

## **Decolonizing Settler-Colonial Infrastructure: Lessons from the (Neo)Anti-Extractivist Revolutionary Strategies and Trans-Solidarity**

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### **Introduction**

*“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.*

The Andean states all ‘emerged’ from right-wing (authoritarian) models of governance in the late 1970s and underwent periods of broadly ‘neoliberal’ economic restructuring in the 1990s. But with marked differences between the cases, they also needed to contend with large indigenous sectors of the electorate, strong traditions of economic nationalism (notably around state oil companies), and the social consequences of extractivism, particularly the power of foreign mining companies. These shared features gave rise to a distinctive set of ‘state crafting’ challenges, including the potential for lapsing into ‘state capture’. I will review and compare the different national trajectories of Ecuador and Venezuela and situate these Andean cases within the analytical framework advanced here. To use a Marxist understanding of extractive imperialism (EI)<sup>1</sup> and critical indigenous studies (CIS) as a lens for social mobilization/anti-extractivism research, I adapt and borrow from both groups of theorists. Extractive imperialism and CIS in anti-extractivism can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on global extractivism, colonialism, and class as it relates to state and society efforts to decolonize, what I refer to as a (neo)anti-extractivism. The explanatory power in extractive imperialism as a theoretical class

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<sup>1</sup> Often under Critical Development Studies, and increasingly in International Political Economy, in the more critical economics.

analysis (Acosta, Gudynas, & Svampa as neo-extractivism and Petras & Veltmeyer) and the explanatory nature of the case studies here that examines the dynamics of the new extractivism in its context of the Ecuadoran Copper Mining Belt (CMB) and the Venezuelan Orinoco Mining Belt (OMA/B) is where my research is set for comparative reasons.

In this paper, I demonstrate the above by analyzing extractivism imperialism in what it does (accumulates by extractivism<sup>2</sup> and prioritizes commodity export), by the social and environmental consequences caused by accelerating cycles of exploitation, and by the reactions that arise out of the internal/external class struggle. I explain the nature of mining in the two case studies, the rise of conflict zones, and the nature of internal resistance and class struggle to settler-colonialism.

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

#### *Ecuador and Venezuela: The Veins Remain Open*

In a 2008 interview,<sup>3</sup> then President Comandante Hugo Chávez commented on the Orinoco 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 a U.S. colony, but they liberated it,

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<sup>2</sup> Accumulation by extractivism is 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 (discussed in Chapter 3). A word on LaDuke & Cowen’s (2020) ‘how’ in settler-colonialism is in reference to the decolonial and anti-colonial works that interrogate extractive projects as nothing new but ongoing processes of (re)colonizing of indigenous lands. Taking from this scholarship, settler-colonialism refers to the operating through internal and external colonial modes and is used here as an analytical tool to understand larger imperial projects as on-going internal and external colonial modes which is distinct in that it functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that over time develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. This is to say that settler-colonial societies do not stop being colonial when political allegiance is severed and continue attempting to eliminate the challenges brought forward by indigenous resistance, e.g., LandBack movements. Scholars in decolonial and anti-colonial scholarship, that I borrow from, argue that settler-colonialism is a structure not an event (Barker 2012, LaDuke & Cowan 2020, Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel 2014, Wolfe 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See “The Threat”, documentary by Luzi and Bellino, 2008

addressing the anti-U.S. imperialism sentiment, “...and this oil is for the world, for the peoples of the world”. On May 1, 2007, fourteen years ago, Venezuela nationalized the oil belt during a visit to the State of Anzoátegui, Comandante Chávez declared 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 increased social welfare spending which proved to be successful (Golinger 2008, Llambi 2018, & Spanakos & Pantoulas 2017).

This is one of the moves promoting extractivism that appears as a contradiction, calling into question whether socialist leaders were going to end extractivism or do the extractive industry any better. Can a socialist leader be actively engaged in promoting an extractivist project at this size and promote working-class betterment? But for the case of Venezuela the decision to implement such projects comes from the on-going sanctions against its economy from the U.S.

The project in Venezuela is known as the “Orinoco Mining Arc” (OMA) and 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 coltan<sup>4</sup>, 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 “National Strategic Development Zone’ Decree in the Guiana Highlands. The government decree, backed with armed military control, created a national mining arc and coined

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<sup>4</sup> Coltan, short for columbite-tantalum, is an essential resource in electronic devices such as cell phones and satellites.

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 decree above were 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 2012-2016,<sup>5</sup> exploits not only approximately 12 percent of Venezuela's landmass but also a large portion of the Guiana Shield, a resource-rich area crossing over to Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil, and French Guiana. The settler-colonial infrastructure intensity is exemplified in the changes between the 'old' extractivism and the '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 2009<sup>6</sup>. See Table 1.1 below for more details.

According to RAISG (Red Amazónica de Información Socioambiental Georeferenciada), the OMA is 24 percent of the Guayana region (111,843.70 Km<sup>2</sup>) 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 60 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 64 percent of the OMA is natural rainforest and forested areas.<sup>7</sup> Important areas in the Guayana region are not completely protected from legal or 'illegalized'<sup>8</sup> mining impacts. One of the conflict mining zones in the Canama National Park area is currently

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<sup>5</sup> See IHS Markit, US Geological Survey, Environmental Justice Atlas

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network RAISG at <https://www.amazoniasocioambiental.org/en/about/>

<sup>8</sup> I use the term 'illegalized' to draw attention to the political and social processes by which unauthorized miners accrue an identity that carries social stigma and vulnerability to state violence. Sati (2017) writes on the discourse around 'illegalized' immigrants and this linguistic turn is useful here in a different context; however, similar to de-naturalize processes of illegality.

being threatened by illegalized mining and dispossessions of land. I take up this issue in detail below. In the Guayana Region are 19 indigenous tribes; 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 ‘illegal’ mining zones, 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 zones grew to approximately 16,000 miners but this was an extraordinary 332 percent increase from the previous two years.<sup>9</sup> According to the UNCTAD 2019 Report on a ‘free-market’ price index, commodity prices growth rate illustrates an 11.3 percent increase per year on mineral, ores, and metals.<sup>10</sup> However, the implication is that ‘free-market’ means 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.

The intensification in accumulation by extractivism by size/area is further explicated in Ecuador. 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’s 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

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://miningwatch.ca/>

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsdsicpb2020d2\\_en.pdf](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.

(MAAP), a large part of the Ecuadorean mining belt is the El Mirador project (primarily copper) that covers 9,928 hectares spanning 11 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 are deforested, and thirty-two indigenous families have been evicted/displaced. 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 in Mirador, Mirador Norte, Panantza and San Carlos. Six additional copper exploration targets have been identified in the Corriente Copper Belt in La Florida, San Luis, San Marcos, San Miguel, Sutzú and Dolorosa to date (Bank Track 2016, Mazabanda et al. 2018).

### *Oil to Minerals*

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 while historically having some slow bleeding moments. The tourniquet is off now 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.

To trace the changes from ‘oil to minerals’, I begin looking at GDP which is typically used to determine ‘growth’ for the purpose of characterizing the new extractivism era. In the tables below we see that for Ecuador the amount of resource rents (extractive capital) in 2016 and 2018 are similar to its 1998 figures. It is in those periods that Ecuador was in its original neoliberal

moment of the 1990s and its recent return to neoliberalism. When compared to its 21<sup>st</sup> century socialist turn there were higher rates of GDP wealth from extractive capital and increased social welfare programs. Both Ecuador and Venezuela experienced a significant decrease from 2008 to 2009, presumably because of the global economic crises but subsequently an extraordinary jump in 2011. These trends are further explained below.

In Venezuela, as oil prices went up roughly between 2012-2016, crude petroleum production decreased at a rate of 34 percent within a five-year period, that is production from 2014 to 2019 significantly decreased by 91,884 ('000 metric tonnes). According to the Central Bank of Venezuela<sup>11</sup>, the price of gold went up from \$1067.88 in 2015 to \$1501.64 in 2019. However, in table 1.1 below, we see that production decreased significantly enough that the sale of gold went from \$1.1 billion to \$72.1 million in 2019. A state's economy predominately relying on its real and potential oil production would naturally seek other revenues in different economic sectors and in this case the states depended on other extractive mining industries.

Ecuador's crude petroleum production also had a sharp decline, but it slowly triggered the same trend to increased extractive intensity in mineral mining in an attempt to answer to the commodity boom and declining oil prices. In Ecuador, gold extraction increased substantially from 2017-2018, at a rate of 6,368 to 8,213 ('000 metric tonnes). This is to say that in a one-year period there was a 77 percent increase in production of one commodity. For Ecuador's oil production it is going back to its 2015 status of 550 barrels per day (bpd) in 2019. This increase could be assumed to reflect the transition back to neoliberalism. Venezuela's oil production decreased to 550 bpd in 2020 as a reflection of the U.S. sanctions.

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.bcv.org.ve/minerales-estrategicos/precio-del-oro>

According to Szczesniak (2016), a mineral industry analyst for many of the banks and corporations invested in extractive capital in the region, Venezuela's oil reserves was the largest in the world with 18 percent in 2015 in which 74 percent of its reserves are in the OMB. Mineral commodities in the area are significantly increasing since 2015 in bauxite, diamond, gold iron, nickel, cement, steel, and more. Venezuela produces approximately 2 percent of the global iron supply and 0.6 percent of the global bauxite. To be sure, oil remains a part of the natural resources extracted more so in Venezuela than in Ecuador, but in the new extractivism era the push to open up extractive industries encourages increasing mineral mining. For example, in Ecuador mineral mining production was at a record low in 2009 and reached an all-time high in 2014 of 28,385 ('000 metric tonnes) and holding an average of 26,741 ('000 metric tonnes) by 2019 and Venezuela's low, as almost exact opposite, was in 2019 at 71,445 ('000 metric tonnes) and its high in 2012 at 191,207 ('000 metric tonnes).<sup>12</sup> As discussed above, copper exploitation in Ecuador is becoming a major part of its economy to feed China's demand of 12,794 metric tons per year of copper which is the world's largest consumer of metal (Quiliconi & Vasco 2021, CEPAL 2021). Table 1.1 below does not reflect copper production because data for copper is missing in most major databases<sup>13</sup> and only counts for the more recent project sites in Ecuador. In 2019, when the El Mirador project began it produced 10,000 tons per day and reserves in 2021 have been measured at 3.5 million tons (CEPAL, Quiliconi & Vasco 2021). Oil industries have a history of nationalizing, but as with Ecuador and its fairly newly exploited copper mining, it is important to highlight the economic transitions from oil to minerals these two countries go through because I believe it is part of the rhetoric that states will 'naturally' open up other extractive sectors if their

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<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/ecuador/minerals-production> and <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/venezuela/minerals-production>

<sup>13</sup> As in the EITI database they note that because Ecuador is a new member it has not gone through its data collection and reporting yet.



oil industry is compromised. This leads to part of the ‘extractive mentality’ and legitimacy given to the state policies by its people.

In Venezuela during the Maduro led government, the trend of centering mineral mining to oil is changing upward because of new economic measures pressured from external forces, including the U.S. economic sanctions, the commodity boom – now ‘post’ pandemic recovery, the decrease of oil prices, and continued anti-imperialism efforts. As reported by ECLAC, when Venezuelan FDI was expected to decrease it proved to increase by 332 percent in 2015 during a time when Venezuela’s political and economic situation deterred many foreign investors from the North. However, this did not deter China from investing and creating bi-lateral agreements with both Ecuador and Venezuela. China’s relations began with investments in infrastructure of up to \$20 billion alone in 2015 from its Export Import Bank of China and China Development Bank. U.S. based manufacturing companies such as Ford Motors and GM Co. were forced to halt production and subsequently were replaced with Chinese companies.

**Table 1.1: Comparison: Settler-Colonial ‘Old’ versus ‘New’ Extractivism for Ecuador and Venezuela (Years/‘000 Metric Tonnes)**

	<b>1993</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Ecuador:</b> <b>‘National Development Zone’</b>				
Gold	12.5	5.4	6.2	8.2
Silver	.06	.115	1.5	1
Oil*	---	450	550	517
	<b>1970</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Venezuela:</b> <b>‘National Development Zone’</b>				
Gold	1	10	1,056	.480
Bauxite	0	5	2.5	.9
Iron	25	15	12	8
Oil*	---	2,225	2,400	1,900

*Compiled by the author from USGS, BCE, BCV, IHS Markit, Environmental Justice Atlas and CEIC. \*Crude oil production (bpd)*

While mega-extractivism projects, in both cases, share a common core of attributes between the case, marked differences between the experiences in Copper Mining Belt in Ecuador and the Orinoco Mining Belt in Venezuela can also be identified. Below I present a comparative review of these two mega-extractivist projects.

*Principal Components of the Extractivist Settler-Colonial Projects*

Here, I draw attention to the principal components to summarize a comparative view of how mining investors and states read about these areas from international and legal reports when making decisions about where and when to invest as well as what kinds of projected complications they may run into and need to creatively strategize how to minimize and overcome certain obstacles. Both case studies include mega-infrastructure projects paid for/promoted by foreign countries but also through bi-national agreements. However, Ecuador over the last few years has pulled out of participating in regional integration, whereas Venezuela continues in pursuit of collaborative regional integration beginning with ALBA (Hirst 2020) and Castro in 2001 to CELAC and continued socialist talks with newly leftist Latin American countries, e.g., Peru (Castillo) and Colombia (Petro). While China's presence is notable in both cases, China's economic policies at home play out differently in Venezuela where Xi Jinping is reported to have continued a historical Chinese policy, the Great Belt and Road Economic Initiative, to advance a global infrastructure development plan that began in 2013 (Li & Zhu 2019, Li 2008). Under this initiative we see increased mega-infrastructure projects connected to the mega-extractive projects under review. This relationship with Latin America in general, and with Ecuador and Venezuela specifically, has contributed not only to the external politics but also the internal politics.

The principal characteristics of mega-infrastructure (resides in the public domain) and mega-extractive projects (resides in the private domain), as described here, provide a comparative

view between the public and private spheres where there are opportunities/space for public involvement and influence. During zoom meetings in 2020 with the Communist Parties of Ecuador and Venezuela (PCE) and (PCV) members as well as some of the Chavista municipal meetings, there were discussions on the importance of socialist/communist parties in government positions addressing how more of the spaces could be reached. Often times the decision-making processes and planning regarding whether public capital should fund the infrastructure as well as decision-making around the bids/concessions given to private corporations that many of the rural indigenous peoples were not given voice in those outcomes. As these components relate to private enterprise, some dynamics play out as ‘gatekeeping’. Legal frameworks have been a combination of bi-national agreements for infrastructure projects and free-trade treaties for both countries. The difference between the two is a matter of who the agreements and treaties are with. Venezuela remains committed to regional free-trade zones within Latin America, e.g., ALBA, as well as open to bi-national agreements with China and other countries that are willing to combat U.S. sanctions. In Ecuador, it is important to note that with a conservative presidency and the last few years of returning to neoliberalism that free-trade treaties are reverting back to agreements with western partners. This is true for public policies, but we can see that Ecuador is choosing this pattern for both public and private domains. Outlining these differences is important because the public domain is where mega-infrastructure is funded with public capital and therefore, the planning and decision-making around what infrastructure should or should not be built comes from the public domain.

In 2012, Ecuador negotiated a ‘commercial association’ with the European Union (E.U.) which essentially translates to a ‘free-trade treaty’ under concepts being used such as ‘partnerships’, and these trans-pacific partnerships specifically exclude China. These relations

within the policies and public domain actually translate into giving preferential treatment to private enterprise/investors which often excludes ‘public’ control i.e., indigenous, working-class voices, especially women who cannot participate due to economic restrictions. Since 2016, Ecuador has experienced new mining regulations and laws that began with oil tax laws that did not attract investors to mining because investors in mining are not willing to pay the 70 percent windfall profit tax on excess profits to the Ecuadorian government and neoliberal policies would correct this regulatory tax.

The private domain is typically shielded from public input (from the people) and remains reviewed by the MNCs and the state. However, the contractual processes and licensing phases come under public review. Those have been the place for the most successful opposition to extractive projects. It appears that public input has been more successful in Venezuela than Ecuador when comparing neoliberal-post-neoliberal moments. The differences between Ecuador’s and Venezuela’s government responses to worker’s and indigenous community grievances, detailed below, is an indicator of public access in particular phases of extraction activity. Gatekeeping seems to increase as governments answer to neoliberal policies and Western dominated commitments. Because of the sources of political pressure points in each of the case studies it was important here as the strategic positioning of the oppositions given two major areas in mega-infrastructure and mega-extractive projects of planning and decision-making process and license and contractual processes (Mining Law 45 Ecuador 2018, Bustamante 2021). In Ecuador, because there was a return to U.S. military occupation (e.g., the base in Galapagos Island) against its Constitution, there are external factors playing a part in deregulating the contract and licenses processes.<sup>14</sup> In Venezuela, the external U.S. sanctions have an impact on its economy, but here I

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<sup>14</sup> See National Assembly Legislative and Supervisory Commission, Ecuador, <https://www.presidencia.gob.ec/>

would like to highlight the internal political pressure points of increased internal regulations around national protected areas (ABRAE). Once areas are ‘protected’ as national interest areas, there is less privatization of land areas by external corporations.

With the new global landscape states appear to be taking advantage of the U.S./China hegemonic competition and GCB/’post’ pandemic economic recovery to fund infrastructure projects, roads, railroads, etc., leading to extractive project sites to build more of their resources. For example, according to the CEIC reports, Venezuela’s exports grew considerably to approximately \$300 million in 2018 from its low in 2013 of \$130 million. In Ecuador the reports showed that its exports increased to \$2.2 billion now given the 2020-2021 push to increase copper exports for pandemic recovery when it was averaging a little under \$2 billion since 2018. It is not necessarily translating to the masses as such, given the deregulation in Ecuador, less public involvement is required to make things happen and increased regulation in Venezuela appears as environmental safeguards with little public participation, leaving some questions around the collective rights of people and Mother Earth (Pachamama). Both components of mega-infrastructure and mega-extractive projects and their related connectedness (where mega-infrastructure projects seem to be enabling the extractive project economic activities) here are currently experiencing the accelerating cycles of the new extractivism and demonstrate a pattern towards continuation of this trend for the coming years.

### **Conflict Zones, Resistance, and Contestation**

#### *Informal (Illegal) Mining and Exploitation*

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 that are

confronted by infrastructure of indigenous resistance, in this case from resource radicals (Riofrancos 2020) of the (neo)anti-extractivism era. 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 Ecuacorriente, 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. These infrastructures have been 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’.

Other settler-colonial sites of struggle are exemplified in the Andean conflict zones<sup>15</sup> impacted by settler-colonial jurisdiction issues. Several areas surrounding the mining belts have been listed as conflict zones because of ongoing ‘illegalized’ operations that have devastating consequences. Two prominent active gold and coltan mining zones in Venezuela, the Bajo Río 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, as reported by Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina – Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America (OCMAL), but with reported findings of mercury in the water affecting the local, displaced

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<sup>15</sup> See OCMAL – Observatorio de conflictos mineros de america latina at <https://www.ocmal.org/ocmal/>

Indígena 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 ‘illegalized’ mining operations (Celis 2017, Velásquez 2018).



Fig. 1.1 Ecuador’s conflict zone projects from Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/)



Fig. 1.2 Ecuador’s conflict zones with criminalization of protests recorded from Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/)



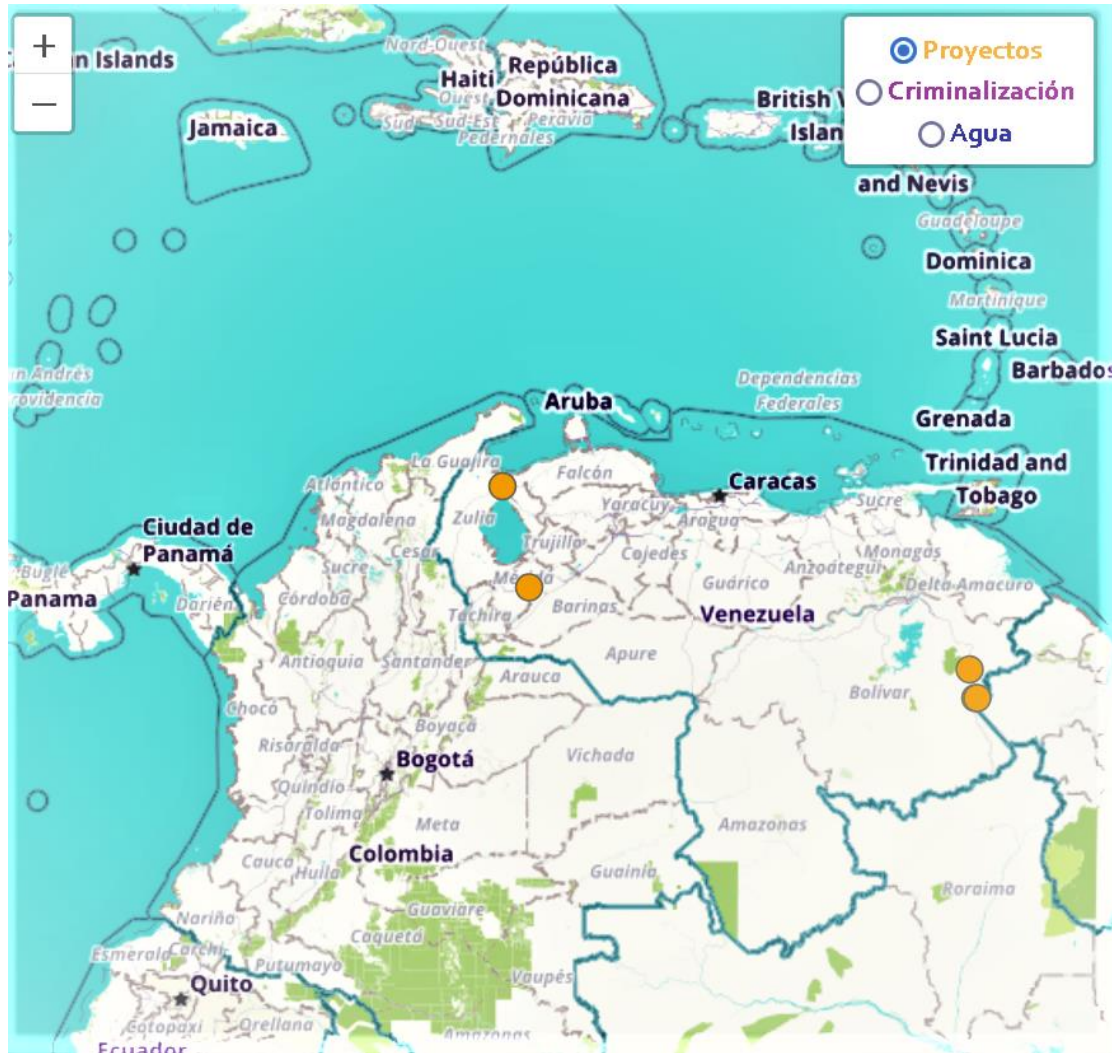


Fig. 1.3 Venezuela’s conflict zone projects from Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/)

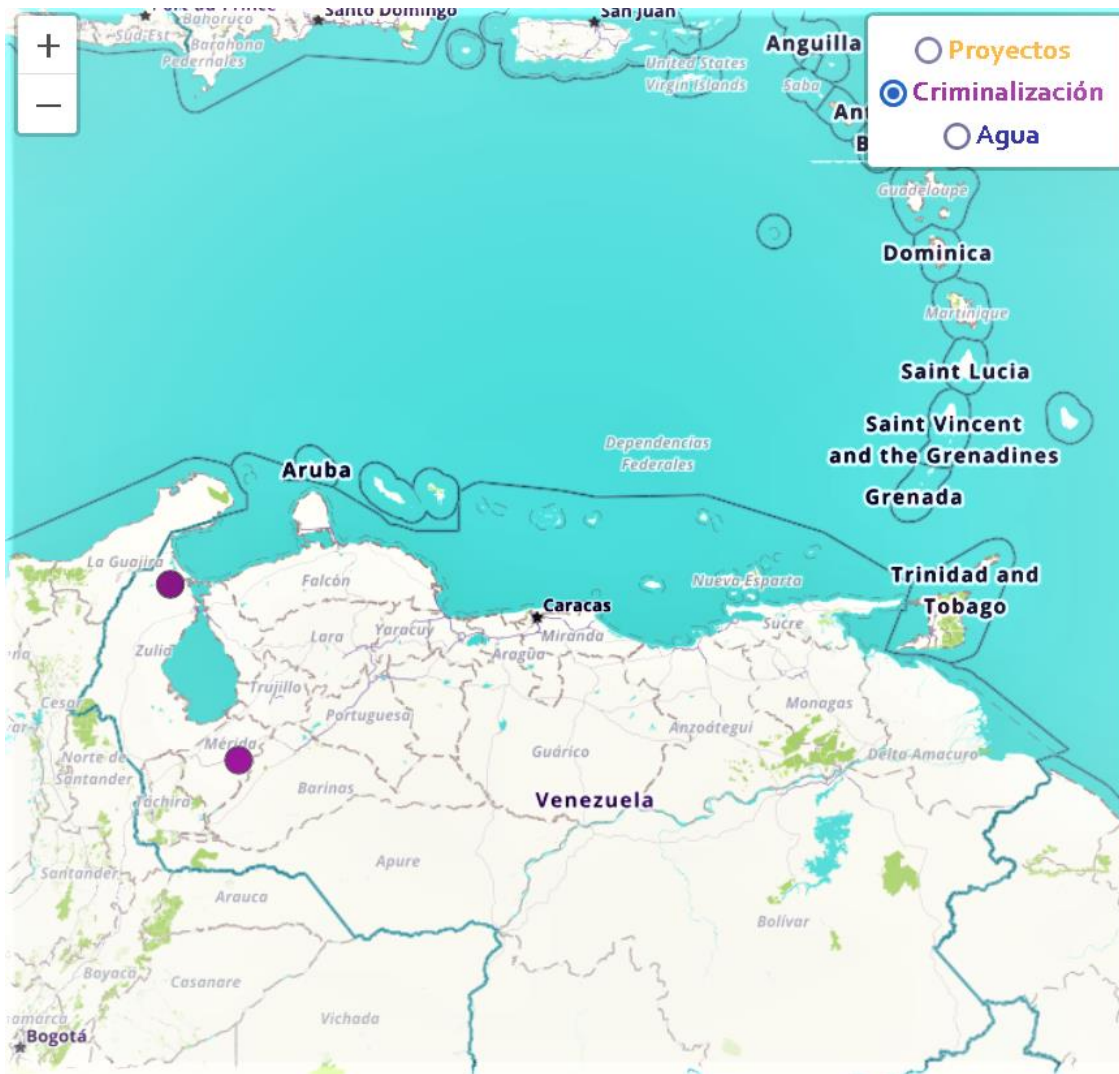


Fig. 1.4 Venezuela's conflict zones with criminalization of protests recorded from Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/)

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 they are found to be fewer in number. According to one of the locals, Simón Bastidas, a Mapoyo Chief in El Palomo, illegalized mining includes selling the gold to the highest bidder instead of to the government so there are known 'crime bosses.' It is reported that Juarcho is one

of the leaders in the mining town Las Claritas in Venezuelan State of Bolivar where mafias want control of unlicensed, gold mines.<sup>16</sup> According to the reports, two locals in the area, Kurmanaev and Ramirez, found seventeen Venezuelan miners' bodies in 2019.

*'An Army of Miners'*

Responses to this have come from the state and civil society. The Venezuelan government created the Socialist Mining Brigades 'An Army of Miners' 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 August 2016 decree and subsequent policies under this project of the Socialist Mining Brigades was that the miners would no longer use mercury because President Maduro banned the use of the dangerous chemical in any mining operations. State leaders have called for an increase in militia movements that consist of the anti-neoliberal/extractivism protestors, community members, and coalitions (detailed later). While Maduro argued on the eve of the OMA opening, the project 'is beyond eco-friendly, it is eco-socialist', anti-extractivist protestors reiterated familiar slogans 'mining is a death project'. This state-sponsored program can be viewed as one way in which the Venezuelan government is better at addressing workers grievances than Ecuador. In the public domain, discussed above, we see that Venezuela answered to the worker's interests and created the Socialist Brigades and the Chavistas 7-point plan

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://elestimulo.com/provea-revela-nombres-de-asesinados-en-el-caso-ikabaru/>

discussed below, to alleviate the illegal mining. In contrast, Ecuador's government during its neoliberal moments, sometimes called 'progressive imperialist', created more policies in opposition to worker's demands.

While the redistribution of the gold capital has played out as outlined in the Socialist Mining Brigade initiative, the motives are questioned by the opposition party, Encuentro Ciudadano, which has filed legal suit against the OMA project for environmental crimes and unsustainable mining laws (Vilhena & Cunha 2021). In addition, as of July 2021, reports of high levels of mercury in the gold mining sectors of the State of Bolivar have been detected by the International Pollutant Elimination Network (IPEN), which did a study that traced mercury levels in various cases of Latin America.<sup>17</sup> The report found that after five years the decree had not been enforced because high levels of mercury in women and children from indigenous groups near the gold mines were recently recorded in 2021. The conclusive report, along with the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI), claims 'this chemical element is a neurotoxic substance that presents a severe threat to both women's health and that of fetuses' (IPEN, BRI 2021). According to the studies and to the Sinchi Warmi (Strong Woman) women's collective in Ecuador, waterways remained contaminated, even after a long dispute they won to have a mining concession cancelled in 2018 in the Río Blanco community (one of the conflict zones mentioned above).<sup>18</sup>

Legal action opposing the creation of the OMA Decree in Venezuela was taken by former government ministers collaborating with civil society to form a united anti-extractivism platform, Platform for the Annulment of the OMA Decree (Plataforma por la Nulidad del Decreto del Arco Minero del Orinoco). Part of the decree includes that territorial domain can be enforced by military forces and thus war can be declared on constitutional merits. The legal action declared the zone

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://ipen.org/> and Hernandez 2021

<sup>18</sup> See Cabildo Popular por el Agua de Cuenca and Barzallo 2021

as unconstitutional and that it 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 ULA (El Grupo de Trabajo sobre Asuntos Indígenas de la Universidad de Los Andes – The Working Group on Indigenous Affairs at the University of the Andes). This ongoing site of struggle is only one of the many ways resistance has countered the settler-colonial infrastructure.

### **Transnationalization of Resistance and Trans-Solidarity**

*“The struggle is global.”*  
*“We are in service to communicate the truth to the peoples.”*  
*Camarada ‘Chema’ José M. Romero, Mayor and Chavista Lieutenant, 2021*

As a (neo)anti-extractivism takes shape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we see both new and old ways of resistance strategies and tactics flourishing throughout not only the conflict zones in mega-extractive sites of struggles, but also globally, in other areas of similar contention. Some of the shared objectives among resistance movements are their ability and capacity to organize and disrupt production and exchange and to combat the marginalization of the socio-political alternatives to mainstream development in extractivism.

#### *Transnationalization from Below*

Above, I addressed the population targeted by the extractive regime and its consequences and I will now address the emerging working-class, predominately indigenous proletarian, anti-extractivism movements as to how they have heightened the transnationalization of resistance through solidarity networks globally with other oppressed working-class resource radicals (Guerra & Guerra 2019, Riofrancos 2017, 2020). 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, but that focus on alternative revolutionary strategies on a macro scale and participate in transnationalization from below, such as the Continental Network, a social movements hub and platform for anti-neoliberal anti-imperial opposition. In Ecuador, indigenous working-class miners began a strike against the Explocen Corporation and launched union building due to exploitation of its workers, and the 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 recently targeted and marginalized by state policies and actions that are intended for the parts of society involved with anti-extractivism. They are also those that are directly 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. A study by the Collective on Chinese Financing and Investment, Human Rights and Environment (CICDHA – as its Spanish acronym),<sup>19</sup> confirms the talks I had with members of the PCV and collectives mentioned below that are seeking state assistance and legal recourse for claims that Chinese companies are violating Venezuelan labor laws. The violations include outsourcing to third parties when recruitment processes for workers take place which is banned under the labor protections, and unionizing workers is deterred with no protections. Another violation reported is the wage inequality between the Chinese workers and Venezuelan workers. The report found that Chinese workers pay was

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<sup>19</sup> See <https://cooperacion.org.pe/derechos-colectivos-e-industrias-extractivas/> (CICDHA) Colectivo sobre Financiamiento e Inversiones Chinas, Derechos Humanos y Ambiente (2021)

more than \$2,000 (US) as opposed to the \$350 (US) for Venezuelan workers and that Chinese workers often times held higher positions (CICDHA, Carrillo 2021). Here, it is important to draw attention to the ambiguity behind the state's role when the government creates policies and programs, such as the mining brigade discussed above, to help resolve workers' concerns yet continues to open up its nationalized industry to private Chinese firms that gain many of the OMA concessions, and violate labor laws, no different than other global extractive regime behavior. In contrast, in Ecuador resistance is demanding more so than Venezuela for a degrowth model with considerations of a no-extractivism agenda (Kallis 2012, Mantovani et. al. 2019).

Revolutionary strategies that continue decolonization efforts address a post-extractivism based on what I call a People's alternative striving to build beyond the settler-colonial infrastructure and eliminate 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)."

Resistance characterized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took shape around not only independence struggles but also against/in response to the violently led massive dispossession of indigenous lands, genocides, and forced integrations into wage-labor and private property during colonialism and beyond in Latin America. In this sense, resistance is not a new phenomenon for the region and implies a degree of resilience. The processes of the new extractivism are not something new but the size and scope is the radicalizing of civil society is also nothing new if we look at mobilization across Latin America in the 2000s. In Venezuela, one of the first signs of



anti-neoliberalism was the Caracazo Rebellion in 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, and 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 that 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, from 2008 to 2020, such as the Continental Network,<sup>20</sup> the Anticonquista,<sup>21</sup> the Solidarity Network,<sup>22</sup> and the In Defense of Communism (twitter-based virtual unity space),<sup>23</sup> which all happen to be social spaces for socialist and communist organizing, political parties, and smaller local political groups 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 Political Bureau of the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) (miembros 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

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<sup>20</sup> Comprised of various socialist/communist groups/organizations that meet often times under the umbrella group of CIPOML (International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations) - <http://cipoml.net/en/>

<sup>21</sup> See <https://anticonquista.com/>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.solidnet.org/home/> - not only a media hub but also organization of various communist groups since 2008

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.idcommunism.com/> since 2016



help (re)politicize mining revolutions (2020). Indigenous working-class mobilization via social engines such as the PCE (Partido Comunista de Ecuador) and PCV (Partido Comunista de Venezuela) and the Continental Network has continued to broaden in scope with global solidarity bases (e.g., with Anticonquista – a communist group in the diaspora of Latin America).<sup>24</sup>

In 2020 and 2021 I have attended webinars, zoom meetings, and conference calls (some via Discord and Signal for security culture reasons) with Ecuadorean and Venezuelan State officials, members of major political parties, and activist organizations. During one of the webinars that took place on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I had the opportunity to engage with Venezuelan State officials and solidarity organizations in defense of the Bolivarian Revolution that gave a report on border battles, conflicts with illegal mining and cartels, and Operation Bolivarian Shield 2020 (Sponsors & organizers collaborating with Venezuela Socialist government and parties include: Alberto Lovera Bolivarian Circle of New York, Alliance for Global Justice, Frente Hugo Chávez para la Defensa de los Pueblos, Vancouver Task Force on the Americas, Orinoco Tribune (media outlet), Chicago ALBA Solidarity, Lieutenants of the Bolivarian Army, Mayor of the Sucre municipality, Bolivar State, Héctor Frontado and Mayor of the Páez municipality, Apure State both PSUV, and Chavistas). Camarada (Comrade) ‘Chema’, Mayor and Chavista Lieutenant José María Romero, and Chavista Mayor Héctor Frontado explained the revolutionary strategies the state and socialist/communist organizations were committing to counter new assaults and that Venezuela has also unveiled its strategy called the Bolivarian Shield. The Bolivarian Shield is its people, army, citizen consciousness and patriotic spirit, in a civilian-military alliance with a will to fight and resist illegal forces at the borders and illegal mining zones. Illegal forces, often referred to the local criminal groups made up of dissident insurgent factions, Colombian guerrilla

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<sup>24</sup> See <https://prensapcv.wordpress.com/> and <https://pcecuadorcc.blogspot.com/> various public YouTube videos are not available of those meetings.

forces, and other gang<sup>25</sup> related organizing taking control of areas south of the Orinoco River where there is less government presence. According to socio-environmental programs and locales in Latin America, the illegal forces refer to the informal mining sectors where miners, some of which are the local citizens and indigenous to the area working without licenses where taxes and laws do not exist (e.g., ‘en la Ley de Minería de Ecuador’ Ecuador’s mining laws do not mention the informal mining markets – therefore, international or foreign researchers may include all those in their ‘illegal’ criminal categories with assumed connection to gang/drug cartels and traffickers) In the informal mining category, mining operates without permits and registrations - all applications under a legalization process and by artesian miners (Valencia 2015, 194). In other words, ‘illegalized’ mining is what we would call operated by ‘small-scale miners’ similar to ‘small-scale farmers’ in the critical agricultural literature.

The new strategy came out of the 2019 policy by the Maduro administration that implemented socialist redistribution of extractive capital rent to give 19 Chavista governors control over mining sites in their municipalities so that locally created rent would be used to supplement local budgets and communal organizing, in attempt to combat inequalities and local environment destruction, especially against ‘illegal’ mining. Camarada Chema explained that a popular power organizing militia style commenced in some of these areas with government support<sup>26</sup> and created a 7-point organizing plan (see Table 1.1 below). Mayor Frontado, dealing with the Bajo Río Caura conflict zone explained that the conflict zone militias have been activated to combat illegal forces and have been used efficiently so far. “Our capacity to act from a logistic point of view has

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<sup>25</sup> *Pranes* (gangs usually related to drug trafficking) and *sindicatos* (unions) are the two groups most international crisis group reports (e.g., ICG – International Crisis Group Latin America Report N73 and CSIS – Center for strategic & International Studies report on Venezuela by Rendon et. al.) refer to without the referencing of local knowledge.

<sup>26</sup> Organic Law #169 gives constitutional rights to municipalities to govern/control local communes.

surprised the enemy,” explained Camarada Chema and “the right begins to attack them when they began to do their campaigns.”

The 7-point plan outlined below, used in other conflict zones was originally created by the Chavista municipalities that were given control over their respective areas by the state, are the organizing lines targeted based on a holistic attempt at healing, protecting, and regaining the community’s power. Although the points do not need to be followed in any particular order, Camarada Chema discussed them in this order to emphasize the beginning of his community’s plans in activating each line. The first was discussed in terms of the people’s ability to participate in communal leadership, action, decision-making, and meetings. When the community met within the first couple of months many of the grievances were outlined and shared with other municipalities. Similar issues were brought forward that included housing and waterways were being destroyed by mining and agro-infrastructures, women and children were faced with ‘prostituting’ and sex trafficking, gang violence was prevalent in the border towns, and media were reflecting a culture of violence where many parents (mining worker families) were complaining about a culture of drug use was excessively in their communities as seen on T.V., and street vandalisms. This led to the organizing line of power in communication. Most of these issues were related to what Camarada Chema called a ‘communicational battle ground’ and were just as harmful as physical violence. He explained that in his municipality’s meetings the community organized around replacing the visible negative art/vandalism with murals and agreed upon signs for propaganda imagery.

Young adults were more a part of the monthly council meetings that headed that organizing line. Because many of the communities brought forward the issues of restricted access to clean water and/or waterways, and the lack access to public services, especially women and young girls

that needed medical services for hygiene and violence-induced health issues. Point 3 is about regaining the power in communal access. This point of the plan was organized by both the people and the state. The people were responsible for outlining the requests in the community, but it was Camarada Chema's job to report back to the state during collective Mayor meetings. Reorganizing the community in these terms and addressing access to human needs specific to each community help build the social power that has been impacted in the conflict zones from the illegal Colombian miners and gangs taking control of the areas. Mining towns dealing with the negative culture highlighted in illegal mining and towns bordering Colombia created action plans to combat media that glorified the culture. Local T.V. channels often showed ads joking and glorifying drug culture, sex trafficking culture, and abandonment of family, according to the organizers at the meeting. Therefore, the murals, artwork, posters, and family run communal events held in common local areas highlighted traditional family values, pictures of families doing communal work, and holding cultural events that included dances, food, and other aspects of local culture to replace the negative imagery.

The last two points are strategies that include the state. Point 6 places responsibility on the state to provide production (work) develop a production sector to combat the loss of jobs as well as assistance to those that had to sell their labor to illegal mining forces. That is, external forces competing and taking over mining zones by Colombia, Brazilian forced legal miners out of their jobs and they began to sell their labor for more in the illegal areas. Because the conflict areas are experiencing high levels of violence, what many would characterize as similar to the Ciudad Juarez border town life between the U.S. and México, an armed people power (the 7<sup>th</sup> point) may be necessary to deploy. Under the State organic law 169 the state has given permission for certain municipalities to use/deploy and prepare for armed struggle. Camarada Chema's municipality is

currently on stand-by status and only using non-violent means with the other points of the plan. This 7-point plan, known as popular power organizing, was shared with other organizers at the Continental Network meetings where various socialist/communist groups met to share and create decolonial projects that addressed the overall groups' campaigns to anti-neoliberalism.

This plan continues to be promoted and is becoming more widespread. Since this 2019 plan for activism is a recent development, signs of success are difficult to measure in comparative terms but some implications can be discerned with recent data coming from locals who are commenting at the community meetings discussed above that are currently engaged with the placative along the border towns mentioned here and coming from a 2014-2020 survey on crimes and homicide rates that indicate that crime has significantly been reduced from 60.3 percent in 2019 to 45.6 percent (per 100,000 inhabitants) in 2020 (Romero 2021). The report shows that for the city of Guayana, nearest the OMA along the Orinoco River, which holds the second highest crime rates, homicides are declining in 2020. Another one of the 19 areas that were given control over local mining sites is the municipality of Sifontes in the State of Bolivar (one of the mining conflict zones<sup>27</sup>), which is headed by Chavistas and the local Indigenous Kuyujani organization from 2015-2020, is actively implementing the 7-point plan to help with similar issues. In this scenario it has been the most successful because it appears to be less controlled by the Venezuelan military forces because as of now the government supports the plan's implementation and really controlled by the people in that area.

According to Chavista Lt. José M. Romero, during the zoom meeting, in one conflict zone that shares 69 kilometers of water with Colombia, there are 98,000 inhabitants and 4,000 families impacted by the conflict with illegal mining and agro-infrastructures that are taken over by

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<sup>27</sup> [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/conflicto/view/931](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/conflicto/view/931)

gangs/cartels coming from Colombia. The members in attendance that day explained that they also deal with U.S. military bases on the border under the War on Drugs policy. In this respect, it is clear with the 7-point popular power organizing line that conflict zones and their community members see extractivism as a direct attack on their families and livelihoods. This means that revolutionary strategies grew out of a grassroots movement that is connected to the socialist/communist parties and leaderships at the local level, included the state in parts of its plans, and shared their efforts and strategies with other municipalities as well as the larger organizations and platforms that reached to the transnational level.

**Table 1.2:**

<b>Popular Power Militia 7-point Plan</b>	<b>Organizing Line</b>	<b>Revolutionary Strategy</b>
1	Power in the People	Begins with the people themselves, communal participation.
2	Power in Communication	The action plan is shared with the people, communicational battle ground, use of propaganda, murals on the streets for imagery, cleaning of streets, people involved every month in counsel and create actions.
3	Power in Communal Access	Action plans to ensure rights and access to the city and public services for the people.
4	Social Power	Social action for social life, reorganizing the community to include health care access to hospitals, medical services, etc.
5	Cultural Power	To combat negative culture highlighted in illegal mining and war on drugs, TV shows, ads, jokes, etc. that glorify social consequences of mining town life.
6	Labor Power	Development of a production sector to work jointly with the Venezuelan people because they had to sell their labor to illegal mining forces (Colombian, Brazilian forces).
7	Armed People Power	Prepared to be armed when activated, this part of the plan means that they will use arms if necessary and activated, currently using nonviolent means with the above.

*Created by the author based on reports from conflict zone, anti-extractivist socialist/communist organizers.*

### **The Dynamics of Class Struggle**

State ‘protection’ of national areas is part of a geopolitical conflict in that on the one hand, national areas are to be ‘preserved’ for their natural biodiverse environmental importance and on the other hand, state protected areas are also mining activities granted by the state. Under both ‘protection’ policies and the legitimacy gained through the discourse of ‘national interest’, indigenous peoples are displaced, often in coercive, violent ways, and the natural environment destroyed. According to the 2021 Mining guide reports by the Chambers Law Firms (Vihena, Cunha, & Bustamante 2021) and Palacios 2020, Article 13 of the OMA Decree allowed the state to militarize the OMA under the ‘right’ “to safeguard, protect and maintain the harmonious continuity of the operations and activities of the Strategic Industries located in the National Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arc” for national interest, regardless the indigenous voices that did not offer consent prior to the decree. The lawyers reported President Maduro to say during his speech when publicly ordering the decree in 2016, that “order shall be brought to the OMA, and therefore a Special Military Zone will be implemented to protect the inhabitants and the resources of that area” and that there are already three helicopters and more than a thousand soldiers in the area<sup>14</sup>” (Palacios 2020). The internal class conflict between local miners, ‘foreign’ miners, and political parties pits working-class and displaced peoples against each other generally, and explicitly creates sub-cultures of xenophobia towards Chinese workers, continues social stigma, and increases vulnerability to not only state violence from the militarization of the zones, but also violence from illegal mining operations/groups.

Working-class miners and those impacted by the new extractivism in these case studies are doubly exploited, that is to say, the contradiction is that the workers (miners and laborers at Explocen and underground mining operations at the sites) are many who are the stolen people from

the stolen land, working for the settler-colonial corporations/infrastructure and then their exploitative behavior causes the workers to resist (Settler-colonial infrastructure built on stolen land by stolen people). The state deals with its working-class when substantial grievances are brought forth, as with the protests, boycotts, etc., and in the case of Venezuela, reacts in contradictory ways that consequentially has less division than in the case of Ecuador but remains an example for others. In these cases, in the context of anti-neoliberalism coming from the state, the class struggle from below became the radical political power and where a return to neoliberalism led to a tripolar class struggle that has now contributed to a right-wing win, President-elect Lasso in Ecuador (Guillermo Lasso, who won on April 11, 2021 over populist socialist Andres Arauz, is an ex-banker, conservative supporter of free-market policies and proponent of tax cuts and austerity). The implications of this transition in Ecuador with the new President promoting neoliberalism and a return to economic austerity loan packages from the IMF is that we will see more government strategies to continue dividing the left and the classes from below who will have to remain in defense, creating new ways in which to unify against the outcomes of President Lasso's government plans. In both cases, the class struggle from below gained transnational support in broad civil-society sectors of environmental activists, LandBack and indigenous movements, and socialist parties/coalitions do not seem to be waning anytime in the immediate future.

What is telling about these class struggles dynamics is the following. When a center-left regime is in control over economic decisions during commodity booms and declines of the oil industry, the class struggle from above gained momentum and state power changed to right-wing leadership in Ecuador and the opposition declined and was further divided. The opposite scenario, in Venezuela, meant that the class struggle from below gained momentum (under neoliberal



moments). However, in either scenario extractivism continues as an alternative to oil dependency, to pay loans, to increase social programs, etc. As the Latin American experience, the class struggle is a constant so long as dependency remains on extraction of natural resources for the development of the north. The above nature of the class struggle in both cases places the resistance in a defensive position, where some newly impoverished center-left class members will gravitate towards collaborating with the radical left but will not remain committed due to the changing nature of the state. The extractive regime benefits either way, which is part of the reason for the (neo)anti-extractivist strategies of a radical trans-solidarity. While member support and commitments change internally, the global fight against the new extractivism continues to grow regardless of a post-neoliberal era return to neoliberalism. A post-neoliberal left must reconcile these divisions during a ‘return’ to neoliberalism by recent right-wing win with President-elect Lasso in Ecuador.

### **Conclusion**

Two of the most prominent case studies in Latin America, Ecuador and Venezuela, with mega-mining projects have both experienced a post-neoliberal moment during a time when extraction intensity grew, and hyper-exploitation of the earth and working-class miners intensified. Given the increase in extractive intensity, anti-extractivism contentions developed in those countries that ended in the fall of governments committed to neoliberal free-market economics. Both Ecuador and Venezuela during their respective post-neoliberal moments transitioned from governments that were considered center-right wing/right-wing, to progressive forms of government (i.e., in Ecuador former President Alfredo Palacio, Independent (2005-2007) and former President Rafael Caldera in Venezuela, COPEI Christian-Democrat Party (right-wing – 1969-1974, 1994-1999). Although both continued controversial extraction of natural resources

during progressive leftist governments with anti-neoliberal and anti-extractivism movements, what I have found is that there were differences between the countries' leftist-turns (Pink Tide moments), that is to say that Venezuela's was more characteristic of the 'authentic' socialist left-turn (Petras & Veltmeyer 2018) and Ecuador's was described as a 'progressive imperialism' (as defined by CONAIE and PCE critics of the government). Thus, Ecuador fits more recently (under President Moreno 2017-present), with the return of neoliberalism, whereas Venezuela is maintaining anti-neoliberal policies.

This evidence suggests that a people's alternative includes the localized resistance utilizing and fostering trans-solidarity relationships. This work is important in understanding how the left allies in the West have largely failed to radicalize around environmental issues and the revolutionary strategies in the collectives discussed here have gained accomplices from other radical indigenous spaces throughout the global north and global south. A people's alternative, as evidenced by these collectives can provide insights into how leftist in the U.S. can become accomplices.

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**\*\*My records from my larger research project\*\***

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS AND MEETINGS

### **Discord/Signal Phone Conversations and Texts**

2016 – 2021

Use of discord and signal applications on cell phone service as preferred means of communication concerned with security culture, private forum, and group private chats. Occasional Facebook Messenger communications.

Communications with leaders and members of the PCV, PPT, PCE, PCMLE, PCMLV, JCV, JCE, Anticonquista, Qiao Collective, and members that attended the Continental Network.

### **Webinars**

October 1, 2020 – Black and Indigenous Liberation Red Nation, issues on transnational activism

October 2, 2020 – Lenin and Anticolonialism

February 5, 2021 – Council of Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) – NGO, interviews and discussion with Alina Duarte, Ricardo Patiño, Danny Shaw, and Patricio Zamorano - discussed issues on CONAIE, return of Correísmo, regional integration, U.S. military base in Galapagos, and probability of increasing mega-extractive projects under in-coming leadership. Ricardo Patiño – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ecuador, during the Correa Administration (2010-2016), PAIS Alliance is a center-left social democratic political party in Ecuador.

March 18, 2021 – Movement Rights – International discussion on indigenous-led movements for the protection of Pachama, Tonantzin, (Mother Earth), included Elders from Condor and Eagle Project such as Casey Camp Horinek, Landback Movement – discussion on Ecuador and other countries and issues on sacred sites covered up with infrastructure, how enforcing mechanisms hold up settler-colonialism, rematriation (re)matriating, and extractivism.

April 15, 2021 – Meeting on ‘Armed Conflict on the Venezuela-Colombia Border’ with Venezuelan State officials and solidarity organizations in defense of the Bolivarian Revolution Sponsors & organizers collaborating with Venezuela Socialist government and parties include the following: Alberto Lovera Bolivarian Circle of New York, Alliance for Global Justice, Frente Hugo Chávez para la Defensa de los Pueblos, Vancouver Task Force on the Americas, Orinoco Tribune (media outlet), Chicago ALBA Solidarity, Lieutenants of the Bolivarian Army, Mayor of the Sucre municipality, Bolivar State, Chavista Héctor Frontado and Mayor of the Páez municipality, Apure State both PSUV, Chavistas Camarada (Comrade) ‘Chema’, Mayor and Chavista Lieutenant José María Romero. Issues during interview on border battles, conflicts with illegal mining and cartels, and Operation Bolivarian Shield 2020.

**Zoom Meetings**

February 1, 2019 – Bilateral Meeting with PCV-PPT. Members from PCV included Oscar Figuera, Elena Linares, Yul Jabour, Oswaldo Ramos, Carlos Lazo, Perfecto Abreu Nieves. Members from PPT included Rafael Uzcategui, Llenia Medina, Carlos Azpurua, Carlos Iriarte, Johnny Ruda, Raiza Carrillo, Jose Bracho. Issues on smuggling extractivism and hyperinflation, coalition building/solidarity around imperialism aggression and invasion and settler-colonialism from U.S., European Union, Canada, and oligarchies from Lima group.

October 12, 2020 – Meeting with the Indigenous activist and researchers of The Condor and The Eagle Project. Interview and discussion with Bryan Parras, Fernanda Preciado, Yudith Azareth Nieto, Elder Casey Camp-Horinek, Patricia Gualinga, and Melina Laboucan-Massimo. Premiere of the documentary. Issues covered on Yasuni National Park Ecuador, pipelines, LandBack Movement, toxicity in environments, transnational solidarity, occupied territories, settler-colonial infrastructures, and global tribunals.

October 21, 2020 - UN75 2020 Conference hosted by IPSA, Interview/Discussion with Ambassador Bob Rae, Canada representative for United Nations panel. Questions asked on China's role compared to U.S, changing nature of the states and capitalism, Marxism, and multilateral relations for structure, pandemic, and economic protectionism.

December 7, 2020 – Zoom and YouTube Live interviews and discussion on The Case for Degrowth with Latin America and Indigenous Perspectives. Winona LaDuke, Arturo Escobar, Susan Paulson, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis. Questions and debate on extractivism of the 21st century and socialist states, China's role in Ecuador and Venezuela, socialist/communist global coalitions implications on their degrowth model.