

The Political Economy of the Global Extractive Regime in Ecuador and Venezuela and Anti-Extractivist Revolutionary Resistance: A New Development Model or 21st Century Extractive Imperialism?

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FOR WPSA CONFERENCE – SEATTLE, WASHINGTON (ONLINE), APRIL 2021

Introduction

The ‘new’ extractivism, as a revived scramble for natural resource extraction, is the most important political economic development in Latin America in decades. It has had major effects on socio-economic relations and the environment since the early 2000s and is still growing rapidly. Historically, the resource extraction through the mining industry, it is claimed, produces ‘the open veins’ for colonial powers and multinational corporations to pillage from Latin America its natural wealth (Galeano 1973). Since the ensuing global commodities boom (GCB) in the 2000s there has been a rise in extractive economies promoting and sustaining a trend of export growth and global investment in the extraction of natural resources ostensibly aimed at addressing poverty and growth by following neoliberal policies. Mining extraction or the ‘mining boom’ has more than doubled between 2007 and 2012 and these ‘booms’ in the economy are perceived as positive, parts of an upward development step, despite the 2008 global ‘boom and bust’ that haunts today’s global economy (Barry 2014, Varoufakis 2015).

With the ‘new’ extractivism, we are witnessing an historic leap in extraction intensity in mega-mining projects. In 2014, in the Andean region only, “There are currently 52,974 mining concessions in Amazonia which cover 1,628,850 km², or 21% of the total area of the Amazon Basin” (Little 2014, 6). Transnational corporations (TNCs) invest in large tracts of land for development strategies believed to ‘open’ the economy via private investment and to resolve

global poverty and today the scope of these investments is reaching all-time highs. Foreign direct investment (FDI) net inflows for México more than doubled in one year, from 2012 to 2013, and other countries in Latin America such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala to a lesser degree experienced a spike in FDI during that time.¹ Furthermore, mining ventures in México are among the multimillion to multibillion dollar operations (Barry, 2014), where government agencies such as the Department of Ministries in agriculture and mining are bolstering the mining industry rather than regulating and/or resisting it (Barry, 2014). In addition, Central-American countries are known for near nonexistent or unenforced regulations in their mining and agricultural policies and, therefore, many TNCs view countries such as México and Guatemala as prime locations for the extractive industry given that they are seen as providing a ‘friendly’ regulatory environment.² Interestingly, South American countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela, rank as the 55th and 57th largest exporters (out of 120 states respectively) of crude petroleum (petro) but are not considered high on the ‘friendly’ regulatory environment.³ Yet, Ecuador and Venezuela have some of the largest mega-mining development projects in the region.

Indeed, the GCB has attracted increased amounts of foreign capital to the region and many of the ‘pink-tide’ States here referred to as 21st Century Socialist States have turned to resource extraction as primary development strategies that look no different from neoliberal mega-development projects of the past. The ‘pink-tide’ moments refer to the national development model characterized as part of the ‘new developmentalism’ and formation of center-left post-neoliberal regimes in response to 21st century emerging widespread resistance to neoliberalism in

¹ See World Development Indicators and data reported by IMF, UNCTAD, and WB figures at <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>

² See <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx> ‘Ease of doing business index (1=most business-friendly regulations)’.

³ See <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/> The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) as an international trade data source: MIT. For 2017, Ecuador is ranked at the 118th place and Venezuela at the 188th place on the indicator above.

Latin America – e.g. Venezuela and eventually Ecuador (Veltmeyer & Petras 2014, Veltmeyer 2014). Many scholars argue that what is different is the scope and size of extraction intensity. The case studies of Ecuador and Venezuela in this paper are prime examples of the most radical 21st Century Socialist States in the region with on-going mega-projects. Dynamics of the new extractivism are exemplified in Ecuador and Venezuela where open-pit mining is reaching all-time highs. For example, Venezuela’s Orinoco’s Mining Arch (OMA) that now extends through to the Orinoco’s Petroleum Belt (OPB), is the main extractive enclave of the ‘new commodity frontiers’ (Mantovani 2016) reaching 1.2 million barrels per day in 2014. The two areas combined make up a 175,000 square kilometers mega ‘development pole’ that is an area equivalent to the entire territory of Uruguay (Fabricant & Gustafson 2015). In Ecuador, mining/drilling for crude petro remains a significant part of its economy but new infrastructure for its first large-scale copper mine, El Mirador Mining Project, began in 2012. The project consists of six open-pit mining sites covering roughly 10,000 hectares expecting to produce 30,000 tons per day over the course of nineteen years.⁴

Consequently, the recent ‘mining boom’ or ‘mining revolution’ that attracts FDI has triggered opposition within left-leaning governments in Latin America, and from anti-mining activists and anti-imperialist coalitions. For example, the La Colosa Gold Project in Bogotá, Colombia began gold exploration in 2006 and “is currently believed to have a potential of producing between 800,000 to 1.2 million ounces of gold per year for 20 years and the mine will involve huge open pits and the chemical extraction of gold with the use of cyanide.”⁵ By 2009, it

⁴ See Lee, B. (2015). China-Latin America Relations: In Ecuador, Dependency on Beijing financing of development projects raises fears, uncertainty for some: <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-latin-america-relations-ecuador-dependency-beijing-financing-development-2190025> and Silvio, D. (2013). Is this the end of the Rights of Nature in Ecuador? Protect Ecuador Organization <http://protectecuador.org/end-of-the-rights-of-nature-in-ecuador/>

⁵ See NACLA Reporting on the Americas: <https://nacla.org/blog/2013/11/12/leader-opposed-colombian-mining-project-murdered>

was claimed that “mining operations would require about 1000 liters of water per second. The total investment is estimated to range between U.S. \$3,000 million and U.S. \$4,000 million.”⁶ Responsive to opposition from peasant working-class miners and widespread rejections from global networks of solidarity campaigns, the project has been delayed. El Salvador has also put in place a legislative ban on metal mining (Dougherty 2017). Activists and anti-movements from various Latin American countries argue that any purported social benefits do not outweigh the economic and environmental consequences making extractivism simply unsustainable.

Unfortunately, successes at halting or slowing extractive activity in one area may increase extractive exploitation in another: fabricating a balloon effect. Using the balloon as an analogy, where if you liken the push for extraction to a balloon, squeezing it in one area merely causes it to expand in another. If policy redirects the extractive industry from one area, such as the mining concessions and activity halted by Colombian State neighboring to both Ecuador and Venezuela, then the companies and related extractive actors will move to another area as well as those needing to migrate for work. For example, informal (illegal) mining operations sprang up near the OMB and CMB in both Ecuador and Venezuela, led by nearby Colombian leaders that have migrated to other mining sites in the Guiana Shield.

In light of these developments we see a growing number of ‘anti’-movements resisting the ‘new’ extractivism and imperialist efforts with transformative political goals aiming to suture the colonial ‘open veins’. Therefore, I ask what forms does the resistance take and what are the implications of 21st century revolutionary strategies? Profound transformations are taking place in the Americas due to the consequences of the ‘new’ extractivism such as shifts in power, intensified sites of struggle and political and economic revolutionary strategies from the working-

⁶ Ibid.

class masses. Evidence suggests that while the progressive leftist states demonstrate continual anti-imperial efforts in 2021, they are not anti-capitalist imperialism and continue to sustain exploitation through ‘accumulation by extractivism’. A secondary question that is raised, then, is do progressive, post-neoliberal Latin American states demonstrate an actually existing alternative to development in mega-extractive projects or is it just ‘neoliberalism with state intervention’ (Lust 2014)?

For comparative purposes, I use two case studies of Andean States that have been labeled as part of the ‘pink-tide’ era of leftist Latin American governments, that have been categorized as major players in the renewed ‘rush’ to extract minerals beginning with the global commodity boom, that have the largest mega-development poles in the region, and that have substantially growing anti-extractivist movements. I also chose these case studies for important differences on how each government has dealt with political and economic decisions around extractivism as post-neoliberal governments are believed to ‘do’ extractivism differently. Regionally, former Ecuadorean President Correa and former and deceased Venezuelan President Chávez and their left-wing governments were celebrated as the lefts leading examples of the faces of 21st century socialism that attributed to the substantial decline in poverty and inequality in Latin America between 2000 and 2015. Ecuador and Venezuela have addressed some inequality and poverty levels have improved with redirected extractive capital towards more social welfare spending; however, the left-leaning governments are entangled in Latin America’s renewed dependence on natural resource extraction. The ‘new’ extractivism model is much like the old extractivism but what is different is the scope and size of extractive projects. I argue that as the increase in scope and size of extractivism takes place so too does the scope and size of resistance. Therefore, in this paper I examine the class struggles and political economic dimensions of the ‘new’ extractivism

and revolutionary anti-extractivism movement in a Latin American ‘post’ neoliberal context, through the case studies of the Orinoco Mining Belt/Arch in Venezuela and the Copper Mining Belt in Ecuador – mega-mining projects that have activated large anti-extractivism resistance in the Andean region.

I, further, argue that the ‘new’ extractivism is better understood as extractive imperialism as it is sustained and legitimized by a) continuities of an ‘extractive mentality’, b) for/by the ruling class elite in the global extractive regime, c) by state laws and policies, and d) by internal/external pressures for extractive capital. A Marxist theory of extractive imperialism as a process promoted and sustained by capitalism-imperialism has explanatory power on the latest scramble for natural resources imposed on peripheral states (Veltmeyer & Petras 2013, Patnaik & Patnaik 2015, Prashad 2020). Extractive imperialism contains these components as factors that help explain how and why post-neoliberal states promote and sustain the ‘new’ imperialism: 1) steady expansion of resource-seeking capital in the Latin American region (Patnaik & Patnaik 2015 argue that this expansion takes place in all subtropical regions); 2) accelerating cycles of exploitation and accumulation sustained by finance capital, loans, and trade; 3) asymmetrical social relations; and, I add, 4) the element of (re)colonization. The concept (re)colonization has been most commonly used in African studies as a way to address the perceived failures of democratization and development. According to Shariff (1997), (re)colonization is defined as territory owned by foreign capital and in the case of extractive imperialism of the 21st Century we can look at MNC ownership over land, U.S. imperial efforts to thwart resource-rich countries political left from power, and finance capital from China backed by collaborators. In the process of reclaiming the concept of imperialism, as ‘globalization era’ Marxists have done, I suggest including the concept of (re)colonization for the purpose of the Latin American experience. Accumulation by

extractivism is, thus, a function of the profound “transformations of ecologies of the many into systems of circulation and accumulation to serve the few is the project of settler-colonial infrastructure and the infrastructure is the how of settler-colonialism (LaDuke and Cowen 2020, 245).” Thus, the ‘territory’ of (re)colonization is made visible by settler-colonial infrastructure.

Mega-Extractive Settler-Colonial Infrastructure: (Re)Colonization through Accumulation by Extractivism

Ecuador and Venezuela: The Veins Remain Open

A tourniquet, typically used to slow or stop the bleeding, is more like a Band-Aid solution and many reforms around the ‘new’ extractivism reflect how the extractive colonial veins remain open with historically having some slow bleeding moments. The tourniquet is off and the ‘oil to minerals’ flow from the South to the North at a pace of accelerating cycles of exploitation is creating an ecological crisis at dramatically uneven rates of blood-letting with indigenous peoples disproportionately bearing the brunt of toxic destruction and displacement. The exploitation and crisis are a direct result of the capitalist-imperialist global system predicated upon accumulation and dispossession.

Silvia Luzi and Luca Bellino⁷, in 2018, had the privilege to interview then President Comandante Hugo Chávez, who commented on the mega-extractive site while flying in a helicopter over the area, “it’s the largest oil reserve in the world” referring to the Orinoco oil area of 55,000 square kilometers that has 200 meters beneath it, a lake of oil. Comandante Chávez said it was once the U.S. colony, but they liberated it, addressing the anti-U.S. imperialism sentiment, “...and this oil is for the world, for the peoples of the world”. On May 1st, 2007 Venezuela nationalized the oil belt during a visit to the State of Anzoátegui, Comandante Chávez declared

⁷ See “The Threat”, documentary by Luzi and Bellino, 2018

the end of the phase “Oil Opening” and nationalized to consolidate popular sovereignty. As noted earlier, during Comandante Chávez’ last term oil prices declined and a transition to rely on other mineral extractive projects was a policy promoted by many Chavistas with a new developmentalism outlook of nationalized industry and increase social welfare spending which had proved to be successful (Spanakos & Pantoulas 2017, Llambi 2018, Golinger 2008).

The project in Venezuela is known as the “Orinoco Mining Arc” (OMA) which aims to exploit the region’s largely untapped mineral resources. In a territory south of the Orinoco river spanning nearly 112,000 square kilometers (larger than Cuba) lie some of the country’s greatest mineral reserves: gold, diamonds, and coltan⁸, a metallic ore crucial to the electronic and arms industries. The challenges of mining this enormous area are not just logistical. The OMA is part of the Amazon River basin, an ecosystem of global interest for its immense biodiversity and home to sixteen officially recognized indigenous tribes. However, on February 24, 2016 President Maduro signed the decree “National Strategic Development Zone’ in the Guiana Highlands. The government decree backed with armed military control created a ‘special economic zone’ and coined the name Orinoco Mining Arc for the zone (Arc after the shape of the Orinoco River). The previously existing Oil Belt together now with the OMA is known as one of the largest mega-extractive areas in the world. After oil prices began to fall in 2014 policies such as the ‘special economic zone’ was a way to establish legitimate government control over protected areas. Mining of the natural resources in the OMA, which more than doubled in gold, coltan, iron, and bauxite from 2012-2016⁹, exploits not only approximately twelve percent of Venezuela’s landmass but also a large portion of the Guiana Shield; a resource-rich area crossing over to

⁸ Coltan, short for columbite-tantalum, is an essential resource in electronic devices such as cell phones and satellites.

⁹ See IHS Markit, US Geological Survey, Environmental Justice Atlas

Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil, and French Guiana. The settler-colonial infrastructure intensity is exemplified in the changes between the ‘old’ extractivism and ‘new’ extractivism: in Latin America the amount of natural extraction of minerals went from 2,400 million tonnes in 1970 to 8,300 million tonnes by 2009¹⁰.

According to RAISG (Red Amazónica de Información Socioambiental Georeferenciada), the OMA is twenty-four percent of the Guayana region (111,843.70 Km²) in Venezuela which is South of the Orinoco River stretching from the Amazonas State through the Bolivar State to Delta Amacuro State. The Guayana region holds sixty percent of Venezuela’s freshwater resources and contains ‘special areas’ under ABRAE (Áreas Bajo Régimen de Administración Especial) to protect national natural areas in which sixty-four percent of the OMA is natural rainforest and forested areas.¹¹ Important areas in the Guayana region are not completely protected from legal or ‘illegalized’ mining impacts. One of the conflict mining zones in the Canama National Park area is currently being threatened by illegalized mining and dispossessions of land. I take up this issue in detail below. In the Guayana Region are nineteen indigenous tribes in which RAISG reports eleven tribes are directly affected by the OMA. The most impacted peoples are the Pemon, Yekuana, Karina, Enepa, Mapoyo, Arawak, Piaroa, Sanema, Akawayo, Jodi/Hoti, and Pume. RAISG estimates the Guayana region to have 7,000 tonnes worth of gold reserve. In this area alone, approximately 150,000 miners migrated to work in the ‘illegalized’ mining zones in which approximately 70,000 of the workers are Venezuelans and the remaining are Colombians and Brazilians miners. Comparatively, although significantly less than the number of Venezuelan workers, in Ecuador during the period between 2017-2020 the number of miners working in the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network RAISG at <https://www.amazoniasocioambiental.org/en/about/>

zones grew to approximately 16,000 miners but this was an extraordinary 332% increase from the previous two years.¹² According to the UNCTAD 2019 Report on a ‘free-market’ price index, commodity prices growth rate illustrates an 11.3% increase per year on mineral, ores, and metals.¹³ However, the implication is that ‘free’ everyone/every commodity can be accounted for, equally and that anything outside of the ‘free-market’ is ‘illegal’. But what is legal or illegal can be a matter of interest.

Similar to the situation in Venezuela, where mega-mining pits are part of a larger mega-extractive pole located in a biodiverse rich area that intensifies land and working-class people exploitation, in Ecuador the Copper Mining Belt (CMB) is located along La Cordillera del Condor (mountain range in the Eastern Andes) and it stretches over 1,600 km bordering with Peru. According to Mazabanda et al. (2018), a part of the Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project (MAAP), a large part of the Ecuadorean mining belt is the El Mirador project (primarily copper) that covers 9,928 hectares spanning eleven sectors that began in 2010 and by 2012 the Ecuadorean government gave mining rights of El Mirador to the Chinese-owned corporation, Ecuacorriente (Bank Track 2016). From 2010 to 2017, over seven years, an estimated 1,307 hectares of deforestation and thirty-two indigenous families have been evicted. As listed on the monitoring site of mega extractive activity, the Corriente Resources reported that the copper belt ‘currently contains four copper and copper-gold porphyry deposits: Mirador, Mirador Norte, Panantza and San Carlos. Six additional copper exploration targets: La Florida, San Luis, San Marcos, San Miguel, Sutz and Dolorosa have been identified in the Corriente Copper Belt to date (Bank Track 2016, MAAP 2018).

¹² See <https://miningwatch.ca/>

¹³ See: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsdsicpb2020d2_en.pdf The FMCPI records the average development of main primary commodity prices exported by developing economies, Free Market Commodity Price Index (FMCPI) report December 2019.

Other settler-colonial sites of struggle are exemplified in the Andean conflict zones¹⁴ impacted by settler-colonial jurisdiction issues. Several areas surrounding the mining belts have been listed as conflict zones because of ongoing ‘illegal’ operations with devastating consequences. Two prominent active gold and coltan mining zones in Venezuela, the Bajo rio Caura zone and the Cuao-cabeceras zone, have been reported to have active military in the area as well as mercury contaminants used by the miners. Miners working in these areas are not only the local Ye’Kuana indigenous peoples but are also Brazileros, Yuduani and Paragua. Ecuador, on the other hand, has less state military activity to monitor its conflict zones but reported U.S. militant forces directed as protection of ‘national’ interests. Fruta del Norte conflict zone and the Llurimagua de Codelco conflict zone are on the inactive lists but with reported findings of mercury in the water affecting the local, displaced Indigena Shuar, Comunidad la Zarza, and Canton Cotacachi people in the Yantzaza, Zamora Chinchipe province and the Imbabura, Intag, Cotacachi province. Settler-colonial infrastructure at the size and scale of these two ‘development’ poles is to carve up into preserves of settler jurisdiction in material reality visible in the infrastructure of the mining pits as well as local borders run by cartels and/or ‘illegal’ mining operations (Celis 2017, Velasquez 2017).

Consequences of the illegalized mining include little to no regulations, deaths, illnesses, and water contaminants. Miners use mercury, a deadly toxic chemical, to refine the gold despite state regulations and decrees. This is not to suggest that legal mining is free of these consequences but found to be fewer in case. According to one of the locals, Simón Bastidas is a Mapoyo Chief in El Palomo, illegal mining includes selling the gold to the highest bidder instead of to the government so there are known ‘crime bosses’ and reported that Juarcho is one of the leaders in

¹⁴ See OCMAL – Observatorio de conflictos mineros de america latina at <https://www.ocmal.org/ocmal/>

the mining town Las Claritas in Venezuelan State of Bolivar where mafias want control of unlicensed, gold mines.¹⁵ According to the reports, two locals in the area, Kurmanaev and Ramirez, found seventeen Venezuelan miners bodies in 2019.

Responses to this have come from the state and civil society. *'An Army of Miners'* created by the Venezuelan government is the Socialist Mining Brigades which is an initiative launched in January 2017 to bring 'illegalized' small scale mining under control. The brigades were intended to replace the illegalized (informal) mining that had flourished in the region. The intention of the Socialist Mining Brigade is to sell the gold they extracted to Minerven, the state mining company, which would keep three percent of its value for itself. The gold extracted, President Maduro said, would then go to the national bank to "strengthen the reserves," while half of the proceeds from extractive capital would be redistributed for social welfare programs in health, education, and other social spending. Part of the decree and subsequent policies under this project of the Socialist Brigades was that the miners would no longer use mercury and President Maduro banned the use of the dangerous chemical in any mining operations in an August 2016 decree.

Legal action opposing the creation of the 'special economic zone' in Venezuela was taken by former government ministers collaborating with civil society forming a united anti-extractivism platform; Platform for the Annulment of the OMA decree (Plataforma por la Nulidad del decreto del Arco Minero del Orinoco). The legal action declared the zone as unconstitutional and breaches other laws protecting land rights of indigenous peoples and laws protecting areas from mining. Supreme Court decisions dismissed the appeal arguing the project was of 'strategic importance', claiming 'national interest' warranted continuation of the project. More parts of civil society joined in the efforts to stop the OMA; for example, NGOs, Provea, Laboratorio de Paz, and GTAI-

¹⁵ See <https://elestimulo.com/provea-revela-nombres-de-asesinados-en-el-caso-ikabaru/>

ULA. This ongoing site of struggle is only one of the many ways resistance has countered the settler-colonial infrastructure.

To conclude this section, accumulation, as a strategy in extractive imperialism, is sustained by finance capital and military might (Petras and Veltmeyer 2018) but here I will focus less on the finance capital and more on the strategies taken by the global extractive regime to quell resistance. Infrastructure of settler-colonialism, according to LaDuke and Cowen (2020), is not only in the form of actually existing mega-mining pits and oil pipelines but also in the form of police and prisons as well as any other institutions collaborating with the extractive regime and are confronted by infrastructure of indigenous resistance, also known as resource radicals (RioFranco 2020). The mega-mining pits in both the OMB and CMB and all the trucks, newly built transit routes/roads, and processing companies are part of the settler-colonial infrastructure as symbolic importance, signs of settler jurisdiction. Other parts to the settler-colonial infrastructure include Ecuacoriente, the main Chinese corporation in Ecuador and Venezuela, and its buildings for its employees; the wage-labor miners, and Explocen, a U.S. corporation, and U.S./China Development Banks. Under nationalism these infrastructures can be granted concession rights, legal access, and permits by the state apparatus but usually with no significant markers to disguise an already visible foreign-owned infrastructure that appears more as a thief of stolen land than positive development steps to ‘growth’ or ‘progress’.

Class Struggle and Exploitation

In Ecuador, the Correa administration, and the Alianza Patria Altiva y Soberana (Alianza PAIS) had to deal with the deep financial crisis from the late 1990s neoliberal agenda that devastated the economy. Correa promoted and recovered the Ecuadorean citizens through his Citizens’ Revolution intended to put the control back in the hands of the people as a radical reform

agenda (Silva 2016). But in contrast to the situation in Venezuela, where anti-extractivism movements enjoyed strong positions within and without government, the social movements in Ecuador deal with a crisis and contradiction that further divides the left. Left-wing parts of Ecuadorian society are divided and, thus, some have been found to support the U.S. coups as for example, on the platform of indigenous eco-socialist groups from a ‘progressive imperialism’ imperative as with the case of CONAIE in Ecuador and recent co-opted elections. Other leftists, aligning with a more radical left, participate in socialist or communist political parties which include working-class indigenous miners who do not predominately align with the right-wing camp but are divided; embedded within internal class conflict (Petras 2015). CONAIE, (Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities) has a history of suspicious credibility due to corruption charges of a past leader CONAIE supported that advanced market-oriented policies under the Gutierrez presidency in 2000. But then by 2005, CONAIE played a less significant role in Quito’s protests against Gutierrez. This left Correa with the decisions to appeal to the lower-middle class and poor during his campaign. In this regard Ecuador and Venezuela were different. In Venezuela, political parties consolidated in order to rid of divisions for example when then President Comandante Chávez was elected and then reelected his original political party, PCV merged with other leftist parties to create the PSUV (Unites Socialist Party of Venezuela) so that the right-wing political parties, who support U.S. coups and intervention, would not control the government.

Working-Class Miners and (re)politicizing Resistance

Research by activist scholars, policy makers, and various NGOs and global institutions agencies overwhelmingly shows that indigenous, women, poor and working class have suffered disproportionately as a result of the new extractivism (Zibechi, Lowy 2015, RioFrancos 2017,

Holst 2016). During my research and conversations with members of the socialist and communist parties (PCV, PTV, PCE, PTE, and PCMLE) about their work around union support/building it was evident the working-class miners are pitted against each other in three ways: Chinese workers/miners and local Ecuadorian and Venezuelan miners fight for the job, ‘illegal’ miners coming from Colombia and other surrounding places (as discussed above with the balloon analogy) as well as recruiting local miners in illegalized mining operations antagonistic with legal miner jobs fight for the job, and legal, local miners, some of which are dispossessed peasants/indigenous to the land are having to work as a wage earner now. The internal class conflicts arising out of these divisions have been a part of igniting the radicalizing of the classes from below.

The radicalizing of civil society caused by extractive imperialism is, also, nothing new; just look at the 20th century mass mobilization across Latin America. In Venezuela, one of the first signs of anti-neoliberalism was the Caracazo Rebellion early 1989 after gas prices more than doubled due to neoliberal policies implemented by the state in favor of free market mechanisms, deregulation of state control over industries, conditions of structural adjustments from IMF and WB bailouts to impose the neoliberal reforms (Ciccariello-Maher 2016, Harvey 2007). Explosions of several buses in Caracas, Venezuela set off a round of protests and ignited resistance movements across the region. The Inti Raymi Uprising of 1990 in Ecuador followed only a year later was an indigenous movement against the brutality of the neoliberal reforms (Ciccariello-Maher 2016). However, the size and scope of resistance is changing. We see an increase in the transnationalization of resistance with global networking and solidarity movements such as the Continental Network, the AntiConquistas, the Solidarity Network, and the In Defense of Communism which all happen to be social spaces for socialist and communist organizing, political

parties, and smaller local political groups. All parts of society that have been targeted and excluded with the decrees and laws mentioned above. Consequently, there is a return to anti-communism/socialism patterns in state actions (or inaction) and in global rhetoric. Douglas Gómez and Carlos Aquino, members of the Venezuelan Communist Political Party (PCV) (miembro del Buró político del partido comunista de Venezuela) share their political line and history of how the political party self-organized transnationally in Latin America and abroad, to protect indigenous and workers' rights and to build a larger movement for the right to land, non-exploited labor, clean water, sustainable livelihoods, to promote a fight (la lucha) that appears to help (re)politicize mining revolutions. Indigenous working-class mobilization via social engines such as the PCE (Partido Comunista de Ecuador) and PCV (Partido Comunista del Venezuela) and the Continental Network has continued to broaden in scope with global solidarity bases (e.g. with Anticonquista – a communist group on the diaspora of Latin America).

The Global Extractive Regime: The Architects of Crisis Management and Manipulation

Quelling Resistance and Silencing Alternatives

The global extractive regime is the architect of crisis management and manipulation strategies found in increased criminalization of dissent and violence against the resistance. Therefore, I ask how the global extractive regime quells resistance in mega-mining 'development poles' in Ecuador and Venezuela? Both governments have used tactics of harassment of social organizations, criminalizing of dissent, disappeared activists, threats and trials that make possible for extractive imperialism to continue less interrupted. New policies, such as Venezuela's CNE (National Electoral Council) registrations process required communist parties who were anti-extractive development to list all member's names for surveillance and the Ecuadorian government pursued legal action against roughly 200 people for participating in anti-extraction demonstrations.

These crises management and manipulations are carried out by the class from above (Kirsch 2014, Petras 2015, Veltmeyer 2013).

The global extractive regime includes ruling class collaborators along the extractive value chain (EVC), presumably functioning for the pursuit of extractive capital. Because finance capital has shifted from primarily U.S. FDI to Chinese FDI in the region then the Chinese banks play a major role with bilateral agreements. To demonstrate the connections of an economics of scale that is not predicated on the consent and voices of the indigenous local people of the area, I have traced some of the settler-colonial ways in which (re)colonization physically takes place. Explocen, a U.S. corporation, provides explosives and other technological blasting equipment and services for the legal and illegalized mining zones heavily throughout the Latin American and African regions. As mentioned above, MNCs largely come from China, Canada, and the U.S. but for the case studies under review here, Chinese corporations are increasingly the choice when it comes to making bids and accepting concessions in the industry as an appropriate alternative. To consolidate an economies of scale, Chinese corporations and Canadian-based corporations collaborate with the states to gain access and legitimacy along the mega-infrastructure landscape which includes Ecuacorriente with the merged sectors from Tongling Nonferrous Investment Co. Ltd. (TNMC) and China Railway Construction Corporation Limited (CRCC), China's Shandong Gold Co. and Canada's Barrick Gold Corporation. CAMCE¹⁶, is a construction engineering affiliate of the state-owned China National Machinery Industry Corporation (SINOMACH) and Yankuang Group, coal company based in Shandong that is heavily invested in Venezuela's nickel industry.

¹⁶ See <http://www.xinhuanet.com/>

Best way to demonstrate continuities and discontinuities of a extractive development model based on intensifying the export commodities (minerals) industry to the global North/East is to find out how the ‘development’ model, predicated on an ‘extractive mentality’, is sustained and legitimized in the case studies under review. The continuities of an ‘extractive mentality’ (both nationally and globally) is upheld by the collaborators and is demonstrated in that intense extractive projects of minerals remain the alternative solutions to capitalism crises when oil prices decline, booms and bust in global cycles, and other social economic ills increase from externally influenced economic campaigns (e.g. embargos, sanctions). This mentality is to feed the global North for overconsumption of natural resources mined from the global South led by the ruling class elite owners of the means of production in the extractive industry; that is, throughout the extractive value chain (EVC). An example of how the mentality works, according to Varoufakis 2015, ex-Greek Finance Minister, is through the more recent trend of relabeling to naturalize and normalize ‘toxic theories’ (Varoufakis, 15 year) that is with the shift to post-neoliberalism in developmental states appear to be the ‘better than’ alternatives for development.

Although neoliberal strategies were not completely abandoned in the ‘pink-tide’ states of Ecuador and Venezuela (Hollender, 2015), social and economic policies were introduced to reconstruct social welfare and developmental institutions. Foreign relations were diversified away from the United States and organizations were created to advance cooperation among South American countries, leading to broadly acknowledged anti-imperialist (U.S./Yankee – Chavistas words) achievements (e.g. exiting relations with OAS to CELAC, creating regional spaces, and eco-socialism - Löwy 2015). Recently, however, drivers of change from the extractive regime have organized a countermovement, often with certain popular support, such as the right-wing counter-movements in Venezuela. State perpetuation by internal policies, regulations, decrees, and

laws created that criminalize and police dissent which have played a part in attempting to quell resistance and maintain an environment favorably to extractive operations and opposition. Strategies were implemented to undercut the legitimacy of left-wing regimes, including an ideological attack on the so-called populist political elites (e.g. Venezuelan law to recertify political parties with member names directed at communist parties specifically advancing anti-extractivism lines). As a result, they have attempted to bring down opposition by right-wing forces entrenched not only in political parties, but also in organizations encompassing key sectors of the population and civil society such as the Workers Party of Ecuador and Venezuela. Ecuadorean President Moreno did this despite active opposition from indigenous peoples whose ancestral territories surrounded by mega-mining pits path. In fact, Moreno's government's current economic plans align with previous neoliberal ones.

Tracing Parallels and Discontinuities: from Washington to Beijing

In Ecuador and Venezuela, the puzzle many researchers are grappling with is how the 'new' extractivism is taking place if governments are seemingly post-neoliberal and anti-imperialism/anti-Washington Consensus. The global capitalism-imperialism era can be best exemplified by tracing, what appears to be political-economic orientations shifting from the Washington Consensus (WC) to the Commodity Consensus (CC) to what some call the 'Beijing Consensus' (BC) (Yin-Huang To & Acuña 2018). The WC began with the U.S.-led neoliberal project of the 1980s to the 1990s consisting of development aid, loans, and structural adjustments creating a donor/donee uneven relationship between the global North and global South.

The commodities boom moment, or commodity super cycle, relates to the increased global demand of resources in the early 2000s¹⁷. Over a span of fourteen years, (2000-2014), a rise of

¹⁷ See the UN General Assembly Documents on World Commodities*

physical commodity prices such as foods, oil, and metals, following the great commodities depression of the 1980s to 1990s which coincidentally coincides with the neoliberal era pushed by the Washington Consensus, left many global South countries in the African and Latin American regions fewer choices but to extend economic policies in their other industries as described above. Some discourse around the direction of actual commodities trade and demand of certain key commodities point to, in a simplified way, a global competition over positions of power between the U.S. hegemony enjoyed since roughly post-WWII and NICs (newly industrialized countries) status such as China. Within that rhetoric, the Beijing Consensus (BC) was coined by Goldman Sachs Joshua Ramo in 2004 to counter that China's role or development model was anything more than a change of power in the global economy (Hudson 2010) . In contrast to that thought coming from one of the 'too-big-to-fail' bailed out banks during the 2008 global economic bust, anti-U.S. imperialism/anti-neoliberalism movements believed the transition from a WC to a CC necessary to depart from neoliberal, imperial policies to a China-alternative based on a South-South cooperation (Vadell 2018, Svampa 2013). In 2001, when China joined the WTO with its policy on 'going global' is when trade with the Global South increased for China.¹⁸ China's trade policies characterized as exporter of manufactured goods; importer of natural resources was predicated on mutual understandings rather than conditionalities of the U.S.-led structural adjustments kind.

One of the better explanations on the distinction between the parallels and differences in the Chinese relationship in the extractive regime is Vadell's 2018 work highlighting key modes of interdependence between China and Latin America; in which five of the six indicators correlate to the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan experience. An extractive industry typically operates through trade, loans, investments, 'special economic zones', financial expansion, and cooperation. Bi-

¹⁸ See China 2011, White Paper Chinese Government

lateral trade agreements between China and Ecuador and China and Venezuela were intended to replace some of the U.S.-led agreements such as the case with OAS in addition to the regional agreements. Loans from the China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank of China, which includes PetroChina, Sinopec, China Construction Bank, invested \$21 billion to various infrastructure projects in Ecuador and Venezuela for the ‘special economic zones’ and FDI was considerably rising with \$20.6 billion to Venezuela and \$2.8 billion to Ecuador according to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce; promoting the two ‘special economic zones’ in the Andean region. Investments in this policy include funds for export-oriented industrialization abroad and economic incentives to Chinese companies in *China’s ‘Patient Capital’ Strategy*. Since 2005, a focus of Chinese FDI has been on mining and oil extraction projects (China-CELAC, 2015) and investments balancing with infrastructure and transportation projects in contrast to previous WB/IMF loans and conditions. A goal of this since the 1980s was for China to increase its economies of scale in small enterprise in the industry (i.e. machinery, experts, equipment etc. (Vadell 2018) and labor (Yin-Hang To & Acuña 2018). Within this settler-colonial infrastructure throughout the EVC (extractive value chain), a South-South Cooperation exists. China, as an emerging aid-donor, still a developing country, is viewed as an alternative with the principles of South-South cooperation in contrast from western aid in that there are no imposing of political conditions or neoliberal development models. In fact, policy papers with China and Latin America do not name it ‘aid’; rather, multilateral relations with ‘inclusions’ and ‘mutual benefit’ (Vadell 2018). However, in the case of Ecuador, anti-extractivism movements see the state-to-state relations with China no different than the days of anti-neoliberal resistance (Riofrancos 2020).

A People's Alternative: Decolonizing Infrastructure and a Post-Extractivism

Transnationalization from Below

Above, I addressed the targeted population by the extractive regime and its consequences and here I will address the emerging working-class, predominately indigenous proletarian, anti-extractivism movements as to how they have heightened the transnationalization of resistance with solidarity networks globally with other oppressed working-class resource radicals (RioFrancos 2017, 2020, Guerra & Guerra 2019). There are many community organizations, collectives, and coalitions that make up the alliances within the 'anti' movements; for the purpose of this research, I am looking at the political-economic actors that have been on the margins in access to government visibility, as discussed here, but that focus on alternative revolutionary strategies on a macro scale and that participate in transnationalization from below such as the Continental Network. In Ecuador, indigenous working-class miners began a strike against the Explocen Corporation and began union building due to exploitation of its workers, lack of safety regulations and sustainable living wages. The workers strike and subsequent organizing against the corporation remains supported by the PCE and the Youth PCE in which many of the miners are a member. The resistance, or resource radicals (RioFrancos 2020), discussed here are those that recently are targeted and marginalized by state policies and actions that are intended for parts of society having to do with anti-extractivism. They are also those that either directly are impacted by/working for a part of the EVC; miners and laborers in corporations directly tied to the EVC.

In Venezuela, the resistance is asking for a post-extractivism in that its' (de) scaled, nationalized, anti-extractivism, not foreign operated, and to give jobs to locals rather than fellow Chinese working-class miners that migrate with MNCs. In Contrast, in Ecuador resistance is demanding more so, than Venezuela for a degrowth model with considerations of a no-

extractivism agenda (Kallis 2012). Revolutionary strategies that continue decolonization efforts address a post-extractivism based on what I call a People's alternative striving to building a beyond the settler-colonial infrastructure and ridding of the 'colonization companies' (LaDuke and Cowen 2020). In fact, "Infrastructure is not inherently colonial – it is also essential for transformation; a pipe can carry fresh water as well as toxic sludge. We suggest that effective initiatives for justice, decolonization, and planetary survival must center infrastructure in their efforts, and we highlight *alimentary infrastructure* – infrastructure that is life-giving in its design, finance, and effects (LaDuke and Cowen 2020, 245)."

Conclusions: Discussion and Interpretations

It appears that the extractive infrastructures constitute contemporary (re)colonization of spaces that have undergone original colonization, a period of decolonization, to a 21st century (re)colonization to maintain a global extractive imperialism. In this sense, we can say that the oppressed working-class proletariat miners and peasants (indigenous peoples dispossessed of their land), lumpenproletariat, that their bodies become part of the settler-colonial infrastructure, through a process of structural violence. To suggest that settler-colonial infrastructure as violent but also potential healing sites leads to questions about the potential implications of an alimentary infrastructure project for other regions, such as African countries, experiencing 'new' extractivism.

Other questions important to consider are what of the implications of increased Chinese economic presence in Latin America? While it is clear that China's relations with Ecuador and Venezuela proved to be more a South-South cooperation and alternative to neoliberalism, we must consider the people's concerns when protestor signs, comparatively, during the mass mobilizations against MNCS in mining and agriculture, read 'U.S. corporations go home!' And the signs in the

21st century read ‘Chinese corporations, go home!’. Extractive capital is a representation of the continued and (re)colonization of the global South through intensified exploitive relations.

My interpretation about the assumptions under a ‘free-market’ versus a ‘closed-market’ labeled as ‘illegal’ in an informal market contributes to the normalizing of criminalizing those that participate in the informal economic activity. The state, presumable a co-creator of legality via mechanisms of laws, decrees, policies etc. participates in naturalization/normalizing the criminalization and further deepening racialized, oppressions of indigenous peoples and the youth where young children also migrate to work in ‘illegal’ mining sites. ‘Free-market’ assumes commodities, that is, land, people/labor, sacred sources of livelihoods, are equally ‘free’ can be accounted for, usually only as attributed to GDP and therefore, anything outside of this is ‘illegal’, unaccounted, invisible in policy, and lacks ‘value’ for the global capitalist-imperialist system.

Although 21st century socialist states have been accomplices to sustaining extractive imperialism, they have been successful at ‘doing’ extractivism ‘better’ in terms of increasing social welfare benefits overall. However, a real alternative will account for the marginalized and silenced voices from below, indigenous knowledge and infrastructure answers to local voices as well as mother earth because extractive imperialism is not sustainable.

“Life is worth more than gold” (Kuyujani Organization at the 20th Ordinary General Assembly in 2016, A Socialist Organization in Venezuela)¹⁹

“We’re like the grass of the mountain that grows back again after being cut, and as mountain grass we will cover the world.” Dolores Cacuango ‘Mama Doloreyuki’, 1964 in Quito, Ecuador.

¹⁹ <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/11980>

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