous people, Afrocolombians, Rrom, Raizales

[13] Accordingly, between 1993 and 2006 alone, the Constitutional Court intervened in 18 cases in which infrastructure projects had been carried out without necessary PC (ABC Colombia 15).

[14] Interview with Laura Galvis – August, 16 2019, Bogotá

[15] The extent to which this can take place can be seen in the example of the mayor of Ibagué, Tolima, Andrés Hurtado, who staged himself as a clear opponent of mining in the 2019 municipal elections, although he belongs to the pro-mining Conservative Party and had defended the nearby Colosa project in the past.

[16] Although the major paramilitary organizations, most notably the AUC, demobilized in 2006, there are still many remaining combat units with a national presence.

[17] There is concrete evidence of such activities by the U.S. mining company Drummond at the El Cesar coal mine (Moor and Van de Sandt).

[18] Interview with Julio Fierro – August 18, 2020, video call

[19] Interview with Glora Amparo Rodríguez – August 12, 2019, Bogotá

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# Mining Policy and Subnational Tensions: A New Stage in The Cycle of Environmental Conflict in Twenty-First Century Argentina.

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## **Abstract**

*This case study analyzes processes of contentious action in rejection of so-called “mega-mining” deployed on a subnational scale in Argentina from 2019-2021. These processes respond to a new stage in the cycle of social conflict over environmental issues in twenty-first century Argentina. This stage is configured through citizen resistance in different provinces with repertoires of convergent struggle, particularly against state mining policy. This renewed policy promoted by the national government in coordination with provincial governments and transnational corporations takes place in a context of socio-economic, environmental and health crises exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a technocratic vision of society-nature articulations that clash with aspects of the current environmental legal system in Argentina, this model generates multiterritorial tensions (political, social, and cultural) in diverse subnational areas. The objective of the article is to understand the transformations of the actor dynamics around state mining policy in this context, including diverse and complex civil-social and political-institutional strategies.*

**Keywords:** environmental conflict; Argentina; Chubut; subnational politics; mining policy

## **Resumen**

*Mediante un estudio de caso se analizan los procesos de acción contenciosa en rechazo a la llamada “megaminería” desplegados en la escala subnacional en Argentina durante el período 2019-2021. Estos responden a una nueva etapa del ciclo de conflicto social de contenido ambiental en la Argentina del siglo XXI. Esta etapa se configura a través de las resistencias ciudadanas en diferentes provincias con repertorios de lucha convergentes, en particular, frente a la política estatal minera. Esta renovada política promovida por el Gobierno Nacional en articulación con gobiernos provinciales y empresas transnacionales se da en un marco de crisis socioeconómica, ambiental y sanitaria agudizadas tras la irrupción de la pandemia por COVID-19. Este modelo se sostiene en una visión tecnocrática de las articulaciones sociedad-naturaleza que entraría en colisión con aspectos del sistema jurídico ambiental vigente en la Argentina y en tensiones multiterritoriales (político, sociales y culturales) en ámbitos subnacionales. El objetivo del trabajo es comprender las transformaciones de la dinámica actoral en torno a la política estatal minera en el contexto señalado que incluye una diversidad y complejidad de estrategias civil-sociales y político-institucionales.*

**Palabras clave:** conflicto ambiental; Argentina; Chubut; política subnacional; política minera

## **1. Introduction**

This article addresses a series of social conflicts about environmental issues (or environmental conflicts) that took place in different provinces of Argentina between December 2019 and December 2021. [1] It focuses on environmental

conflicts sparked by citizen resistance to state mining policy. The national government, in agreement with governments of different provinces and in coordination with transnational investment companies, implemented a renewed mining policy to expand or enhance this extractive industrial activity. This occurred within the

framework of a socio-economic, environmental and health crisis reconfigured by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should be noted that Argentina has a federal and republican structure of government in which the provinces are constitutionally autonomous units. Therefore, there is an overlap of political communities attached to political-institutional regimes of different levels in the same territory. In terms of environmental governance, this means that the National Government must manage affairs together with the Provincial Governments. In addition, the indigenous communities that inhabit the territories have a constitutionally recognized involvement in the matter.

Imbricated within the political-legal concept of territory understood within this study, the critical theory of space provides additional perspectives. In the words of Henri Lefebvre (219-229), territory is the *product and producer of the social*. Considering the approach to the social production of space, the spatial implications of extractivism are key to understanding environmental conflicts. *Multi-territoriality* is involved in the intersection between scale, power, and agency. That is, the actors linked to the disputed territory interact with different degrees of conflict due to the appropriation of *geographical-social space* at different scales.

The objective of the work is to understand the actor dynamics around state mining policy in this particular context, including diverse and complex civil-social and political-institutional strategies. These include the intersection of social protest, demands for compliance with the electoral mandate, and the use of constitutional mechanisms of citizen participation through legislation and juridification of said demands.

The research here takes Argentina as a case study (period 2019-2021), focusing on different provincial conflict scenarios. The analysis focuses mainly on the contentious process of the Chubut province, given its organizational level, veto capacity and the sedimentation of collective action in relation to environmental issues. The environmental conflicts that arose in the provinces of Mendoza, Río Negro and Andalgalá (in the province of Catamarca) were also addressed as subunits of the Argentine case to show the diversity and complexity mentioned

with respect to the strategies deployed by the actors at a subnational scale.

The “National Mining Development Plan” was relaunched following the inauguration of the new governmental authorities (municipal, provincial, and national) in December 2019 in Argentina. This state policy was developed under a new Peronist/Kirchnerist national government in different provinces with subnational governments of various political parties, and with varying degrees of conflict. [2] Since 2003, metal mining in the province of San Juan has been implemented on a large scale with social resistance, with low veto capacity over the projects, and low degrees of acceptability among the citizens of San Juan. This “San Juan” model has been driven by staff and politician-technicians who were incorporated into the mining area of the national cabinet.

In Mendoza and Chubut, citizens organized assemblies and protests against proposed government legislation to allow metal mining in these provinces. These were massive actions, and the assemblies gained veto capacity over mining policy in the period studied.

In Chubut it led to the rearticulation of the contentious actor called *Unión de Asambleas de Comunidades del Chubut* (the Union of Community Assemblies of Chubut, or UACCh, by its Spanish initials). [3] This promoted a heterogeneous collective action that included the presentation of a bill by popular initiative opposed to the one presented by the provincial executive of mining zoning. [4] They also presented actions to the judiciary to stop the provincial government’s project from being debated by the executive.

Inspired by the process of resistance deployed in Mendoza and Chubut, in Río Negro the assemblies of Curru Leufu campaigned for a constitutionally recognized mechanism of citizen participation, known as popular initiative, to repeal the current mining law. In Andalgalá, in Catamarca province, the El Algarrobo Assembly spearheaded a process of social resistance to the advancement of a new mining project nearby. In turn, the assemblies in these places developed an organic articulation with each other that allowed them to exchange knowledge and experience while generating mutual support networks.

The research findings indicate a modularization of the environmental conflict during the stage of the cycle analyzed. The modular choices are characterized by citizen decision-making involvement. Thus, environmental conflicts were presented as areas of democratic expansion (Merlinsky, *Toda* 21) that gave dynamics to subnational politics. Likewise, this process presented multiscale political-institutional effects (local, provincial, and national). The Argentine case is an example of the production of territories involved in environmental conflicts over the advancement of the frontier of extractivist metal mining. These complex multidimensional processes show that management of natural resources and the environment is eminently political, with moments of open conflict and others contained by political institutional forms.

This case study, constructed from the sub-units of Mendoza, Chubut, Río Negro, and Catamarca, is especially relevant to understanding existing heterogeneities around environmental conflicts, both nationally and across Latin America. In Argentina, unlike other Latin American countries, the first large-scale metal mining project was developed in 1997. In 2002-2003 the first citizen assembly organization emerged in the city of Esquel, Chubut, which had the power to veto mining and reached the first provincial law prohibiting the use of toxic substances associated with the activity. The "Esquel effect" (Svampa and Antonelli 125-129) had a lasting influence on the configuration of the environmental conflict cycle in twenty-first century Argentina.

In summary, the Argentine case has implications for the general theme and for the study of different experiences since the beginning of this cycle, constituting a significant case of nexus between extractivism, environmental conflict and territorial tensions.

The question that arises is how social resistance and citizen strategies to reject mining policy at a subnational scale produce territories in this new stage of the environmental conflict cycle in twenty-first century Argentina.

## 2. Methods

A qualitative research design was conducted

using the single-type and embedded case study strategy (Yin 165-185). The methodological strategy constructed aims to describe the Argentine case in a contextually situated manner. The narrative approach was used to determine the contents and limits of the case study in terms of scale, territorial inscription, profiles of the participating actors, patterns of collective action, juridification and institutional registration of the demands (Merlinsky, *Cartografías* 65).

As for the methodology used here, this work is based on techniques for making records of local and national media; observation of assemblies and forums transmitted through digital channels; analysis of bills developed by provincial executives and popular initiatives and videos of provincial legislative sessions during the study period; presentations and judicial measures related to the subnational cases during the study period; digital documents of the assemblies and the contentious actors studied, and letters and documents of national, provincial and municipal governments, political parties, ecclesiastical institutions, the institutions of the science and technology, and the indigenous communities settled in the territories where there were disputes about permitting mining activity.

The construction of the Argentine case study through provincial or local subunits allows the analysis of several contentious processes that are concentrated in this unit. It offers different spatio-temporal intensities and the configuration of different arenas of conflict at different scales. Given the political-institutional and socio-territorial features of the processes and agency, the analysis is carried out from a subnational perspective, considering the dynamics of local and provincial actors and the multiscale tension in which they are embedded.

As environmental conflicts are usually characterized by local communities' rejection of a transnational project in their local area, the interaction between scales is considered. Argentina's legal system has incorporated environmental protections since 1994, when the most recent constitution was passed. The General Environment Law 25675 was passed in 2002, and further protections were incorporated into the 2014 reform of the Civil and Commercial Code. Together with the provincial constitutions,

these provide a normative plexus of consolidated environmental values. Provincial governments have power over the use of natural resources and the environment while the national government controls the minimum budgets for these. In addition, indigenous people in Argentina have constitutionally protected rights with respect to participation in natural resource management concurrently with the provinces. This is considered here, since some of the mining projects are in territories georeferenced as belonging to institutionally recognized indigenous communities.

In summary, regarding method, the Argentine case was constructed by selecting subnational processes that were productive to compare. The crucial operations carried out were linked to the search for oppositions and productive dimensions to describe the subunits of the case. Also, events were identified that connect a series of general phenomena that can be extrapolated to other realities. The proposal here is to provide the Argentine case as an analog case (Becker 73-102) of the productivity of environmental conflict in a pandemic context. Through the logic of analogies (Becker 73-102) this specific case can be used as a model for reasoning other cases.

### **3. Environmental Conflict in Argentina from a Subnational Perspective (period: 2019-2021)**

In December 2019, Alberto Fernández and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner won the national elections with the Kirchnerist coalition, *Frente de Todos*, and emerged as president and vice president, respectively. From their inauguration, a process of relaunching the country's mining policy began. This was expressed in the formation of the national cabinet in sectorial matters.

In the Fernández government, the will to move forward with the National Mining Plan resulted in former San Juan provincial government officials with links to mining being incorporated into the Secretariat of Mining of the Nation and its dependencies in the Ministry of Production. Mining Secretary, Alberto Hensel, was the Minister of Mining of San Juan from 2015-2019.

The president of the *Justicialista* party (PJ),

the main party in *Frente de Todos*, was José Luis Gioja until March 2021. [5] Under his provincial government large-scale mining developed in San Juan province. Since 2003, the main Argentine activity of the emblematic mining company, Barrick Gold, has been in the mountain and periglacial area of San Juan. [6]

The "San Juan model" refers to the implementation of a policy to foster metal mining in San Juan. First passed during the Gioja government in 2003, the policy remains in place today. Social resistance did not reach veto capacity over mining projects and policies and degrees of citizen acceptability of this extractive industrial policy were reached. [7] San Juan became the maximum exponent of "new mining" in Argentina (Christel, *Resistencias Sociales* 13).

As a framework, it is worth noting that metal mining is currently under way in Catamarca, San Juan, Santa Cruz, and Jujuy and there are a total of 59 projects in different stages in these provinces plus Neuquén, Chubut, Salta, Río Negro, and Mendoza, in coordination with transnational companies. Salta, Jujuy, and Catamarca are in the "lithium triangle," a region encompassing parts of Bolivia, Argentina and Chile that contains approximately 50% of the world's reserves of this strategic mineral. Rocks and industrial minerals are also mined in the country's 23 provinces (Ministerio).

Metal mining policy has been a state policy in Argentina since the 1990s and in the period under study it gained new governmental momentum from the incorporation of an experienced provincial political and political-technical elite into national management. In turn, this policy is embodied in the territories by provincial governments of different political parties. In some cases, this involves repealing existing provincial laws. [8] In turn, there were different degrees of rejection promoted by circumstantial coalitions of various subnational political, state, and social actors with a variable scope of modularization of demand in citizens that makes it difficult to achieve the social license for activity in different provincial territories.

The mining policy proposed by the national government encountered normative, social, and political limits in the provinces. Mendoza was

the first episode of conflict in the new stage of Argentina's environmental conflict cycle that began in December 2019. Mendoza's governor, Rodolfo Suárez (of the main opposition coalition, *Juntos por el Cambio*), sent a bill to enable metal mining to the legislature, in line with the sectoral policy of the government of the Argentine nation. This implied derogating from the 2007 provincial Law 7722 which prohibited the use of chemical substances in mineral extraction processes. This law was achieved by popular mobilization and citizen political participation.

The social protest in Mendoza against the modification of the law banning the use of chemical substances in mineral extraction was transversal to the different social layers of the citizenship and reached a high intensity for a brief period. Massive citizen demonstrations were organized through a series of assemblies to oppose the enactment of the new law.

Mendoza is characterized by wine production and in January and February traditional harvest festivals are held across the province. It is one of the most important national holidays in the country. The demonstrations against the mining law were juxtaposed with the planning of this event, raising questions about whether it would go ahead. The citizens, some local governments and the harvest queens spoke out under the slogan: "without water there is no harvest." There were roadblocks and "banderazos" (protests with Argentine flags) in rejection of the legislative modification, making the conflict visible at national level ("Peligra"). This contentious process had a high impact and was called the "Nuevo Mendozazo" in allusion to the historic *pueblada* of 1972. [9]

However, the law sent by the executive was approved in both chambers, which included the vote of the opposition. [10] In view of the social protest, the governor called for a round of dialogue before putting the new law into effect. Faced with popular pressure and the national escalation of the conflict, the governor vetoed the law – which he himself had promoted – a few days later (Lag).

In turn, the governor of Chubut made an announcement similar to that of his counterpart Mendoza but did not send the mining zoning law to the legislature until November 2020.

The UACCh declared itself on maximum alert, held demonstrations and initiated a state of permanent assembly in the different towns of the province against the government initiative. The environmental conflicts raised in Mendoza and Chubut around mining policy had an impact on other scales (other provinces and the nation) during the period studied.

After the outbreak of the pandemic, in March 2020 the national executive decreed the suspension of non-essential face-to-face activities. The decree of Social, Preventive and Mandatory Isolation (ASPO by its Spanish initials) and, later, Social, Preventive and Mandatory Distancing (DISPO by its Spanish initials) affected the activities of social and union protest in Argentina. [11] The cycle of contentious action for environmental issues studied here was suspended or in a state of latency during the ASPO.

In the case of Andalgalá, Catamarca, the protest actions that achieved national reach began in April 2021, promoted by the El Algarrobo assembly and self-convened neighbors in rejection of the progress of the Agua Rica project 25 kilometers from the town. [12] On April 8-9, neighbors held a sit-in in front of the mining company's warehouse in the town. This was guarded by the provincial police. On April 10, the "Caminata por la Vida (Walk for Life) no. 583" was held, which had a high attendance. [13] That day, the mining company's warehouse and the local PJ party office were set on fire in the center of the city. Days later, 12 assemblymen were arbitrarily detained for two weeks. In this context, the conflict took on national significance. Human rights organizations spoke out [14] given the criminalization of the protest and the National Secretary of Human Rights, Horacio Pietragalla, intervened (Colectivo 31-42; Piscetta).

The aforementioned assembly has been promoting protest actions since 2009, such as blockades to interrupt supplies to the mining site, "caminatas por la vida," information camps, judicial actions, and the use of constitutional mechanisms to create local laws that protect the environment, among others. Furthermore, the mining activity is developed in a periglacial environment so the operation is said to have violated the Preservation of Glaciers Law.

In the case of Río Negro, the main actions promoted by the assemblies of Curru Leufu were the presentation of a bill to the legislature through popular initiative, petitions, forums and informational material, judicial protection from the uranium extraction project (Amarillo Grande) and demonstrations in some localities in rejection of projects in the southern region of the province. The Mapuche-Tehuelche communities that inhabit the area where the mining projects are located also demonstrated. They alleged that various mining projects were moving forward without respecting the right to prior, free, and informed consultation established

by the Constitution of the Argentine Nation and international treaties that the country adheres to (mainly, Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, ILO). This position was institutionally endorsed by the parliament of the Mapuche-Tehuelche People and by the Council for the Development of Indigenous Communities, CODECI, of the provincial executive.

To organize and summarize the main dimensions of the subunits that make up the Argentine case, a comparative table of provincial environmental conflicts during the period studied is provided (Table 1).

**Table 1. Comparative Table of Environmental Conflicts in the Argentine**

Province	Mining regulatory framework	Location of the conflict	Period	Contentious Actor	Actions	Degree of massive-ness	Veto power
Mendoza	<i>Restrictive/Regulationist</i> (Law 7722/2007)	<i>Extended</i> (Capital, San Carlos, General Alvear, Rivadavia, San Rafael, Tunuyán and Tupungato with national impact)	<i>Short and intense</i> (December 2019)	Asamblea Popular por el Agua de Mendoza and self-convened neighbors	Mass demonstrations called "Mendozazo"	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>
Chubut	<i>Restrictive/Regulationist</i> (Law 5001/2003)	<i>Extended</i> (throughout the provincial territory with national impact)	<i>Prolonged and intense</i> (December 2019/ December 2021)	UACCh, Mapuche-Tehuelche communities and self-convened neighbors	Mass demonstrations called "Chubutazo", permanent mobilization and direct actions, Popular Initiative, and legal actions	<i>Medium and High</i>	<i>High</i>
Río Negro	<i>Enabling/Deregulationist</i> (Law 4738/2011 that repealed Law 3981/2005)	<i>Bounded</i> (Bariloche, Cipolletti, Viedma and Región Sur)	<i>Prolonged and low intensity</i> (February 2020/ July 2021)	Assemblies of Curru Leufu and Mapuche-Tehuelche communities	Popular initiative, legal actions, and local demonstrations	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>
Catamarca	<i>Enabling/Deregulationist</i> (Law 5682/2020 updating laws 1871/1959 and 2233/1967)	<i>Extended</i> (Andalgalá with national impact)	<i>Short and intense</i> (April 2021/ May 2021)	Assembly El Algarrobo and self-convened neighbors	Demonstrations and direct actions at local level	<i>Medium and Low</i>	<i>Low</i>

Provinces (December 2019-Dicember 2021).

Source: compiled by the author.

As a result of the previous social resistance efforts, Mendoza and Chubut have laws that prohibit open-pit mining and the use of chemical substances in mineral extraction processes. At that stage of the cycle of environmental conflict in Argentina, Río Negro (like other provinces that replicated Chubut's experience) achieved a *restrictive or regulationist* mining framework (Table 1) in 2005 from which the legislature derogated in 2011 within the framework of provincial impact protests. On the other hand, Catamarca has had a mining regulatory plexus of *an enabling* (with respect to metal mining) and *deregulationist* (regarding environmental protection) type since 1959. This provided the framework for the first experience of open pit mining after national regulatory clearance in 1993. In 1997 the exploitation of the Bajo de la Alumbrera mine began.

The location of the conflict (Table 1) in some cases is of an *extended* variety. That is, the demand transcends the local territory where resistance to the project or policy is configured, extending to a large part of the provincial territory, and even has impacts in other provinces, sometimes reaching national visibility. In the subunits surveyed, this happened for different reasons: a) criminalization of social protest (in the cases of Chubut and Catamarca) that sparked awareness among the public due to complaints received by various human rights organizations; (b) concurrent national events (in the cases of Chubut and Mendoza) and (c) claims of constitutionally protected indigenous communities (Chubut). In other cases, the location is limited to local spaces and the claims of the indigenous communities were made by institutional spaces of the provincial government (Río Negro).

Regarding the degree of massiveness and veto capacity of environmental conflicts in rejection of mining policy during the period analyzed, heterogeneous balances were observed: Chubut and Mendoza presented a *high* degree in both dimensions and in Río Negro and Catamarca, a low degree was observed in both cases (Table 1). This corresponds, on the one hand, to the historical evolution of the contentious process and, on the other, to the institutional tools in force.

As mentioned, Mendoza and Chubut, unlike Catamarca and Río Negro, have laws in place that regulate mining. These were achieved during the cycle of environmental conflict opened in 2002 that has been characterized by a mobilizing socio-legal quality. That is, in this new stage there is a growing juridification intertwined with a politicization of the environmental issue supported by a robust regulatory framework.

Enabling large-scale metal mining would therefore require the derogation of laws created in response to citizen demands and the creation of regulations that would have to pass through the legislature. Besides, these new regulations may not comply with minimum budgets, or the principles of environmental policy protected in environmental law. This produces widespread voter rejection with the potential to affect political preferences. Provincial political elites are therefore less likely to carry out initiatives at odds with the environmental regulatory framework. In addition, such measures are not contemplated in their electoral platforms and run contrary to the demands of their voters.

### 3.1 The Environmental Conflict in Chubut as a Subunit of the Argentine Case

One of the subunits of the Argentine environmental cycle is the emblematic case of contentious process in Chubut. In 2002 the citizens of Chubut, especially in the mountain city of Esquel, began a series of protests to stop transnational company Meridian Gold's Cordón Esquel project from exploiting a metal deposit near the town. A self-convened neighbors' assembly was formed, which adopted the slogan "No to the mine." As a result of the collective action, the government of Chubut called a referendum in which 81% of the population voted against the project. Although the poll was optional, participation reached 75%. Finally, in April 2003, Law 5001 prohibiting metal mining activity was passed as a way of ending the conflict in the face of the upcoming provincial elections.

This process of vetoing mining via citizen resistance was pioneering in the region. The "Esquel effect" opened a cycle of environmental conflict in Argentina that, in the context of a

pandemic, presents a new moment or stage.

Once the national and provincial authorities came to power in December 2019 [15], the governor, Mariano Arcioni, announced a productive development plan that included mining the plateau in the departments of Gaster and Telsen ("Arcioni"). [16] It also modified the Ministry of Hydrocarbons and created the Undersecretariat of Mining. This plan was launched in agreement with the national government. According to its promoters, the goal was to diversify the provincial economic matrix and generate foreign exchange. The government announced its policy at a time when the province was in crisis: the state was in debt, public sector salaries had not been paid, and there were widespread disputes with trade unions.

Faced with the government announcement, the UACCh declared itself in a state of maximum alert and resumed protest actions. The scenario in Chubut and Mendoza was analogous in that the first step to relaunching mining policy in these territories was the revocation of provincial

laws. Within the framework of the social distance measures decreed by DISPO, the assemblies launched a campaign to collect signatures for a popular initiative that would strengthen the regulatory framework of the pioneering provincial law. Between October and November 2020, the electoral tribunal of Chubut certified 30,916 signatures endorsing the popular initiative.

On November 20, 2020, hours before the provincial judiciary referred the popular initiative project to the legislature, the provincial executive presented the mining zoning project contrary to the spirit of the one promoted by the UACCh. Both were referred to the Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment Commission for a ruling. On November 24, a massive march and a provincial environmental strike were called. The demand was: "Approval without modifications of the second popular initiative and rejection of the mining zoning bill promoted by the provincial government." In this context, two assembly members were arrested.

The provincial executive's bill and the popular initiative were sent to the legislature of Chubut

**Table 2. Bills to Regulate Mining in Chubut Presented in the Legislature (24.11.2020).**

	Bill 128/20 "Mining Zoning Law"	Bill 129/20 "2nd Popular Initiative"
Presentation in the Legislature	Project of the Provincial Executive with the agreement of ministers	President of the Tribunal Electoral Provincial presents UACCh project
Project name	Sustainable metalliferous mining industrial development in the province of Chubut	Popular Initiative. Bill to establish parameters of environmental sustainability in mining operations
Constitutional and legal framework	Original domain of the Provincial Government over natural resources (art.124 CN and Law 24585, National Mining Code), Law 5001	Popular Initiative (art. 263 CP), Law 24051, Hazardous Waste
Framework of mining activity	The present bill establishing mining zoning, Law XI No. 35, Environmental Code of the Province of Chubut, and Law 24585	This bill establishes the scope of the National Mining Code and Law 25675, General Law on the Environment in the territory of Chubut
Object	Mining zoning of the departments of Gaster and Telsen	Prohibit throughout the territory of the province metal mining with any polluting, toxic or dangerous chemical substance according to Law 24051 and in accordance with the spirit of law of 5001
Basis	1) National mining law 2) Constitutional law of the provinces on the use of natural resources 3) Mining zoning within the framework of Law 5001	1) Environmental that has as background law 5001 2) Constitutional mechanisms of participatory democracy 3) Rights of indigenous peoples (art.75 inc.17 CN and art.34 CP and Convention 169, ILO)

Source: compiled by the author.

(bills 128/20 “Sustainable metal mining industrial development of the province of Chubut” and 129/20 “Popular Initiative. Bill to establish parameters of environmental sustainability in mining operations”) and led to tensions over which project would be approved. Given the popular pressure, by May 2021 the legislators had not managed to issue an opinion on the projects. The positioning in favor or against mining generated breaks between the legislative blocs of the ruling party and the two political coalitions of the opposition with representation in the Chamber (*Frente de Todos* and *Juntos por el Cambio*). The *Juntos por el Cambio* bloc was dissolved. In short, the environmental issue represented a political-territorial split for all the political organizations with parliamentary representation.

The bill sent by the Provincial Executive aimed to permit mining on the central and northern plateau (replenishing the strategy of double territorial status) while the popular initiative project aimed to prohibit large-scale metal mining in the province (Table 2).

As seen in table 2, the projects are opposed in their objectives, scope and prerogatives and are based on different regulations. Both claim to comply with the spirit of the law of 5001 (the executive intends to carry out the zoning, which was never executed and whose established deadlines had passed, and the popular initiative promotes expanding the restrictions on the use of chemicals and protection of aquifers). Likewise, in both projects there are prominent meanings of the word “sustainable”. This denotes the inscription of the debate within the “sustainable model” of the consolidated environmental field (Azuela 1-537). The executive’s project focuses on the regulation of mining activity within the legal framework of the activity in force at national level but neglects the participation of citizens and of indigenous peoples which gives sustenance to the project promoted by the UACCh.

The citizens of Chubut, mostly opposed to metal exploitation since 2002, experienced this process as an “electoral scam”. That is, the mining issue was not one of the proposals of the electoral campaign and, particularly, the governor in his previous mandate had held an anti-mining stance. Arcioni, as successor of the

late governor and territorial leader Mario Das Neves, stood in line with the people of Chubut against large-scale mining until he was re-elected.

Between December 2020 and May 2021, mobilizations were held in favor of opening the debate on mining promoted by unionized workers, mayors, mining chambers and some citizens of towns of the plateau area. In February 2021, the government resumed the initiative and called various social and political actors to informative meetings on the pro-government project. It was launched as a form of debate on the mining issue but without incorporating the arguments put forward in the popular initiative. He unsuccessfully called for legislative sessions to deal with the 128/20 project.

In parallel, the assemblies of the UACCh were mobilized and, in this context, they chose to pursue different forms of struggle. The forms of protest included a wide repertoire that was organized throughout the territory in the form of assemblies: marches in cities across the province on the fourth of each month in commemoration of the original struggle of Esquel, “Mesetazo” (popular protests in the areas of the plateau affected by the mining zoning), open letters to the governor, the president of the legislature and bishops of the area, mobilizations in other localities, horseback riding, and forums on open radio, among others. Increasingly, the national media covered the local conflict over the advance of “mega-mining” (Tronfi). From the disturbances for the presidential visit during a series of disastrous wildfires in the Andean region of Río Negro and Chubut, the protest against “mega-mining” gained high visibility (“Ataque”).

Members of the assemblies called this cycle of environmental protests “ChubutAGUAzo.” [17] They demanded compliance with the electoral mandate to limit the province’s “extractivist profile,” as well as appealing to the constitutional resources of semi-direct democracy and juridification of the demand.

There was judicialization of the treatment of the 128/20 project based on various presentations made by assemblymen and by Mapuche-Tehuelche communities. Besides the aborted legislative sessions because of popular

pressure, it is also worth mentioning the debates within the academic and professional institutions established in the territory in favor of and against metal mining and the production of documents and public positions on the issue during the period.

Finally, on May 5th, 2021, a majority opinion of the legislative commission was reached rejecting bill 129/20. In a remote session the next day, in the context of a 24-hour strike, mobilizations and a vigil until the treatment of the project, legislators voted to reject project 129/20. By 13 votes (official and allies fruit of the ruptures of the legislative blocks indicated), 12 votes (legislators of the *Frente de Todos* and a split from the ruling bloc of Peronist extraction) and two abstentions (radical legislators of the *Juntos por el Cambio* bloc) ("En votación") the popular initiative was rejected. In response, protesters blocked roads for a week. Provincial police cleared a part of the blockades, and more assemblymen were arrested.

It should be added that it is in the reformist wave of the 1990s, after the democratic transition of 1983, when a series of mechanisms of semi-direct democracy were incorporated into the Constitution of the Argentine Nation and the Constitution of the Province of Chubut, among others. The national constitution established the institutions of popular initiative and popular consultation ("Constitución de la Nación Argentina", arts. 39 and 40) and the provincial constitution, sanctioned the same year as the first, in addition to popular consultation and the popular initiative, created the Revocation of mandates ("Constitución de la Provincia del Chubut", arts. 262, 263 and 264, respectively). It should be noted that these constitutional tools are rarely used for citizens to participate in public decision-making. This is demonstrated by the fact that since its inclusion these constitutional mechanisms have not been used at national level; in the provinces, to date, legislation has not been adopted through semi-direct democracy mechanisms and there are only cases of effective implementation at the municipal level.

In the case of Chubut, popular initiative was used twice. Promoted by the UACCh, in 2014 and 2020 the same bill was presented to the legislature through a popular initiative

to establish parameters of environmental sustainability in mining operations. The objective was to expand and update the current regulatory framework inaugurated with the pioneering law 5001. Neither attempt was successful: the bill resulting from the first popular initiative was substantially modified in its legislative treatment and the project presented through the second popular initiative was rejected.

In the case of Chubut, the constitutional instruments of semi-direct democracy were combined with two others. On the one hand, a demand to the provincial political representatives regarding the government programs voted, since they did not contemplate policies of metal mining authorization or accentuation of the extractivist profile of the provincial territory in their respective electoral platforms. On the other hand, a social mobilization with a degree of provincial organization headed by a collective contentious actor that has a memory and sedimentation of environmental protest actions of more than 40 years. [18] It also combines a socio-legal mobilization of the assemblies and the Mapuche-Tehuelche communities in articulation with the *Equipo Nacional de Pastoral Aborigen Región Sur* (ENDEPA, a Catholic institution with established church members where indigenous communities are settled), which managed to judicialize the 128/20 bill of the executive and suspend its legislative treatment through a judicial action until December 2021.

In addition to the judicial activism and collective mobilization that delayed legislative treatment of the 128/20 project, there came the impasse occasioned by the electoral schedule for the national legislative elections held in September –the simultaneous and mandatory open primaries, called PASO, and the general ones in November 2021. However, the environmental conflict impacted on the electoral performance of the parties. The ruling party, *Chubut Somos Todos*, was relegated to fourth place in a loss unprecedented since its foundation in 2014. Consequently, they lost two seats in the national congress, leaving them without political representation.

The outcome of this episode of the political contest was precipitated when the political-partisan and institutional conditions were given

to vote favorably on the mining zoning project in the Chubut legislature. On December 15th, 2021, in the face of the imminent loss of parliamentary status, bill 128/20 was approved by 14 votes in favor, 11 against and two absentees, amid demonstrations outside the legislature, in the provincial capital of Rawson. [19] The provincial police repressed demonstrators that night in Rawson and over the following days in which collective mobilizations known as the “Chubutazo” took place. In that context, dozens of people were injured, including one legislator, and more than 30 were arrested on the first day. Early the next day, the governor promulgated Law XVII No.149 through Decree 1285/21. Then, the UACCh called for demonstrations in different localities of the province and a state of permanent mobilization was established until the revocation of the law.

A *pueblada* was originated with its epicenter in Rawson. Fires broke out in the administrative block. The government house, the legislature, the superior court of justice, the public prosecutor's office, among 16 other public departments and the newspaper *El Chubut* in Trelew were all set on fire. The massive demonstrations continued, with roadblocks on provincial and national routes, union strikes that included the blockade of port activities, mobilizations to Rawson and caravans in different localities of the province. Under popular pressure, the vice-governor and the governor announced on social media that they would send a bill to revoke mining zoning and that a provincial referendum would be called on enabling large-scale mining. Sastre called an ordinary session in the legislature virtually on December 21st, 2021, the last session before the recess, and the legislators voted to revoke the law that the governor had signed into law five days earlier.

These days had repercussions at both national and international levels. An example of this was the hacking of the website of the company Panamerican Silver, the main investor in the Navidad project for the extraction of silver in the northern central plateau of Chubut. After the Chubutazo, Panamerican Silver decided to stop its operations and left the province. The provincial justice charged 24 assemblymen from the cities of Rawson, Trelew and Puerto

Madryn for the incidents in the administrative block. The UACCh stated that this constituted a criminalization of protest and advised those citizens who had suffered institutional violence to file complaints. The UACCh also launched the third campaign to collect signatures among the voters of the province to present, for the third time, the bill by popular initiative to the legislature.

#### 4. A New Moment in Argentina's Twenty-first Century Cycle of Environmental Conflict

In Argentina, neoliberal reforms – with the consequent pauperization of ways of life that they brought with them – and the fragmentation of the public sphere altered the modalities of citizen intervention and broke the representative party-society bond. In the 1990s, at the subnational level, there were popular mobilizations in the form of social outbursts that led, towards the end of 2001, to a national crisis. It was an institutional breakdown in which there was a sedimentation of new forms of collective action because of a widespread social unrest combined with a crisis of governability and political leadership. In this context, the cycle of environmental conflict in twenty-first century Argentina was opened. This can be seen as a new configuration of the democratic game between scales given the interweaving of the environmental conflict into the public-political debate at the subnational level but with implications in national public policy.

As a local correlate of these new forms of collective action, social resistances were built (Walter 15-28; Svampa and Antonelli 125-129; Christel *Incidence, Social Resistance*; Gutierrez 28-508; Van Teijlingen and Dupuits 7-16) and a complexity of strategies, such as those described in the section dedicated to the case, in the face of the advances of the extractivist frontier, particularly, the expansion of large-scale metal mining. These social resistances are embodied by the citizens of different territories with different veto capacities over projects or state policies and forms of self-representation that at times overflow the channels of political-institutional representation.

Driven by international prices, Latin America

has experienced a reprimarization of its export-oriented economies in the twenty-first century. Within this framework, territories have been incorporated for the extractive industry with various social, political, economic, and environmental impacts. Extractivism is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon where the variation of the spatio-temporal dimension is key. Likewise, Latin American literature on extractivism has had an impact on the content of the public debate on the modalities of local-global development and the dependent role of the region (Martín 13-26).

This cycle of environmental conflict that emerged in 2002 has extended to the present day, developing similar processes in various places and provinces in rejection of different projects or state policies that involve the exploitation of the common goods of the territory. These are geolocated disputes that imply the struggle for the decision and orientation of state policies around the use of strategic natural resources, where the right to water is a central argument for social resistance in the territories. These contentious acts with different degrees of articulation are local claims and challenge subnational governments for two reasons: firstly, because the national constitution establishes that natural resources are protected by the provinces ("Constitución de la Nación Argentina", arts. 121 and 124); and secondly, because of a territorial issue, since projects of this type have a logic of location specificity that impacts on the *socio-spatial production* of the territory and its materiality (Haesbaert 9-42). This combination makes subnational territories the space where environmental conflicts occur and provincial governments the main actor to oppose. Territories involved in mining conflicts are built on a multi-scale tension of open and contingent outcome.

The literature on subnational politics from a multiscale perspective observes the effects of geolocated socio-environmental protests on political regimes (Delamata 237-277; Torunzcyk 31-175; Christel and Torunzcyk 47-68). The multiscale tension is expressed in the conflictivity that combines the dimensions of power and territory. Environmental conflicts take place in each territory, but their effects

transcend it. Faced with a network of private and public, international, national, and provincial actors that aim to generate the conditions for the development of extractivist activities, there are social resistances that dispute the forms of socio-spatial production from the subnational scale.

These studies show that cycles of contentious action can partially or intermittently alter the social peace of the regime. However, they tend not to affect its structural characteristics. In terms of democratization, it should be noted that a substantial part of the social conquests or the ability to veto or delay the execution of state policies and large-scale projects with investments of transnational capital were the result of contentious collective actions.

In short, in twenty-first century Argentina there is a growing installation of the environmental issue in the public sphere that is expressed in environmental conflict, multiscale tensions and expanded political participation. These are promoted by social resistances that present different degrees of organizational articulation and veto capacity over national mining policy. This presents different temporal and spatial intensities within the studied unit. The environmental conflict is expressed in a civil and social arena; however, these affect the political-institutional, showing effects in the state as well as in the political-partisan, union, ecclesiastical and science and technical institutions.

## 5. Conclusion

By developing the contemporary Argentine case, this paper constitutes an empirical contribution to knowledge of the cycle of environmental conflict in the country and the region in the context of the pandemic. In methodological terms, the Argentine case is offered as an analog case since the specific case can be used as a model to reason – through the logic of analogies as Howard Becker recommends – other cases.

A methodological contribution is made to the study of environmental conflicts from the embedded case study with a perspective from the subnational scale of the conflict, considering the multiscale tension in which the process and

agency develop. A systematization of the main dimensions of the Argentine case was elaborated based on the description and comparative analysis of the selected subunits.

A new moment or stage of the cycle of environmental conflict in twenty-first century Argentina opened in 2019 due to citizen rejection of a renewed impulse of national mining policy in agreement with some provincial governments and in articulation with transnational companies in the sector. This policy aimed to achieve social license and expand extractive industrial activity. To this end, the national government adopted a model of management of the activity considered successful at the provincial level as a national state policy. This model is based on a technocratic vision of society-nature articulations which collide with aspects of the environmental legal system and the public culture around the environmental.

Since 2002, the metal mining industry has encountered brakes in several provinces because of the configuration of social resistance and a heterogeneity of citizen strategies to influence the public-political debate. This implied a democratization of the pre-established order and a growing politicization of the environmental.

In this new stage, a sedimentation of collective action is combined in a subjective way as assembly organizations anchored to cities that are activated and interact with each other and with other multilevel political, social, and state actors around environmental problems. The collective action is combined in an objectified form as *restrictive* and *regulationist* legislation of mining activity (both provincial and national) that, in nine provinces, was reached at previous moments of the cycle. Likewise, the growing activism of indigenous communities that are protected by a normative plexus that enables legal presentations and legitimizes environmental demands plays a key role.

## Endnotes

[1] It alludes to the diversity and complexity of social conflicts of environmental content. They have a territorial anchorage in a historical, political, economic, and cultural context where the Society-Nature relationship has become visible as a constituent dimension of the social order. They are struggles for ways of inhabiting the environment, for

subsistence – in the sense intended by the current of environmentalism of the poor – and for the reproduction of the link between a community and its habitat (Folchi 80-99). In the terms of Antonio Azuela and Paula Musseta (191-215), the environmental dimension of conflict intersects with other dimensions that make it up, which generates specific results in the social order that vary according to the configuration of the conflict. As Gabriela Merlinsky suggests (*Una sociología reflexiva* 32), we opt for the use of the concept of environmental conflict when the actors involved in the contentious process use environmental arguments to publicize the demand.

[2] After the social, economic, and political representation crisis that Argentina experienced in the years 2001-2002 – which caused the fall of the Alianza government, the resignation of President Fernando De la Rúa (Unión Cívica Radical Party) and the assumption as provisional president of Eduardo Duhalde (Justicialista Party, PJ) – elections were called, and Néstor Kirchner (PJ) was the winner. From the broad spectrum of the Peronist movement, which has historically been represented mainly by the PJ, the national government was assumed by a subnational political elite from the Patagonian province of Santa Cruz. To date, it governs in coalition (except for the 2015-2019 period, when the country was ruled by current opposition coalition Juntos por el Cambio, known at the time as Cambiemos). Kirchnerism constituted part of Latin America's twenty first-century leftist turn, in which there was a continuity of extractivist policies (given the late and dependent typology of the state and its paradoxical role for the capitalist development of the region) and, in turn, progressive redistribution of income and expansion of citizenship rights.

[3] The UACCh has functioned as the supra-organizational structure of the assemblies since 2012. There are more than 40 socio-ambiental assemblies through all the territory of Chubut. These replicate the pioneering citizen assembly of Esquel. These act in a network forming a new contentious actor in the provincial territory, which conveys a citizen socio-environmental demand. They are associations or organizations in the field of collective action that are imbricated in informal networks of sociability to preserve local ways of life.

[4] Mining zoning legislation establishes a dual status in terms of mining exploitation and environmental regulation in the same provincial territory. In the case of Chubut, since 2002 the different provincial governments have been trying to enable large-scale metalliferous mining through the establishment of “mining zones” but, given popular pressure, they have not materialized.

[5] Fernández assumed the presidency of the PJ in March 2021 (the presidency of the nation and the party is usually exercised in parallel). Gioja took over the presidency of the party when Peronism became an opposition at the national level during the Cambiemos government (2015-2019), which denoted his interference at the national level.

[6] In 2010, Law 26639 of Minimum Budget Regime for the Preservation of Glaciers and the Periglacial Environment was enacted. This law prohibits mining in glacial and periglacial areas. This affected the binational project (San Juan, Argentina – Huasco, Chile) of the Barrick Gold

company called Pascua – Lama based in this type of area. In parallel, given the breaches of environmental regulations and social resistance in Chile, the project in the province of Huasco closed in 2020 through a court ruling.

[7] The protest actions began in 2004 in the capital of San Juan and spread to the towns of Jachal and Calingasta. Nonetheless, in 2005 the gold mining operation, Veladero, began by the controlling companies, Barrick Gold Corporation and Shandong Gold. Then, Gualcamayo was inaugurated in 2009 and there are currently 11 mining-metalliferous projects in different stages in the province (Ministerio de Desarrollo Productivo de la Nación).

[8] During the period 2003-2011, because of collective demonstrations at the provincial level, laws were enacted in different provinces that prohibited “mega-mining” (Chubut, Río Negro, La Rioja, Tucumán, Mendoza, La Pampa, Córdoba, San Luis, and Tierra del Fuego) framed in the General Environmental Law of 2002 and in the constitutional power that each province has over the management of natural resources and the environment. In the case of Río Negro and La Rioja, the laws were derogated.

[9] This was part of a series of puebladas (popular uprisings of cities) that took place in the country during the dictatorial government of the self-styled “Argentine Revolution” between 1969 and 1972.

[10] Mendoza, like the Nation and eight other provinces, has a bicameral Legislature where bills must be dealt with and approved by a majority (simple in this case) in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators to become law.

[11] Social protest, considering that one of its main characteristics is the presence in public space, occurs in a context of high tension due to the socioeconomic and health consequences of the pandemic. In contrast to the ASPO period (March-May) where the dynamics of social conflict decreased and forms of public irruption developed with low occupancy of public space, during the DISPO (June onwards) social protest grew and was expressed openly (Citra 22-30).

[12] The project would be exploited in an integrated way with the Bajo de la Alumbrera mining deposit, which was created in 1997 by the transnational controlling companies “Goldcorp,” “Yamana Gold,” and “Glencore” together with the interstate company Yacimiento de Agua de Dionisio, YMAD. YMAD was created by law 14771 in 1959 and is composed of the National University of Tucumán, the state of the province of Catamarca, and the national state (Gutiérrez).

[13] It is estimated that about 4,000 demonstrators participated. It must be considered that Andagalá has a population of around 20,000 inhabitants (“Argentina”; “Andagalá”).

[14] It should be noted that the Peace and Justice Service (SERPAJ) which has as its maximum reference the Argentine Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Rodolfo Pérez Esquivel, is an organization that accompanies the claim of the El Algarrobo Assembly and provides legal advisory services to its members.

[15] At the provincial level, the formula Mariano Arcioni-Ricardo Sastre won the elections with a provincial alliance, Chubut al Frente, with Peronist ideology and non-party PJ members. Arcioni achieved re-election after becoming Governor in 2017 following the death of Mario Das Neves in the exercise of his third term.

[16] The provinces of Argentine Patagonia are characterized by a geographical heterogeneity that is key to understanding their social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Chubut has a coastal area, an Andean region and a valley where economic activities are developed linked to the exploitation of its natural resources (aluminum, oil, fishing, livestock, tourism, and wind energy production, among others). It also has an extensive plateau in the north center where the main metalliferous mining projects are concentrated in exploration and prospecting stages. There, family livestock production is developed with a population scattered in villages and small towns.

[17] This refers to the “Chubutazo” of 1990 when popular mobilizations and protests for the advance of neoliberal economic measures promoted by the national government and assumed by provincial governments of different parties, led to the resignation of the governor, Néstor Perl (PJ). On this occasion, the word “agua” (water) is highlighted since the objective of the protests is to preserve the aquifers of Chubut.

[18] The first socio-environmental assemblies of the Andean Region of Chubut and Río Negro were created in the 1980s during the democratic transition.

[19] The Legislature of Chubut is unicameral and consists of 27 seats in a single district. The seats are renewed every four years along with the election of governor and vice-governor. The vice-governor is the president of the legislature with a vote in the event of a tie. The system of distribution of seats by incomplete list ensures the majority to the party most voted, and the rest are distributed through the D'Hont formula. The composition of the chamber during the period 2019-2023 is 16 provincial deputies representing the provincial ruling party (Chubut al Frente Coalition), eight for the Frente de Todos and three for the Coalition Juntos por el Cambio. As the conflict over mining policy unfolded in the province, all parliamentary blocs split up. In 2021, the legislature was made up of seven blocs in total, given the rupture of the factions that made up the mentioned coalitions.

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# 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 legitimization 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 (Níquen 19), or the intensification of eco-territorial conflicts, are hidden by this discourse (Voskoboinik 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 (Voskoboinik 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 (Voskoboinik and Andreucci; Jerez et al.; Pausa and Dietz). The latter, according to Kristina Dietz and Louisa Pausa (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 legitimization 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 (Tetreault 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” (Mileno). Their discourse strategies also align with green imaginaries through rhetorics of sustainability and green mining: e.g., Almaden Minerals states that their Ixtacamatitlan 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; Garcia 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 extractivism. 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 *kuojtakiyolan* (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 Ixtacamatitlan 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 unsustained 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 unsustained (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

[1] Without the generous and unconditional support of many people in San Pedro de Atacama, Tambo Valley, and Sierra Norte de Puebla, we would not have accessed crucial information included in this research. We are deeply thankful for their shared (practical) knowledge, experiences, and emotions.

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## Authors' biographies

Lorena E. Olarte-Sánchez is a PhD Candidate and lecturer in international politics and research skills at the University of Vienna. Her doctoral project examines the intersections of political ecology and the strategic-relational approach in the context of socio-environmental struggles in Mexico. She is Literar Mechana Scholarship recipient (Austria) and Conacyt Fellow (Mexico) 2016-2020 which has helped to fund her research. Lorena studied communications sciences at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, non-profit management at Tec de Monterrey, and holds a Master's degree in Sustainable Development Practice from the Institut d'études politiques-Sciences Po Paris. Besides her academic journey, Lorena has more than 10 years of experience working for grass-roots organizations and international organizations in Mexico, France, Switzerland, and Austria.

Anna Preiser is university assistant (Prae-Doc) at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her PhD project focuses - from the perspective of political economy and political ecology - on socio-ecological conflicts and environmental politics in Peruvian mining sector. She studied International Development (University of Vienna) and International Business Administration (WU Vienna), and has done various research stays in Peru as an exchange student (Universidad del Pacífico), as a visiting researcher (Universidad Católica del Perú) and for field research. She is grateful for having received a CALAS fellowship "tandem transatlántico" (Sept. 2019-Feb 2020), which also served as a financial support for her research stay in Peru in 2022.

Nina Schlosser is a PhD candidate at the Berlin School of Economics and Law and the University of Vienna. In her doctoral project, she sheds light on the resource dimension of electric automobility and analyzes the actors, discursive practices, structures, and conflicts within the Chilean lithium sector. The research is possible due to an initial funding provided by the Berlin

School of Economics and Law (Oct. 2020 - Dec. 2020) and a scholarship by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Berlin) where Nina is a member of the graduate school "Crisis and Social-Ecological Transformation". She holds a Master's degree in Political Economy of European Integration and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Berlin School of Economics and Law.

# Thinking through Art, Drawing and Performance Ontological Conflicts that are at the Core of Mining Struggles

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## Abstract

*How could art contribute to make sense of the ongoing conflicts over mining and territory from alternative perspectives? Engaging with other modes of producing knowledge beyond the dominant Western tradition, two artists-researchers point connections to other modes of thinking with natural-cultural entities. Grounded in their history growing up in Peru, and thinking through performance and drawing, their writings pay attention to the ontological conflicts that are at the center of the struggles over mining in Peru. Alfredo Ledesma performs his hybrid beings (such as the Mountain self, the Jaguar self, the Sheep self) in order to explore imaginaries that have persisted as alternative horizons to the dominant system. He does this in towns impacted by mining projects to point to the alternative horizons that can be found in the struggles of various communities for “re-existence”. Imayna Caceres approaches an intuitive intersection of ecological, planetary concerns, where drawing works as an alternative method for knowledge production. Recalling their upbringing amid mestizo-indigenous practices that stem from Amazonian and Andean worlds, Caceres speculates about the more than human entities and relationalities that are centrally evoked by those rejecting mining.*

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**Keywords:** art, autohistoria, earth-beings, performance, drawing.

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In this text, we give an account of the way in which art makes it possible to rethink various sociopolitical realities and imaginaries that exist around the struggles of mining and territory. Through performance, textile work, drawing and video, we bring attention to ways of producing knowledge that contribute, exceed (De la Cadena, *Earth Beings* 335), and trace interferences with the dominant scientific discourse. These are ways of producing knowledge that are nourished by the family and neighborhood mestizo-indigenous worlds in which we grew up in Lima, the capital of Peru, and which, in turn, have their origin in Andean and Amazonian sociocultural practices.

We write in two voices employing the approach of *Autohistoría-teoría*, which was conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldúa as a form of theorizing in which personal experiences, social protest, poetry, and one's personal and

collective history – revised and in other ways redrawn – become a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories (Anzaldúa 241-42). For Anzaldúa, *autohistoria-teoría* allows us to “expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (*Ibid*). In this manner, we aim to expand on the speculative knowledge that emerges in our artistic practice, in order to trace and account for alternative ways of “feeling-thinking” (Escobar, *Sentipensar* 184), researching and writing.

Focusing on performance, sculptural methods and textile work, Alfredo Ledesma addresses imaginaries that have persisted as alternative horizons to the dominant system. He does so by performing beings such as the Mountain Self, in territories that are being directly affected by mining. In turn, through drawing and video,

Imayna Caceres approaches an intuitive intersection of ecological, planetary concerns, where drawing works as an alternative method for knowledge production. Drawing on their upbringing amid mestizo-indigenous practices that stem from Amazonian and Andean worlds, Caceres speculates about the more than human entities and relationalities that are centrally evoked by those rejecting mining.

### **When Worlds Collide, Co-exist and Re-exist: Territory as Knowledge**

Alfredo Ledesma

On my father's side, I come from a family of silversmiths originating from a town in the Andes near the city of Huancayo. It is situated in a mining area, from which silver was extracted, along with other minerals. Some of the silver was used to produce artisan silver jewelry – which forms part of a cultural tradition, but most of the metal was used for export. Today that area lies destroyed. As my indigenous grandmother migrated to Lima with her children, I myself was disconnected to this area and territory. Nevertheless, growing up in Peru's capital Lima in the house of my grandmother, who also taught me the craft of silversmithing, I came to understand through her stories and reflections of changes in her life, but also through dealing with this topic in recent years, that territory is a space full of social history and symbolic and spiritual meaning. (Indigenous) knowledge and tradition is incorporated into the territory, as a way to be with the territory, and likewise, territory is incorporated into their knowledge and tradition. This traditional and local knowledge is a practical and reflective knowledge, which is passed on from generation to generation. It is also based on a certain understanding of nature, influencing interactions and relations with the surrounding. As Marisol de la Cadena stresses, it might be based on the understanding that nature is composed of earth-beings, of sentient entities, including human as well as non-human beings such as animals and plants, but also the sun, lagoons, mountains, or the wind, and on the mutual respect and mutual relation of care between those earth-beings (de la Cadena 5). This understanding of nature has inspired me

to expand my understanding of beings within territories and reflect on their agency, questioning the human-centered perspective and dualistic society-nature divide - a central aspect which I want to transmit through my art.

This aim intersects with my interest to address underlying structures of coloniality and diverse social, ethnical, epistemological and ontological hierarchies (Quijano) that are reproduced in the Peruvian society, and which are imposed on various communities impacted by mining, threatening their lifeworlds and local ways of being and knowing. This interest has deepened after visiting towns impacted or threatened to be impacted by mining projects (e.g. San Marcos and Valle del Tambo in Peru) where it was clear that mining leads to or is expected to lead to a profound change or even loss in relations to nature, culture, beliefs, values, knowledge, and perceptions of wellbeing.

Based on those experiences, also closely connected to considerations about the meaning of territory, reflections of underlying ontologies of nature are part of my projects. I contrast modern conceptions of "nature" (as a resource and means towards an end that might involve the destruction of non-human and human life) to Andean and Amazonian conceptions of life. In these conceptions, nature is understood in a more relational way, understanding society and nature not as separate domains, but as relationally constituted, thus understanding human and non-human entities as continually linked, only to be understood in their interconnectedness (Escobar 58). Also, nature is often attributed intrinsic values, understanding ecology or the cosmos as a subject that is an end in itself.

In that context, I further reflect about how knowledge about nature is produced, how it depends on or is related to the existing power structures and the type of knowledge which is considered legitimate. In Peru, knowledge that is able to foster economic growth and profit - such as through mining - is prioritized, even if it has proven to lead to ecological destruction. As indigenous, and also rural, campesino ways of understanding the world and their knowledge are often not oriented towards economic profit in disregard of nature, they often are considered as inefficient and reduced to being based on

superstitious beliefs by modern Western society and governments (Leff 33f, 46). To contrast this, I explore and also want to make visible what forms of values, thoughts, imaginaries, and visual perception have persisted, despite the existent hegemony over non-Western conceptions of “ecology” such as Pachamama.

Having those reflections in mind, in my projects and performances, human beings and modern culture are de-centered. By giving protagonism to other earth-beings beyond human actors - specifically to the wind, and also the mountain-self and the sheep being which I perform as a hybrid - I want to offer other ways to think about relations within a territory, and about the agency and protagonism of diverse actors. It is a proposal to engage in a process of unlearning and relearning through challenging and changing how we perceive beings and aims at broadening our horizons, understandings and connections.

In the following, I will present three artistic projects, which deal with the aforementioned issues. First, I invite you to take your time to see the video, and afterwards, you are welcome to read some reflections and contextualization of the projects.

### Through the Textile

With the project “Through the Textile: A Symbolic Intervention with the Textile in the Andes,” I want to give space to non-human and also human actors to express themselves and articulate their own language. The wind, manifesting itself through its interaction with the textile and its sound, is a central character. Also the textile, with its weaving and represented symbols, is supposed to be understood beyond its objective characteristics. Thinking about its process of coming to life, subjective value is attributed to it. It connects the breeding of sheep, the haptic connection and movements of weaving based on cultural tradition and the representation of symbols based on a certain cosmovision (Espejo). This project also involves voices of human protest actors in the Tambo Valley, resisting against the start of the mining project Tia Maria, to protect their mode of living based on agriculture. While witnessing their protest in 2019, the year in which I elaborated this art project, I have listened and recorded protesters who often remain unheard. Their opinions about the struggle and reasons for rejecting mining evidences the conflictive character of parallel existing perceptions and valorizations of nature and desired ways of being with the territory. The interaction of the wind and the textile was filmed in the Andes in Ancash,



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXRhZbtZl1A&t=20s>

close by to one of Peru's biggest copper mining projects Antamina, where (partly indigenous) locals have experienced diverse changes since the presence of the mining operation for the last twenty years, one of them being the destruction of the mountain once considered a powerful being with its own character.

Also with this project, I am interested in reflecting and questioning how we know and understand "nature", broadening our perspective of active beings manifesting in territories, and to give space to voices faced by threats to their lifeworlds.

### Introducing the Hybrid Beings

Art poses the possibility of reconstructing myself by extending my body in tandem with other beings to create a conglomerate of differences that otherwise tend to separate us and limit our understanding. Becoming a hybrid seeks to make it possible to understand a world made up of many worlds, embracing a multiplicity of possible worlds. In this pluriverse, we can coexist and connect through traditions and practices, where rivers, mountains, oceans, rocks, clouds, the wind, the sun can be understood as subjects (Blaser and de la Cadena 4-5). In this context, I understand hybridity as the integration and combination of human and non-human perspectives. It is also a reminder that we, especially referring to many urban people in Lima with parents who have migrated to the city, are already a mix of many worlds of the pluriverse, influenced by multiple backgrounds, traditions and worldviews. Thus, we should embrace the different worlds and influences as integrated parts of ourselves, but also to expand this understanding. Performing non-human perspectives by becoming hybrid beings is an attempt to make visible the existence and protagonism of other living beings, offering us a vision of different (non-)human worldviews, thus leaving human-centered perspectives, opening up the path towards a pluriverse.

Seeking to be in "another skin," I performed as a hybrid, that is, a fusion of natural beings who manifest themselves as a unity through corporeality – amongst others with the costume of a sheep and a mountain:

### The Sheep Self



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_inJ5BjTyY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_inJ5BjTyY)

The first hybrid being I performed was the Sheep Self in 2020, which I consider as a representation and symbol of the connection with the territory and of mutual care. The creation of this character was inspired by my family background: The family of my indigenous peasant grandfather bred sheep. When my grandmother migrated to Lima with her children, and also when I was already alive, my grandfather sometimes brought my grandmother a sheep, as a way to remain connected with their rural territory and other beings. For this project, my aunt Loroña, who still lives in my father's birthplace in an Andean town beside the city of Huancayo, breeds sheep and thus has a close connection to those animals, routinely observing their interaction as a flock, agreed to send me the skin of a sheep that was bred in this town. With this skin, sewed to fit a human body, I performed the sheep being in various places in Vienna - where I have been living the past eight years - also inviting other people to become a sheep self and to join for a walk as a flock. This video presented here, as a demonstration of the performance, was filmed in Vienna. In the performance, the physical presence of the hybrid is manifested in an open space, in a place called "Baumkreis am Himmel" which could be translated as "Tree Circle on the Sky," as well as in the action of walking and perceiving different beings present in the surroundings. This performance - through a corporal experience, experiencing it with different senses, feeling the heaviness of the skin, the heat underneath while moving in space, the smell of the sheep skin in combination with the smell and sounds of

the surrounding - invites us to enact other ways of thinking within a body, understanding the body as a bridge to different perceptions, which embrace multiplicity.

### The Mountain Self



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMQ\\_MKa16wo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMQ_MKa16wo)

One important actor in my ritual performances is the Mountain Self. In pre-colonial times, sacred mountains served as platforms for various rituals and they continue to be associated with divinity in some indigenous Andean cosmovisions, especially when they are considered as Apus (mountain spirits). Mountains have a direct influence on the life cycles of the region in which they are located. According to the pre-Incan tradition of the Andean area, some of the mountains protect the inhabitants of the valleys that were irrigated by water from their peaks. As Fabian Li demonstrates in her book *Unearthing Conflict* mountains and lagoons are a protagonist in the socio-territorial struggles that are threatened to be exploited (4). This invites us to think about the deep ecologies of indigenous communities, understanding mountains as protective beings, and the indigenous communities' right to live in harmony

with the mountains.

Based on those observations, as well as my experience in (planned) mining areas in Peru, I created the Mountain Self, giving protagonism to mountains as powerful actors within territories, stressing their active presence, perceiving the mountain as a sentient, living being, and reflecting different perceptions of the meaning and value of a mountain, especially in the context of mining. The mountain Self has traveled from Peru, to Austria and to Mexico. The performance presented here took place in 2021 at the Pacific coast in Mexico. With the movement and the proximity to the sea and the sound of the waves, the mountain's agency as well as interconnections of different earth-beings is emphasized.

## Approaching through Drawing Speculative and Alternative Forms of Knowledge Production

Imayna Caceres

My aim is to examine the ways in which it is possible to address socio-political realities, imaginaries, perspectives and conflicting relationships that exist with respect to mining through drawing. A large literature has shown evidence of the negative impact of mining activities in South America both to their communities and the land. [1]

The severe environmental impacts include soil erosion, deforestation, loss of fauna and flora, loss of biodiversity caused by toxic chemicals, acidic water, dust and gas being released into the air, all which in parallel drastically affects health and deeply alters life forms (Cacciuttolo 1-2). Questioning the reason why mining companies and conglomerates are allowed to impact the planet so severely brings us to the paradigm of progress, and to mining as a proposition on how to use the land in order to achieve said progress.

As an artist-researcher, I am interested in speculative spaces that engage and exceed what is contemplated by the dominant scientific discourses. My way of producing knowledge

happens in a braiding of diverse artistic means, engaging learnings of the organized collectives of which I am a part, engaging learnings from the mestizo-indigenous worlds in which I grew up in Lima, and seeking to connect all this to existing scientific literature. In my work, I draw, paint, and write my account of personal-collective memories, stories, dreams, sound and body knowledge, and learnings made in the encounter with creatures, entities and phenomena. Grounded in the history I come from and the daily relationships I have developed with the more than human neighbors in the place I have come to live in Vienna, my work aims to point out interspecies connections and other ways of thinking with natural-cultural entities beyond the human.

In my experience, the artistic practice of drawing makes us pay attention to what we are able to perceive in the shapes, languages and properties of things and beings, in their livingness, and through this, to come across other forms of knowing. A knowing that takes place through our senses, through the materiality of our body and through the standpoint of our multiple identities. Via drawing, one is able to engage in, and to invoke an aesthetics of living, where life expands between balance and chaos,



*Underworld Journeys Through Bodies of Water*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm

between transformative action and inactivity, persistence and chance, the known and the unknown, and through which we can explore the reflections that arise from it.

In the drawings and series to which I refer in this text, I draw on black paper as a medium to evoke the environment of the underground, the subconscious as an underlying realm of basal fears and desires, the fabric of space-time and the dark matter of the cosmos. A scenario where each drawing connects worlds where past, present and future meet simultaneously. And where the spaces left undrawn keep a record of the parts of reality that may never be studied or researched, areas that resists human understanding, and that may never be known to us.

The use of black also connects me also to a pre-colonial aesthetic history of the Peruvian northern coast, which produced black water vessels with various social and symbolic uses (as it is case of the Chimu culture c. 850-1450 AD). Vessels which have kept a symbolic archive of non-modern ways of relating to non-human others.

My drawings can be understood within an aesthetics of the dark, as a place where our perception through our senses sharpen. Where the dark is a space to explore feelings of anxiety, danger, and mourning, but also room

for subversive and radical knowledge by those who inhabit the margins. An allusion to an underground darkness that is imagined as a worksite for an archeology that digs gaps onto the surface.

In my series *Geographies of Selves / Roots in the Dark* (2019), I referred to the weight of several axes of history and the structural systems of domination and accumulation, but also the passing on of dissident ways of living which included world-making (Escobar 2015) co-laborings (de la Cadena 2015, 12) with the more than human. As part of this series, in "Underworld Journeys Through Bodies of Water," I drew the body of the South American continent as a floating island from which inland waters run onto a primordial ocean. Surrounded by eroded soil, Andean waters become the Amazon, and the Atlantic, feeding the world above and below – of new and ancestral life. Like an x-ray that in darkness reveals a further reality underlying beneath what can be seen: The blossoming land is the soil that feeds us, that embraces our dead and nourishes the darkness of soil and cosmos.

Drawing thinking about the bodies of water that cross the continent brought me to think about water and its relation to soils and mountains. In *Cosmic Pathways. Water Descending Upon Mountains* 2019, I drew a mountain on which cosmic rivers descend, insinuating the edges



*Cosmic Pathways. Water Descending Upon Mountains. 2019*

of the South American continent and alluding to the water dwellings in the Andes and the Amazon. I drew the constellation of the Southern Cross which can only be seen from the south and a rainbow that evokes the mythological serpent Amaru and with it the various paths and transformations of water.

At the heart of mining conflicts in Peru there is often an ontological conflict about what rivers and mountains mean and what kind of relationships and practices it is possible to establish with them. Environmental defenders in South America speak of rivers as sources of life and ancestral beings, and the scientific ontological turn of recent years has been showing that their perspectives hold ground.

Research shows that water has been present throughout the universe for almost all of its existence, and that it is from outer space that it came to earth. [2]

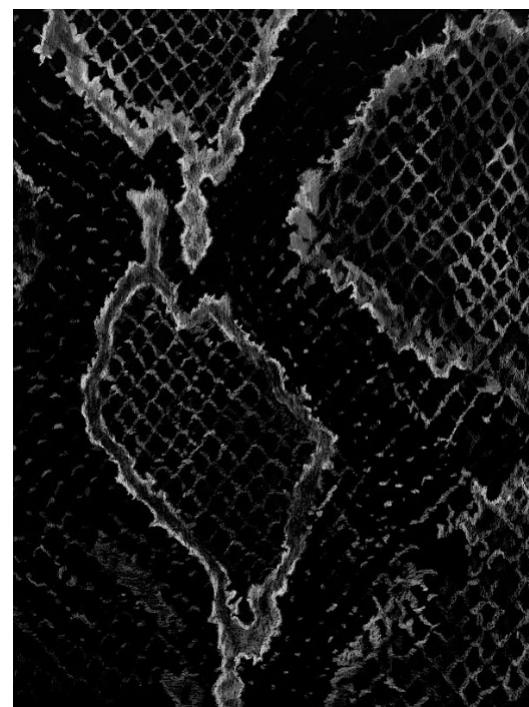
Water on the planet is very old and its presence has contributed to form the planet and its various landscapes. Moreover, some scientists hypothesize that water shaped biodiversity, in that it would be the variations in rainfall in the equatorial zone which has contributed to this area's greater diversity of species. [3]

The mountain in my drawing alludes to the Andes from which water streams descend to return to the sea. Thinking-drawing the Andean mountains allows me to imagine them as antennas that help the water to find its way to the ground. Soil that absorbs water, distributes it throughout its channels and is shaped by it. Forming *puquios*, streams, creeks that meander to the sea, sculpting the land and changing the terrain as they move. Masses of water interconnected as a vibratory energy that in its different states creates paths across the planet. Water transporting memories and carrying messages as a mediator of worlds that come together to become with one another. Rivers of water that sing with a thousand voices and each stream sounds its way, carrying the histories of all they encountered.

The two drawn rivers meandering down from above are placed like arms that embrace the mountain and feed it with cosmic waters. Water that runs through the cosmos crossing and pollinating our planet. Since H and O are

very common elements, they often travel in meteorites that fall to earth, and the water of our planet also evaporates so that it returns to the cosmos. Thus, the circulation of water occurs at the planetary as well as the cosmic level. [4]

A perspective that is somewhat hinted in several indigenous mythological legends, as in the case of the dark constellation of the Llama in the Milky Way which was thought to drink the excess water to prevent the planet from flooding (Urton 188). Being able to visualize this cosmic cycle of water, the discussions concerning the territories affected by mining then appear limited. For there is usually a perception of mining tailings as something that only affects the populations directly adjacent to mining operations, ignoring the flow and recirculation of water that occurs throughout the planet – affecting thus the majority of the world population. Thinking about it in this way would imply for mining companies the need to calculate a mining cannon that considers their planetary impact as well.



In "Maps of the Amaru" I drew the skin of a snake with the wish of referencing the *Amaru* as a serpentine entity that inhabits different realms and thus is able to slither across borders. Observing in detail the skin pattern of the snake, I identify a shape resembling the map

of South America. As I draw it and seeking to emulate every scale's shimmer and reflection of lights, the areas of continental land became covered in closely knit scales, resembling a chain of mountains, whereas the mountain-scales on the sea appeared submerged in water. Thinking of South America as imprinted on the skin of the Amaru snake brings me to think of a land in undulating motion and continuously renovating its skin. Something not far from a geological understanding of how the earth is a living organism whose crust is made of moving tectonic plates that cause earthquakes and volcanos both on land and on the oceans floor. In this way, drawing lands and waters brings about a reflection on soil being in constant motion, and through drawing, I come across patterns that remind me how we are made on a quantic level with the skin of other entities.

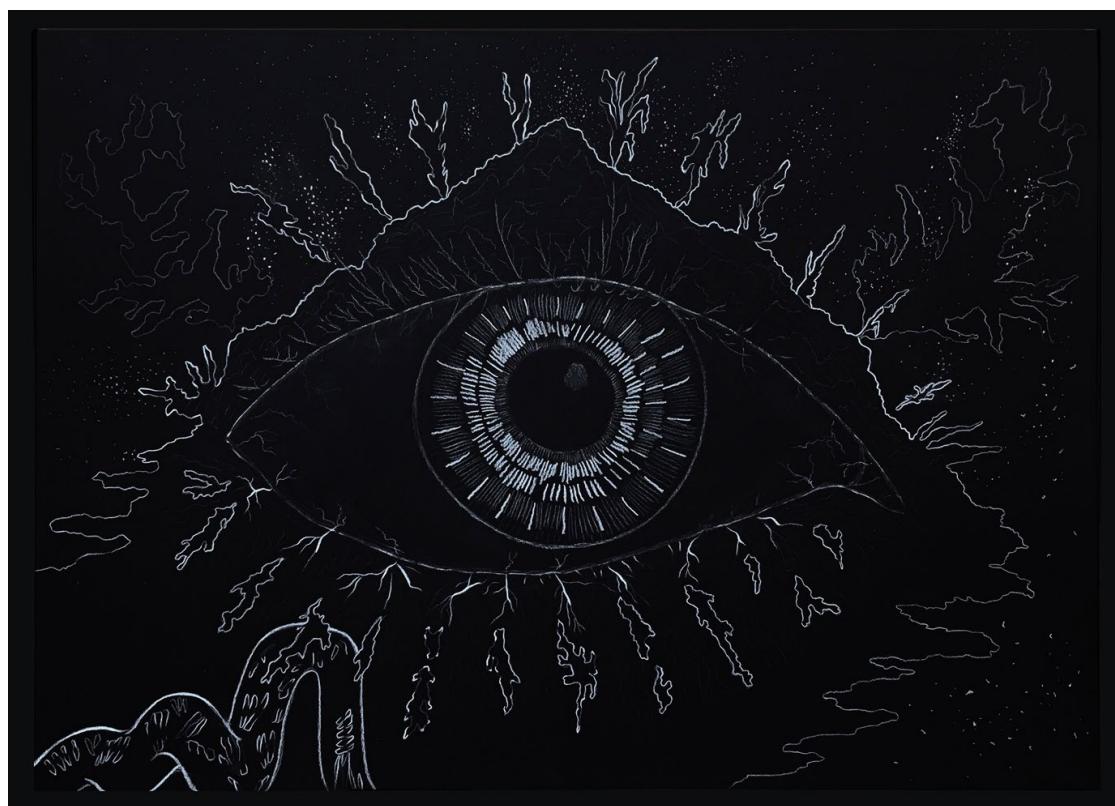
Throughout these series I found that my drawings lived many lives. In one of those lives my drawings worked as theoretical reflections that were able to revise symbols and produce pollinating meaning.

Through drawing one is able to invoke ways of existing that have not been represented in what

was described as modern culture. In this, drawing acts as a ground for relating to our multiple identities and possible readings of history. In the absence of material documentation, it emerges as a weaver of traces of affection, able to connect to that which is cherished or deemed necessary to be remembered. [5]

Drawing offers a ground in which one can move between various fields, circulating through human and extra-human interactions and confluences. A permeable soil in which it is possible to sustain a resonant and intertwined dialogue with diverse traditions of plant teachings, indigenous and feminist knowledge and care, and scientific knowledge (Kimmerer 156-166).

Part of my *Kinship* series (2019), “*Vision*” shows a mountain-eye in reference to a trip through the Amazonian Andes region where my mother stems from, and where I came across a mountain full of life in the San Ignacio province of Cajamarca. Filled with such a diversity of plants and creatures and with several streams flowing down its slopes, the mountain seemed as it could breathe and move. Facing this living entity, it was easy to imagine that this mountain could



*Vision*, 2020. 50 x 70 cm.

have been considered an *Apu*, that is, a sentient mountain entity that is in mutual relationships of care with people, as de la Cadena describes in *EarthBeings: Ecologies of Practices in Andean Worlds* (2015).

This encounter solidified my thinking of mountains as creatures carrying life on their skin and within their guts and constantly changing, growing and shrinking. Researching on the formation of the Andes, as a succession of mountain ranges, cordilleras, plateaus and depressions, I learned that the Andes were made by volcanic activity and subducted plates, in a process which created numerous dikes and veins containing concentrations of valuable minerals. Both this geological research and my drawings brought me to reflect about the heavy elements that are sought out by mining industries: what did these minerals mean for ancient Andean inhabitants? How might this particular relation to minerals and mountains have been passed on and survived? How did they arrive to precolonial groups which employed gold and silver for social and symbolic purposes, as something which was different for the colonizers upon their arrival? The glimmer, luminance, transparency, refraction of minerals could have well been reminders of the outer worlds that inhabit the cosmos, and of the cosmic events that made life in the universe possible. Elements from outer space older than the Milky Way, sinking in, burrowing in the entrails of mountains. Mountains which retrieve water from the atmosphere, receiving and collecting heavy rainfall and creating rivers.

Here stories come to my mind that were passed on in my family as evidence that even for those who migrated from Amazonian and/or Andean mountain environments to Lima, the stories from back home still feature in one way or another the presence of mountains as well as a cautious relation to minerals, particularly to the obtainment of gold and silver. Growing up my mother told me stories in Lima which had been told to her by her grandmother at 3,035 meters in Uchumarca. Stories like the one of the boy-angel with golden curls who appears to people and invites them to play with a golden ball, only for the people to end up appearing *desbarrancados* (*falling off a mountain into a ravine*). Or the story of how when one has not procured to drink water

during the day, it can happen that your head detaches itself from the body during the night, in its desire to fetch water. Or the story of a man who crossing the highest mountain slopes, comes across a well-dressed man who gifts him a small gold bull. Realizing that something is not right, he wraps the bull with his clothes and buries the gold bull in the mountain. In these stories, one can read a symbolic critique of ways of life that make us pursue devastating destinies, that warns us of the danger of not taking care of our needs for water, or caution us about not being fooled by the appeal of money. Is the impulse behind the passing of these stories a kind of acknowledgement of the lived traumatic colonial memories that so deeply turned around the extraction of minerals? Or is there also even a passing of spiritual practices which once had their place in connection to temples dedicated to the sun and the moon with their respective associated elements of gold and silver?

An early example of how drawing can capture the ontological conflicts surrounding mining activities are the drawings of Guaman Poma de Ayala in his *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (Peru, c. 1615). An ontological distance captured in this fictional drawing in which the Inca asks Pedro de Candia “Is this the gold you eat?” to which Candia replies, “We eat this gold.” The political criticism in this ironical depiction is clear: who is capable of unleashing so much violence and destruction simply to find gold? The only possible explanation for such an absurd urgency is that gold is what they eat, what they need to maintain life and a functioning society. To this day, “*You can’t drink gold*” is one of the many slogans that can be read on the walls of the mining towns of Peru and the Water Marches of the continent.

In my experience, drawing works as a tool for the interpretation of different realities, which contributes to my writing. Tracing paths to ancestral connections and symbolisms through drawing and thinking with the vision of the mountain, I find it interesting to think of knowledge as layers of learnings, erasures and reconstructions. A layered sedimentation of experience that has been passed down from the earliest forms of life. Learnings that transformed the RNA and DNA of ancient ancestors and that

in the process multiplied the diversity of the planet.

Through drawing I employ speculative ways of associating information, making unexpected connections. As an extensive web, made of threads, knots and entanglements, which break creating gaps but that also generate structures of interaction and open new questions. Drawing and thinking with the more than human creates a dialogue between intuitive and scientific knowledge that connect aspects that are commonly dismissed such as intuition and connect it to theoretical thinking. A perspective in which the Western traditional scientific method is one of many ways of producing knowledge.

### Political urgencies

We are at a juncture of global pandemic, ecocidal extractivism, racial disaster and capitalism, and catastrophic environmental collapse (Demos 1). This seemed to have highlighted how the way we relate to others might have overwhelming and imposing consequences. An opportunity to reflect about relationalities and perspectives which were previously not accounted for, and to do so from a standpoint that dialogues with threads of dissident worldmaking in order to revise and transform our modes of living, being, thinking with others.

In invoking our inter-existence with other beings, I do not think of earth-beings as having a kind of inherent goodness which allows them to maintain balance, or to connect alienated worlds back to what is called ‘nature’. Quite the contrary, as sentient beings, earth-beings should definitely be imagined as having the emotional bandwidth for positive and negative behavior that any other people is able to carry. Of having will, desires and motivations. Of producing collaborations and disassociations and of being able to foster masters and learners. [6]

Instead, what I am interested in is the connection of the spiritual to the political that addresses historical power relations in realities that are human and beyond. With the political-spiritual connection I mean the practical, nurturing relation to a materiality or ecosystem (local and cosmic) that is practiced out of need. A care of the relationships with what keeps us

alive and which is the basic condition for our life to exist. [7]

The collectives I am part of carry a political-spiritual engagement to the struggles of the peoples who are already speaking in behalf of their relations to mountains, rivers and woods. People in Latin America that are criminalized like Máxima Acuña, Alberto Curamil, Leydy Pech, Nemonte Nenquino, or that have been disappeared and murdered for speaking up like Bertha Cáceres, Bety Cariño, Cacique Emryá Wajápi, Macarena Valdez, Samir Flores, and so many more.

With so many thousand deaths on one side of the several mining conflicts that exist in Abya Yala, the urgency of this situation carries criminal undertones both for the humans and for the destruction of entire ecosystems vital for the survival of our species. [8]

Here it is relevant to make an important notation. When talking of territory, I am aware that an ontological conflict is already at place. The political conversation around mining conflicts in Peru takes place within the conceptual framework of territory and the sovereignty of the nation-state to administer land according to the criteria of the law. This considers, for example, the possibility of consultation processes but also protects private property and the right to free enterprise, even more so after the modifications made to the 1993 Peruvian constitution that liberalized the protective role of the state. Something that structurally clashes with the welfare of the people (human and more than human) in mining extraction zones.

But the limitation of the concept of territory is even greater in that it does not contemplate the cosmopolitics of the more than a thousand indigenous groups in the Americas. Thus, the dialogue on territory already begins at a disadvantage for these groups, which are unable to assert their political-spiritual relationship with the cosmos in their dealing with the state. As we have seen, this does not change when definitions are included in the constitution that consider the *pachamama*. Something that shows the power that exists in hegemonic paradigms and the colonial heritage that survives in the relations between political actors of the center and the periphery. [9]

My proposal is that thinking through drawing allows us to approach the ontological aspects that are part of the struggles around mining and the conflicts and relationships between those who live in the territory and those who live with the territory. In the face of the various socio-ecological crises of our time, we urgently need artistic practices that set-in motion alternative ways of generating knowledge.

In this I bear in mind that I come from a history that does not begin with writing as a way of creating and archiving knowledge, but with the language of other natures-cultures, of colors, of drawing, murals, khipus, knotting, textile weaving, ceramics, stonework and more. In my practice, I have found that a grounded approach to the different arts can contribute to decentering the human and ultimately can contribute to the project of decolonizing the academy.

Art, considered as a cosmopolitan praxis, contemplates multidimensional ways of understanding knowledge, tracing connections and relational perspectives about the worlds in which we interexist. Especially when working with artistic practices that evoke and condense life-sustaining visions about the ways of living and relating to each other to which we aspire.

## Concluding Thoughts

We write in two voices that share resonances, but that also reflect differences. Both proposals show the possibility of how art can help us think about our relationships with human and more than human subjects involved in the mining conflicts in Peru and Abya Yala. We have in common the methodological use of an autoethnographic speculative frame to investigate our readings of particular elements that form part of the territorial conflicts around mining and the surrounding political events. The artistic methods that we explore, use life stories and symbolical vocabularies to generate insights and theories. In this manner, we expand our grasp beyond commonly examined factors, channeling artistic perspectives to explore the political social landscape, we aim to expand the narratives in which we think of social justice and transformation.

## Endnotes

[1] This is something I had the opportunity to discuss in Peru directly as part of my sociological fieldwork studies in 2006. Both with residents living in the vicinity of Barrick Gold's Pierina mine in Huaraz, as well as with residents of La Oroya where the Doe Run mine operates.

[2] van Dishoeck, Ewine F., Eric Herbst, and David A. Neufeld. "Interstellar Water Chemistry: From Laboratory to Observations." *Chemical Review* 113.12 (21 Nov 2013): 9043-9085. <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/cr4003177>

[3] Greater species diversity at the equator linked to variations in precipitation. 9 Sep. 2019. Oxford University Earth Sciences. <https://www.earth.ox.ac.uk/2019/09/greater-species-diversity-at-the-equator-linked-to-variations-in-precipitation/>

[4] The hydrofeminist researcher, Astrida Neimanis, reflects on ways of thinking about water in terms of an ethics and poetics of hydrocommons. In a recent talk, she stated "All the water that has ever been on this planet is still here, no more, no less." Since water seems to evaporate onto the cosmos and to return in meteorites, perhaps this is not fully true. I highlight this because of the importance of understanding how our interconnectedness does not really end on a planetary level. See: "We Are All at Sea: Practice, Ethics, and Poetics of 'Hydrocommons'". Talk at RIBOCA2—2nd Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art 2020.

[5] A few ideas and considerations around drawing were first developed by the author in "Underground Blossomings: Serpentine thinking with other beings." *Periskop: Forum for Kunsthistorisk Debat* 24 (2020): 32-47.

[6] See for example: <https://www.quantamagazine.org/soils-microbial-market-shows-the-ruthless-side-of-forests-20190827/>

[7] I published this definition of the political-spiritual in a previous article: <https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/articles/imayna-caceres-practices-of-connection-and-care-of-life/>

[8] Abya Yala is the name that indigenous social movements, as well as anticolonial groups and initiatives, give to Latin America.

[9] See also de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics."

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## Authors' biographies

Imayna Caceres is an artist and researcher interested in the makings of communities in more-than-human worlds, futuristic ancestral heritages, and practices of regeneration and kinship. She engages with forms of knowledge that exceed the dichotomies of modernity and Western knowledge. Her work includes relational and ritual practices, projects in public space, video and digital and analogical drawing.

Candidate to the Doctorate in Philosophy by the Akademie der bildenden Künste. MA. in Fine Arts as well as MA in Artistic and Cultural Science, and BA in Sociology and in Communication Sciences. She is part of the collectives Trenza and Anticolonial Interventions in Vienna, with which they organize around feminist ecopolitical matters.

Alfredo Ledesma Quintana is a Peruvian artist based in Vienna for the last seven years. He was born and raised in Lima, and belongs to the third generation of a Peruvian artisan silversmith family. Through his artwork, he tries to close a gap, reconnect with, revalue and reactivate traditional Andean culture and his Andean identity. With his work he tries to critically approach existing "modern" values and rework, decolonize, and de/re-learn through art.

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