Environments of Inequality

Crisis, Conflicts, Comparisons

Olaf **Kaltmeier**
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Ann-Kathrin **Volmer**

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Environments of Inequality

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Environments of Inequality: Crises, Conflicts, Comparisons

Olaf Kaltmeier, Mario Peters, Ann-Kathrin Volmer

Unequal access to power, natural resources, and welfare has long been at the heart of multiple crises in the Americas. Beginning in the sixteenth century, European colonization marked a fundamental rupture in the development of American societies and established a regime of inequality based on ethnicity and/or race (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). Central elements of this regime of inequality have been perpetuated to the present day and repeatedly redefined, resemanticized, implemented in practice, and institutionalized. In the Americas, inequalities based on gender, race, social class, age, or legal status overlap, intertwine, and reinforce each other. This is known as the Coloniality of Power.

Frequently, these inequalities are related to or inscribed in not only the social space of human interactions but also the physical environment. Already in the early 1900s, the then-emerging discipline of sociology developed a new socio-ecological approach to urban spaces. It pointed out that socio-economic inequalities based on ethnicity, race, and class translate into segregated physical spaces. Especially in capitalist societies, the land market produces inequality and creates wretched conditions for marginalized groups who live in places with very limited access to public resources and services. The environmental justice approach, which emerged in the United States in the 1980s and was later developed further with an inter-American perspective, also emphasizes that those who are most marginalized in society are also excessively exposed to ecological risks, such as noise and air pollution, flood risk, among others (Wagner 2020, 93).

Meanwhile, the causes of global environmental changes are closely related to privilege. They are measured in consumption patterns and ecological footprints. Two dimensions are relevant in this respect: first, economic development at a nation-state level, which is often measured by comparing countries in the Global South and North. For example, the National Footprint of a citizen of the United States would imply the resource need of 5.1 Earths, while the average person in India would require only the biocapacity of 0.8 Earths (Miller et al. 2022). The second dimension that matters is class. Wealthy people are the least exposed to environmental risks, even though they have the largest ecological footprint. According to Oxfam (2023), the richest one percent of the world's population were responsible for 16 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, while the richest 10 percent accounted for about 50 percent of all emissions worldwide. This is rooted in their neo-aristocratic lifestyle based on luxury consumption and the ostentatious display of wealth. In addition to the use of private helicopters

and jets, this lifestyle includes extravagant leisure competitions such as the recent billionaire space race between Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson. Undertaken for reasons of prestige, space races and the like are not only an enormous waste of money; they also cause the immense release of carbon dioxide emissions and waste of natural resources (Oxfam 2023).

Different conceptual approaches highlight specific aspects of the complex dynamics that characterize environmental inequalities. Scholars of socio-environmental conflicts often emphasize the competing interests of different stakeholder groups and disputes over the access to and use of natural resources. People engage in collective action to claim access to these resources. The chapters in this book all focus on different kinds of societal organization, mainly social movements, and their relationship to their specific environments. Claims to natural resources can be related to a deep sense of place (Massey 1994), juxtaposing concepts of territory (Sandoval, Robertsdotter, and Paredes Lopez 2017) with a feeling of belonging. As Massey has argued, concerning our sense of place, scales often overlap in single spaces, and scale is never a fixed spatial unit. Regarding conflicts, scales provisionally result from the spatially and materially structured manifestation of social contradictions in political struggles between different actors (Belina 2008). The legal, material, and social conditions differ depending on the spatial unit in which access to natural resources and/ the interests of social movements are negotiated. The case studies in this book vary between local, regional, national, and international scales, which, in an intertwined way, influence the key problems of each analysis. Underlying power structures related to race, class, and physical location can be addressed by another conceptual approach, discourse analysis. These structures become visible in the claims of the stakeholder groups but are materialized in the performance of power in the conflicts.

From the perspective of the social sciences, the multiple articulations and complex entanglements of social inequalities and "natural" environments are some of the most important issues in the debate on the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is the (unofficial) name of the present geological epoch in which human activities, particularly the extensive use of fossil fuels and non-renewable resources, have caused unprecedented CO_2 emissions and multiple other environmental problems like plastic pollution, the acidification of oceans, and the extinction of species. There is some debate about when the Anthropocene started, but most scholars agree that it began around 1950 with the "Great Acceleration," i.e., the rapid increase in activities that cause pollution. However, this acceleration also suggests a preceding period of slower accumulation of anthropogenic processes, which, in Latin America and the Caribbean, can be traced back to 1492, the beginning of colonialism in the Americas. From a Latin

American viewpoint, the genealogy of the Anthropocene is intertwined with colonialism, the rise of capitalism, sexism, and racism (Kaltmeier et al. 2024). It is important to stress that the Anthropocene cannot be reduced to a single crisis, such as the climate crisis. Rather, it is a multiple crisis in which social, economic, political, and ecological crises intertwine on different scales and culminate in a planetary civilizational crisis (Lander 2022).

This book includes nine chapters on different formations and expressions of environments of inequality, ranging from the nineteenth century to the present, including references to colonial times, with a strong but not exclusive geographical focus on the Americas. Coming from four continents and different academic disciplines, including (environmental) history, literature studies, political science, sociology, international development, Global and Area Studies, and media and communication studies, the authors are all at an early stage of their careers and represent a new, promising generation that applies innovative and critical approaches to the study of environments of inequality

Several chapters use implicit and explicit practices of comparing. Comparison is not just a method of identifying similarities or differences between two or more things. Similar to our previous remarks on spatial scales, objects and views of comparison and the practices of comparing themselves are rather also subject to constant change and are only ever fixed for a limited period of time. Some chapters compare social dynamics and environments of inequality in different entities, like nation-states, while others explore the act of comparing itself, emphasizing that it is a social and historical practice involving actors with specific purposes. Here, the emphasis lies on who is comparing and why, rather than solely on the objects that are being compared. Actors initiate the process of comparing, imbuing it with purposes and shifting frames of reference, and normative backgrounds and historical contexts inevitably influence comparisons (Epple and Erhart 2020).

The book is divided into three interconnected sections that address crises, conflicts, and comparisons across time and space. The sections are titled 1) Conflicts and Contestation over Resources and Territory, 2) Crises of Environmental Policies, and 3) Constructions of Inequalities: Discourses of Disruption.

Conflicts and Contestation over Resources and Territory

Socio-environmental conflicts over resources and territory are expressions of deeper connections between different crises. The chapters in this section focus on proactive forms of organization and protest that communities and movements have developed to address environments of inequality. In the first

chapter, Jacey Anderson compares movements and resource conflicts over rivers in North America and Central America. Using oral history interviews and archival research, she reveals how historical narratives, people, and the physical environment influenced one another and how people engaged in the fight for the preservation of ecological resources in two distinct places (the United States and San Salvador) that may have more in common than what divides them.

The next two chapters address not only how environments of inequality can be studied in their relation to situations of uncertainty and conflict, but also how crises and conflicts can open new opportunities to challenge or reinforce existing inequalities. Both chapters focus on race but take very different approaches. Tathagato Ganguly looks at Black Ecuadorians' struggle for *territorio*, the labeling of their territories as *comunas*, and the dissonance between the two. Building on the notion of "overlapping territoriality," the chapter reveals how two competing ideas of territory are at play in northern Esmeraldas, Ecuador. In her chapter, Livia de Souza Lima focuses on Brazil, where an enduring system of racial and gender injustices informs social and political exclusion. She seeks to understand how Black women came to play a key role in the recent tide of social mobilizations and how they use the rhetoric of political occupation to reclaim political institutions and to express their determination to participate as elected women in spheres of decision-making.

Crises of Environmental Policies

This section focuses on historical circumstances and recent events in which social routines become disrupted and social actors identify a crisis situation. The chapters explore the kinds of social actors – social movements, the media, and cultural producers, among others – that begin to speak of crisis. Demands for social change are eventually getting more attention on a national level. Therefore, national governments include these debates in environmental politics. The three chapters in this section discuss different aspects of environmental policies in specific contexts. Ángela Maria Ocampo Carvajal addresses the role of law in socio-environmental conflicts, offering new insight into how the environment is structurally embedded and contested in one of the basic pillars of democracy, the legislation. Her chapter draws from ongoing research on environmental conflicts and rights-based legal mobilization in Colombia. Carvajal aims at understanding the role that rights-based legal strategies play in environmental activist networks by looking at meaning-making processes over the notion of "place/territory."

Analyzing environmental crises in the plurinational state of Bolivia, Marie Jasser examines how intersectional inequalities are inscribed into territories and territorialities through different forms of access to land and agricultural

production systems. Based on the work with satellite images and quantitative data, her analysis focuses on changes in labor relations, reproduction of life, and nature relations to disentangle the underlying processes and structures of inequality in the Bolivian agro-industrial soy complex in the Chiquitanía region.

In her chapter, Nina Schlosser focuses on regional and local conflicts over the extraction of lithium. Lithium is a necessary resource for the transformation toward electric cars and batteries to store energy, but, as this chapter shows, it is important to understand the socio-environmental impact of resource extraction. Focusing on the Salar de Atacama salt flat in Chile – one of the driest places on earth – Schlosser sheds light on how groups with conflicting interests attempt to come to a consensus on lithium extractivism. Her case study reveals the complex dynamics between corporate strategies, the implementation of infrastructure, "sustainable" development projects, monetary payments, and the cooperation between multinational corporations and Indigenous people.

Constructions of Inequalities: Discourses of Disruption

Reality is constructed and shaped by the way it is expressed and narrated in discourse. The third section focuses on how specific topics around environmental inequalities are created through narratives in the media and in literature. Migration is one response to crises and conflicts, often chosen by people who see no other way to escape unemployment, social exclusion, violence, food insecurity, or climate-related hardships. In the first chapter of this section, José Antonio Romero López studies the Central American migrant caravan that traveled toward the United States in late 2018. He analyzes the use of social media among migrant networks, the role of legacy media and their reporting about the caravan, and the public discussion about the topic in social media. Romero shows that media-related practices were crucial to building the migrant caravan as a constructed, material reality embedded into broader social inequalities.

As Eren Devrim shows in her chapter, social categorization is a central instrument in the construction of inequalities, and analyzing it is key to understanding the unequal structures of society. She examines the narratives of waste pickers in two Indian cities who reflect on their own marginality. Her analysis reveals the interplay between gender, caste, and religion as well as environmental factors in the (re-)production of social inequality.

Race is a social category that has been significantly transformed over time and it has often been used to exercise power over people. In the last chapter of this book, Angela Gutierrez offers an analysis of race relations in literature. She examines *Guerra de Razas: Negros contra Blancos* (*Race War: Blacks against Whites*), a book written by journalist Rafael Conte during the uprising

of Black Cubans in 1912. Reflecting on how Conte employed the long-standing comparison of Haiti and Cuba, Gutierrez argues that a focus on comparing as social practice allows for an examination beyond othering. The chapter also helps reveal how people use comparisons, in this case, as a rhetorical tool to justify governmental actions.

   The book is the result of the international summer school "Environments of Inequality. Crises, Conflicts, Comparison" that took place in Guadalajara, Mexico, in September 2022. The event was organized by the Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CALAS), the German Historical Institute Washington, and the Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 1288 "Practices of Comparing" at Bielefeld University. Twenty-two PhD students from eleven countries and different academic disciplines discussed their innovative research at the week-long summer school. A selection of the finest works is compiled in this book.

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Conflicts and Contestation over Resources and Territory

Rivers of Resistance: Resource Conflict and Rural Organizing in the Americas

Jacey Anderson

It would be difficult to imagine two places with more differences than the Río Lempa and the Tongue River. The Río Lempa begins in Guatemala before winding through El Salvador – the most densely populated country in Latin America – and emptying into the Pacific Ocean. Three out of every four Salvadorans live within the river's basin, using it to fish, irrigate crops, wash clothing, and bathe. The river runs through a tropical climate with a wet and dry season, where it is warm year-round, with an average temperature of thirty-one degrees Celsius. By comparison, the Tongue River is about 4,800 kilometers to the north. It flows through one of the least populated places in the lower forty-eight states of the U.S., and while people do live along its basin, they are spaced out by multi-acre ranches or, if they live on the west bank, call the reservation home. This semi-arid steppe climate has little rainfall with harsh winters where the average temperature is well below zero degrees Celsius for over a quarter of the year.

Indeed, these are two very different places, but they may have more in common than what divides them. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, rural ranchers in Montana, USA fought to prevent coal development along the Tongue River Valley and successfully prevented a coal-hauling railroad from ever existing, while farmers in Chalatenango, El Salvador organized to ban metal mining in their communities and eventually the entire nation, achieving something no country in the world had ever done before. The farming and ranching communities in each location fought against mining companies who wanted to exploit underground resources that would have damaged the watersheds and returned few benefits to the communities. Residents in both communities chose water over gold or coal and resisted the power of the mining companies and their false promises of economic benefits.

This is an environmental history of two river basins in the Americas. The following chapter unpacks parallels between these places, specifically, how people used their local knowledge of the land to successfully prevent mining projects (White 1996). I examine the environmental, societal, and cultural factors that led to these successes from different scales – the global to the local – and highlight common themes they shared. Both movements focused on defending their watersheds from mining projects that would have damaged water quality and altered residents' ways of life. The leaders of both movements were not traditional environmentalists and did not consider themselves to be. Rather, they

were ordinary people who were fighting for what they valued – a life of dignity and respect for their surroundings. They relied heavily on creating strategic relationships around mutual interests and played the long game, with each of these resistance movements lasting over three decades. By examining two distinct case studies, I show that "success" stories are not singular anomalies. They serve as models for future action.

This chapter employs and expands the concepts of economic underdevelopment and dependency theory where the process of "development" tends to only benefit one side in global, capitalistic relationships. In the case of Latin America, this means that most of the resources generated through development have historically flowed outward and benefited wealthy countries, while poor countries enjoyed little to no economic gain and ultimately suffered (Frank 2018; Galeano 1997). However, transnational study reveals the ways this pattern operates on different scales – not just the global, but the local and regional, where communities in wealthy countries can also experience a core-periphery dynamic. Rather than focusing on the well-examined, top-down perspective, this research aims to expand on the agency and response of the "periphery," who, in the case of modern El Salvador and rural Montana, were well-aware of their place in this relationship and actively fought to change the status quo, a thread that runs through all three sections of this chapter.

In addition to centering the experience of the people in "periphery," I include the role of non-human actors in this story of resistance and include these actors as part of the analytical "periphery." Because the subfield of environmental history developed in and paralleled the environmental movement in the U.S., the field tends to have a U.S. bias. The Salvadoran case offers promising insights to how applying the principles of environmental history to other parts of the globe might contribute to different debates within the field, and how including more work of Latin Americanists and other scholars from the so-called "Global South" to environmental humanities research in other regions can provide essential perspectives in debates surrounding extractivism, land sovereignty, and environmental justice. Scholars like Ramachandra Guha have demonstrated that environmentalism of the "Global West" is a product of the early-twentieth-century U.S. and has historically focused on protecting resources like land and wildlife. What scholars now call early environmentalism was connected to patriotism and national pride (Guha 2000, 143). What Joan Martinez-Alier termed "environmentalism of the poor," however, connects concern for the environment with concern for social justice. Indeed, Guha, Martinez-Alier, and others argue that environmental movements of the Global South cannot

be successful – or even exist – without also directly addressing human rights (Martinez-Alier 2003).

The research for both case studies relied on the use of private archives that were created by the organizers and organizations that led and/or participated in both movements. For the Montana case study, after several formal and informal conversations, the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC) opened its doors to a basement full of documents they had collected and organized since the 1970s. This included twenty-two archival boxes full of documentation about the Tongue River Railroad (sometimes referred to in documentation as "TRR") and their organizing efforts to prevent its construction. For the El Salvador case, long standing connections with U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities allowed a team of researchers at Montana State University to collect personal papers from U.S. activists who were and/or are part of the organization U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities, a transnational solidarity branch of The Association for the Development of El Salvador (Spanish acronym CRIPDES). The collection, Project Solidarity Archive, includes thousands of documents and photographs from the 1980s through present day. Additionally, on a research trip to El Salvador, CRIPDES staff allowed me to look through their recently consolidated, unprocessed collection in San Salvador. This provided invaluable materials on the history of organizing from the 1980s through the anti-mining campaign. The materials informed the bulk of the El Salvador case study, and to the best of my knowledge, have not yet been examined by other scholars. These private archives, along with oral history, have been the bulk of what has informed my research.

Both movements were grassroots at their core; however, the documentation available limits how the story can be told. For example, one strategy NPRC often employed was writing letters to politicians and responses to draft railroad plans. These letters informed how I told the story. To show the grassroots nature of the Salvadoran anti-mining campaign in this section, I relied mostly on public opinion surveys. While they perhaps read less intimately than letters, they are evidence that rural Salvadorans, like rural Montanans, had a deep understanding of the land and what was at risk with large mining operations.

I organize this chapter into three sections. The first section provides a historical and environmental backdrop to conflict and resistance in each location. The second section reveals the transnational and global implications of how the gold and coal industries operated and how national borders and economic policy shaped the distribution and demand of these minerals, setting the stage for the third section, which highlights the resistance movements to extractive

industries, and to what extent they succeeded in their goals. I conclude with what this comparison reveals about the human potential to affect positive change.

Historical and Environmental Backdrop to Conflict

The history of resource conflict in Montana is deeply tied to the land and territory, specifically the area's history of settler-colonialism in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and its own distinct neocolonialism of the twenty-first century. Historian K. Ross Toole distinguished Montana and the U.S. West in terms of geographic and power scale, where water was the most valuable resource in a place where coal was in high demand. Because the process of converting coal to energy requires large quantities of water, the two resources conflict with one another, but coal is reliant on water (Toole 1975, 5). Resource conflict paralleled the settle`r-tribal conflicts because coal was not in demand in the west until settlers arrived. Toole described the region as a window to the national context of tribal identity, where Montana tribes had to carve their own way to survive and thrive, revive ceremony, and operate through bureaucracies like the U.S. Department of Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Toole 1975, 15-16).

The systematic removal of tribes from their land opened the door for settlers to move in from the east. Families began to move west with the promise of economic success. For the Tongue River Valley, economic success came in the form of raising cattle. The construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1882 reached Miles City, allowing for more people to come to the area who were interested in cattle business. Some of these new arrivals left after struggling to endure the winter or failing to make a living in the arid conditions of the eastern Montana plains. Others, though, stayed for generations and made a livelihood, passing their knowledge of the land down through multiple generations (Jiusto and Hampton 2001).

While many settlers flocked to the southeastern part of the state for cattle ranching in the late-nineteenth century, many people began to travel to Montana earlier in the century for mining. In 1889, Montana territory became a state and could govern itself. Adopted in 1905, the Montana state flag depicts a sunrise over the Rocky Mountains with the Missouri River flowing in the foreground. Waterfalls, trees, and grasses blend in effortlessly as part of the landscape. Equally notable are a pick, shovel, and plow along with the state motto: "*oro y plata*." These symbols reflect Montana's ecological richness, as well as its proud farming and mining heritage. Montana earned its nickname, "The Treasure

State," because of its literal treasures of precious metals. This legacy and tradition of mining presented itself in the form of other minerals as well, including coal.

The long history of resource conflict came to a head in the late-twentieth century. The 1970s were a time of conflicting values in the United States, and Montana was no exception to this pattern. The so-called "oil crisis" spurred a national desire to have a self-sustaining energy supply, and coal seemed to be the most promising way to achieve this.[1] At the same time, in 1972, Montanans rewrote the State Constitution. A progressive and controversial document for its time, it added – perhaps most famously – that Montanans had the right to "a clean and healthful environment."[2] In other words, parallel to the environmentally conscious shift at the national level, Montanans were growing more concerned about environmental issues, stemming from their connections to the land through farming, ranching, mining, and recreation (Schmidt and Thompson 1990, 411).

The 1972 Constitution was also a response to The North Central Power Study (see United States Bureau of Reclamation 1971). Conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and "twenty-one private and public utility companies, electric companies, electric cooperatives, public power districts, and cities," the study proposed forty-two new coal-burning power plants in the Northern Great Plains, twenty-one of which would be in Montana – most in the Tongue River Valley. Ranching families from Birney, Bullhead Mountain, and Rosebud Creek attended the meeting; they knew this would not only change the way they operated their ranches for generations but make the land too unhealthy to ranch at all and force them to leave. They partnered with the Northern Cheyenne and formed a grassroots organization called the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC) to resist coal development on their land. Montana ranchers and tribal members were concerned with the environmental impact of these mines, especially how this would affect their water supply; the plan relied on using water from the Yellowstone, Big Horn and Wind, Tongue, Powder, and North Platte Rivers to cool the plants (Erickson 2021).

Where residents of the Tongue River Valley saw risk, entrepreneurs saw opportunity. In 1973, Wesco Resources of Billings began acquiring coal properties for a speculative coal strip mine called "Montco," short for Montana coal, in the Ashland and Birney areas. Four years later, ITT Resources, a subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraph, purchased a half interest in the proposed Montco mine. Washington Water and Power and Washington Natural Gas acquired the remaining interest, and Burlington Northern began a

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[1] Because the United States funded the Israeli military during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo in retaliation, sparking an oil shortage in the United States in what is now colloquially referred to as "the oil crisis."

[2] Montana Constitution, Article 9, Section 1.

study on building a new track to haul Montco coal out of state. The idea of the Tongue River Railroad was born, and with it, opposition from landowners whose property would be bisected by the proposed route (Dawson 1977). While ranchers were concerned with the overt logistical issues of raising cattle on land bisected by a railroad, such as cattle being hit by trains or blocked from access to water and grass, they also voiced concerns of railroads starting fires, spreading weeds, and creating noise pollution, as well as only serving coal mines rather than bringing cattle to market or passengers to and from the area.

The risks of mining coal along the Tongue River were clear to residents, but the purpose for mining the coal in their valley changed over the years, further solidifying their stance against extractive development. One of the original arguments for the developing coal along the Tongue River Valley was to help the country be more energy self-reliant, but one of the first planned destinations for Montco coal was to move it to the West Coast where it would then be shipped to Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. In 1975, Montana put a ban on shipping coal to overseas markets, but this was short-lived and repealed by 1980.[3] By the early 1980s, the plan to ship coal to Asia was materializing. Burlington Northern was designing a railroad to ship to the West Coast for this reason, despite the fact that coal coming from Montana and Wyoming on this line was lower quality than what Asian markets would accept.[4] Wally McRae, an early NPRC member and Colstrip area rancher, called attention to the overall hypocrisy of the situation, "Montana ranchers have been told they have a patriotic obligation to ensure domestic self sufficiency in energy," he lamented, "Now, suddenly, we have an international responsibility. It seems to me that my responsibility to the people is to make sure they have enough food, which is more of a basic energy requirement than every increasing use of energy by both domestic and foreign energy users."[5]

If the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of colonization and displacement in the Americas, the late twentieth century marked an increase in organized resistance to the status quo of extraction by outside interests, all while global colonial processes continued. Observing the devastation of coal development in other areas motivated residents of the Tongue River Valley to organize to prevent their treasure state from becoming a sacrifice zone. They had

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[3] "Law change heralds new view of coal in Montana," Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[4] David Alberswerth, Memorandum to Interested Persons, June 2, 1982, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, M.
[5] "Law change heralds new view of coal in Montana," Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

observed the effects coal mining had in other communities and were proactive in fighting the Tongue River Railroad before it could harm their watershed.

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The Tongue River and Río Lempa both have long legacies of conflict over land and land use and have both resided in the periphery of extractive resource relations. The legacy of conflict over land tenure in Latin America has been well documented by historians over the last several decades. El Salvadorans have historically depended heavily on land for their livelihood, but prior to the civil war (1980-1992), a mere fourteen family oligarchs owned sixty percent of the land, which they used to grow export crops like indigo and coffee. El Salvador, like most of Latin America, developed not in isolation but connected to global powers, which forced the region to rely on export crops that they could not control the prices of, and benefited few (LaFeber 1993).

Not only were most Salvadorans excluded from the benefits of their resources, but they also suffered through a twelve-year, violent civil war that scarred their country and their lives. In 1980, five leftist organizations formed the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), a guerrilla opposition, to stand up against the militarized government (Todd 2010, 51). The government represented a legacy of oligarchy and had administered state-sponsored violence over the previous five decades. During the twelve-year conflict, thousands of people fled the country as refugees and lived in United Nations refugee camps along the Honduran and Guatemalan borders. According to the United Nations Truth Commission on El Salvador, about one third of the entire population (5.2 million people) either left the country or were internally displaced (United Nations 1993).

Alongside the history of oppression and violence is a parallel history of resistance. Before the war had officially ended, Salvadorans living in refugee camps in Honduras organized to repopulate their homeland. Frustrated by the lack of communication and understanding from the Honduran and Salvadoran governments and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Salvadorans living abroad began to leverage international support to go home and move forward with their lives (Todd 2021). In 1984, four hundred displaced Salvadoran families met and formed CRIPDES (Todd 2010, 197). According to leftist organizer Lorena Martinez, "CRIPDES was a form of reorganizing the same people who participated in social struggles for better living conditions, access to land and a free society in the 1970s. The leaders of CRIPDES emerged from this experience and had their roots in the constructed consciousness" (CRIPDES 2002). Part of their mobilization process included leveraging

international solidarity to accompany the repopulation movement. The first region people repopulated was Chalatenango, along the Río Lempa. According to Karen Ramirez, project manager of the Oxfam partner Provida, because these people were the first to own land, they were organized at a higher level than other communities. This was due both to the process it took to repopulate, and because the experience of owning land for the first time meant they truly saw the value in protecting it.[6]

As El Salvador exited war and entered a time of relative peace, Salvadorans had to envision what their new country would look like. Life after war presented many challenges, but Salvadorans were now fighting for something beyond survival – they were fighting for a life of dignity.[7] But the post war era brought about an additional challenge: Salvadorans had to envision what their country would look like in a new, hyper-globalized context. Although the war did not produce a clear winner, the 1992 Peace Accords drew a double-edged sword by way of political reform. The Peace Accords opened elections to opposition parties, parties who ultimately followed a neoliberal path, leaving the country vulnerable to international interests. International courts were overseeing Salvadoran massacres, and The United Nations took an active role in supporting the post-war peace process. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank lent money to rebuild connecting El Salvador to the global economy (Eriksson, Kreimer, and Arnold 2000). While the Peace Accords were being signed, El Salvador, like most of Latin America, began to see signs of the neoliberal era in their daily lives. It was in this context that mining activity increased throughout the country; between 1998 and 2003, the government gave twenty-nine exploratory licenses to foreign gold mining companies, including to the Canadian-based mining company Pacific Rim (Westervelt 2015).

Located thousands of kilometers from each other, Montanans and Salvadorans developed deep suspicion of state and corporate interests in their resources through a history of violence and exploitation. When the world became increasingly globalized in the twentieth century, these suspicions only grew as coal and gold demand increased. Salvadorans and Montanans responded to, resisted, and shaped neoliberalism and resource extraction. Montanans resisted through writing a new state constitution and questioning resource development. Salvadorans pushed back through observing the connection between their wellbeing and environment. Residents in both valleys maintained a long vision of what was good for their land and livelihoods, questioning economic versus intrinsic value.

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[6] Karen Ramirez, interview by author, 2023. PROVIDA, San Salvador, El Salvador.
[7] CRIPDES "Analisis y acuerdo politico de la concentración ciudadana por la paz, la dignidad y la justicia social," Box D, Folder 2, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

Resistance Movements to Extractive Industries

If the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of colonization and displacement in the Americas, the late twentieth century marked an increase in organized resistance to the status quo of extraction by outside interests, all while global colonial processes continued. While communities in the Americas have always resisted colonial, extractive processes, the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked a paradigm shift in activism when people mobilized more effectively by learning from the past, committing to a long-term struggle, and growing their bases through the formation of coalitions.

The NPRC used knowledge of the land and legal system to play the long game and delay the construction of the Tongue River Railroad Company and its associated mines. One example of legal strategies the NPRC implemented to delay the construction of the railroad was responding to draft Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). The EIS were reports that the railroad company had to conduct before beginning construction. The NPRC members used their local knowledge to point to gaps and falsehoods in the reports.

In 1982, the NPRC filed extensive comments on the draft EIS for the proposed Montco strip mine near Ashland. This speculative mine was the Tongue River Railroad Company's (TRRC) justification of the first version of the Tongue River Railroad. NPRC took their comments to Washington D.C. to oppose the company's application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, a certificate that, if granted, would give the TRRC the power to condemn people's land to construct the railroad. Most comments were written by ranchers who owned property under or near the proposed rail line. Through their comments, the opposition poked holes in the company's plans, highlighted hypocrisies, questioned justifications, and emphasized personal and local impacts of the project. For example, Sophie Olson, a rancher near the town of Prey, asked, "Where do they plan to get their water to build their road and railroad? They say they'll keep it watered down to minimize the dust pollution but where do they get the water to keep the road and railroad watered down during construction? If this past summer is any indication, the rainfall sure won't take care of it." Olson used her knowledge of rainfall patterns she developed by observing her property year after year to question the practicality of the railroad. Similarly, Boyd and Margaret Blum depended on water from the Tongue and Yellowstone to irrigate their crops and used their knowledge to demand answers. "Water is such a precious resource here in the West," they wrote, "If the water in this river should become so polluted, it would destroy these highly productive valleys." They went on to say that agriculture, "has been the life blood of this part of the state of Montana," and, "we dare not let this application for the building of this

railroad and the opening of these mines be approved without first investigating and having answered *positively* those questions regarding the availability and the usability of this water."[8]

    Despite the concerns the local landowners expressed, in 1985 the Surface Transportation Board (STB) awarded the Tongue River Railroad Company a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, which meant the railroad had permission to begin construction. The NPRC appealed the decision and won a postponement, but the Tongue River Railroad Company continued toward their goal, forming alternate routes and reapplying for permits.[9] The NPRC had to continue organizing with a long vision of preventing the railroad. As the company switched their plans, the NPRC adapted strategies.

<div align="center">*</div>

    Like residents along the Tongue River, the Salvadorans who repopulated the Río Lempa had to be flexible and play the long game when it came to organizing to protect their resources. As El Salvador navigated the postwar years the Salvadoran government embraced free trade policies while many working-class people opposed them. The organization Citizenship and Development created a report that noted concerns of new neoliberal policies. They argued that, since the introduction of neoliberal economics over the last few years, they had "reduced the role of the state to promotor of development" and, as a result, economic, social, and environmental problems had "sharpened." They noted that while spaces of democracy had opened since the signing of the Peace Accords, they still needed to deepen to be truly democratic. In addition to a call for stronger democratic processes, the report described a need to create a plan of development that would allow sustainability, equal distribution of resources, and better quality of life for the population.[10] Among the opposition to neoliberal development were strong concerns among Salvadorans for privatization of public services like healthcare and water, as well as concern for the environment. In 1998, over a dozen non-governmental organizations, largely representative of most federations of cooperatives and development associations, signed an environmental declaration. Many of the signatories produced basic grains, sugar cane, coffee, and other crops vital to the integration of El Salvador's economic

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[8] Boyd and Margaret Blum letter to Carl Bausch, October 15, 1983, Box 1980-81 TRR 70IA, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT; underline mark from original document.
[9] Steven D. Paulson, "Timeline: The Northern Plains Resource Council and the Tongue River Railroad" NPRC Archive, Billings, MT.
[10] "Ciudadania y Desarrollo" CRIDPES archive, Box A, Folder 4, San Salvador, El Salvador.

development. They saw their work as directly tied to environmental protection in order to "achieve a true sustainable development for the *campesino*."[11]

"Environmentalism of the poor," or the concern and understanding of environmental and social issues as interconnected and needing to be addressed simultaneously, was a current that ran strong through the postwar era. In 2006, the Analysis and Political Agreement of the Citizen Coordination for Peace, Dignity, and Social Justice held a meeting to discuss the struggles in El Salvador including violence against women, high cost of living, terrorism of the state, and the antiterrorist law corruption and impunity, and hegemonic world power. In their meeting report, they listed the "*retos a enfrentar*," or "challenges to face," alongside the "*banderas de lucha/utopías*," or "flags of struggle/utopias." The plan named immediate tasks as well as long-term tasks.[12] The concept of "utopia" was common among the Salvadoran social movement and is well-documented by Latin American historians (Kelly 2018; Moyn 2012). Rather than purely reactionary, the organizing concept of "utopia" always kept the long game in mind. Organizers were aware that a utopia was a destination that could never be reached; progress would ebb and flow, but the utopia served as a light to guide the social movement toward a change, and true to the movement's Marxist origins, the utopia was always focused on the wellbeing and strength of the community over the individual.

Examples of utopian ideology are consistent through CRIPDES documentation in the post-civil war era. A 1997 CRIPDES report described the concept of "*La Organización Comunal*," defining formal organization as "a mechanism or structure that allows working people to work together in an efficient way." The report pointed to the strength and value of community over the individual, noting, "the sum of the force of people when they are organized is better than the sum of the force of individuals when they are not organized." Furthermore, it argued that visualizing the future "should be the result of participation from everyone involved." It then listed eight principles of organizing, breaking each one into specifics.[13] In February 2003, CRIPDES held an internal discussion on how to implement a communitarian process into their work. The plan included a synopsis in the following categories: community philosophy, culture, ideology, economy, society, institutionalized community, legislative, democratic participation, utopia. At the heart of this plan was the

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[11] El Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales y las Organizaciones Campesinas Firmantes de la Declaratoria Ambiental, 26 June 1998, Box D, Folder 2, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[12] "Análisis y Acuerdo Político de la Concertación Ciudadana por la Paz, la Dignidad y la Justicia Social," September 5, 2006, Box D, Folder 6, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[13] "La Organización Comunal" San Salvador, Abril 1997, Box A, Folder 1, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

belief that another world was possible, one that valued community over profit. This was the "utopia" they hoped a communitarian process could work toward. Additionally, the plan included non-human nature as part of the community, noting that, "the work sacrifices of the present have an objective to create the base of a new society [...] where we would live in harmony with nature and arrive at happiness."[14]

The practice of a prolonged popular struggle was evident during the postwar era through the concept of collective action toward utopia and was a key to the success of El Salvador's anti-mining campaign. The long game was essential because mining activity had a long history in El Salvador. Mining had been a part of Salvadoran history for centuries. Many Salvadorans had artisanal mines along the Río Lempa long before the Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century. Large-scale gold and silver mining did not start until the early twentieth century after European settlers "discovered" Central America's gold belt, which ran through El Salvador directly under the Río Lempa. In 1904, the San Sebastian mine opened in the department of La Unión. It was mined through artisanal methods until the 1970s when a U.S. metallurgist introduced cyanide as a substance and method to extract gold from the mine's ore (Dougherty 2011). Although all mining ceased during the civil war, at the turn of the century, foreign mining interests grew throughout Central America as free trade policies caused countries to compete to lower trade tariffs and allow foreign companies to access their resources. In other words, while gold mining had a presence in El Salvador for centuries, it was not a substantial contributor to El Salvador's economy until the 1990s, with the introduction of neoliberal policies at the end of the war.

At the turn of the century, foreign mining interests grew throughout the region as free trade policies caused countries to compete for foreign business. Central American countries competed for a Foreign Direct Investment in mining in anticipation of the end of the Multi Fiber Agreement, which could have led to the collapse of the textile industry, a major contributor to the Central American economy. In 1995, El Salvador established a three percent royalty rate for mineral production. In 1997, Guatemala reduced their royalty rate from six percent to one percent. To respond, El Salvador reworked its mining law and lowered the royalty rate to two percent in 2001 (Dougherty 2011).

As Central American countries lowered their tariffs, mining activity grew substantially in El Salvador. Just one year after El Salvador lowered its royalty rate to two percent, the Vancouver-based Pacific Rim Mining Corporation bought the rights to El Dorado gold and silver deposits in San Isidro, Cabañas. The Francisco

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[14] "Modelo de Sistema Comunitário," Written with support of Licendiado Aquiles Montoya, Economist and Professor in UCA, draft for internal discussion, February 2003, Box D, Folder 9, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

Flores administration (1994-2004) supported Pacific Rim's efforts (Dougherty 2011). During the Flores administration, the Salvadoran government gave twenty-nine metallic mineral exploration permits to foreign mining companies in the northern portion of the country, most of them along the Río Lempa, the country's main freshwater source. More than seventy percent of the population lived in departments the river ran through. The gold belt also ran through a large portion of the river as well. Communities feared mine tailings would contaminate their water source as they observed with San Sebastian. Despite this, Pacific Rim continued exploration and development during the Flores administration and planned to open a mine in the Cabañas region (McKinley 2015, 8).

Strategies for Success

The successful banning of metal mining in El Salvador and prevention of coal development in Montana relied on knowledge of the land, education, and creating strong strategic relationships on multiple levels. Each of these unique relationships had their own set of power dynamics, strategies, and friendships that shifted over time as the social movements responded to broader environmental, political, economic, and social processes.

As Salvadorans began to campaign against metal mining, southeastern Montanans ramped up their fight against coal mining and coal-hauling railroads. In 1991, the Tongue River Railroad requested a forty-two-mile extension to its permit to connect with Wyoming coal mines, extending the length of the line to 131 miles. They called this version the "TRR II." There would eventually be four versions of this railroad plan, each adapting to serve different real and hypothetical coal mines.[15] The following year, NPRC gathered over 1,100 verified statements against the "TRR II" from farmers, ranchers, railroad workers, and other area residents to submit to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). The ICC required each statement to be notarized and required twenty-two copies of each letter. Despite this challenging process, NPRC traveled around the region with computers, printers, and notaries, so locals could submit their statements. The U.S. Postal Service delivered archival-sized boxes containing over 24,000 pages. The variety of people from different interest groups who wrote statements exemplifies the quantity of individuals with different backgrounds who all opposed this railroad.[16]

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[15] Steven D. Paulson, "Timeline: The Northern Plains Resource Council and the Tongue River Railroad," NPRC Archive, Billings, MT.

[16] Teresa Erickson, letter to Interstate Commerce Commission, Box TRR I, Folder "Comments on final EIS for TRR II," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

Relationships that Montana ranchers created organized on three levels: family, organizational, and transnational. In the first level, families broke long-standing traditions of keeping to themselves and began to call each other when the Tongue River Railroad Company came knocking at their doors. Jeanie Alderson, the daughter of one of the original five families who formed NPRC, and an active leader in NPRC herself, shared that "neighbors talking to neighbors was pretty radical, but that's what we had to do."[17] And according to both Alderson as well as Teresa Erickson, NPRC's Executive Director from 1986 to 2019, it was specifically women who were the ones who broke this silence and began to build solidarity and camaraderie among ranching families. "The women were more willing to break taboos and talk to their neighbors about what was going on," Erickson explained.[18]

Once ranching families who did not want a railroad to bisect their properties established a coalition among each other, they were able to team up with other stakeholders. Over the years, NPRC partnered with railroad unions, school superintendents, university students, and even coal mining unions to fight the Tongue River Railroad Company's plans that, in these groups' eyes, would only benefit investors. NPRC recruited new allies with each new iteration of the railroad.[19] In some versions, the railroad would shorten established routes, laying off railroad workers or forcing them to relocate. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) approached crews for agreement to operate the Tongue River Railroad trains. The union opposed the new railroad but wanted control of these trains if they were inevitable. The unions came to an agreement with BNSF to operate the trains, but NPRC was not concerned. An NPRC newsletter explained "first, it does nothing to lessen the unions' opposition to the railroad, in fact, they continue to support the fight to stop the railroad. Second, the agreement reached with BNSF stipulated that trains operating over the TRR will run from Decker to Glendive. This means that the trains will *not* stop in Miles City and Miles City will *not* gain any permanent jobs because of the railroad."[20]

NPRC highlighted these alliances to further galvanize the movement. In a 1997 newsletter, they wrote, "NPRC believes that the property rights of Tongue River ranchers, the jobs of railroaders and coal miners, the businesses of people in Forsyth, Sheridan, and Glendive and the traditional ways of the

[17] Jeanie Alderson, video interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, 2016, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[18] Teresa Erickson, interview by author, August 3, 2022.
[19] Teresa Erickson, interview by author, August 3, 2022.
[20] Derail the Tongue River Railroad: The Train's in Trouble" Newsletter Supplement, October 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

Northern Cheyenne far outweigh any perceived need for the TRR."[21] In an internal organizing flier titled "Elements of the Tongue River Railroad Issue that Might Make a Good Story," the author further highlighted the special power of these unlikely alliances. "Unique coalition of ranchers on the Tongue, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow, railroad unions, coal mines, and several town Chambers of Commerce while MT congressmen all support it."[22] In her interview, Erickson shared that the most effective way to organize coalitions was to figure out people's self-interests and unite around an issue based on that. She explained that when she first learned about the Tongue River Railroad upon joining NPRC in the 1980s, she thought, "oh my God, this is such a great issue because everybody's getting screwed. Meaning you have the opportunity. There's tons of self-interest here."[23]

The alliance that lasted the longest during this struggle was between the Northern Cheyenne and Euro-descendent ranchers; representatives from both groups formed NPRC. The proposed railroad would have run along the Tongue River, which served as the eastern border of the Northern Cheyenne reservation. According to Northern Cheyenne tribal member Alaina Buffalo Spirit, not only would the railroad have crossed sacred sites and disturbed local salmon habitat, but it also would have harmed everyone downstream in addition to everyone on the proposed route itself including the Amish, the Lummi nation, and both the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene tribes.[24] The Northern Cheyenne and NPRC fought the Tongue River Railroad for over thirty-five years by responding to draft EISs, surveying the route for historic properties that were eligible for federal protection, and sharing the railroad's potential negative consequences with communities, newspapers, and elected officials. They played the long game until the idea of more coal development became obsolete and the push for the railroad finally came to rest.

NPRC and their allies fought against the Tongue River Railroad for over three decades, delaying the railroad and coal company's plans however they could. The railroad company responded by changing their plans and routes often and winning new permits and investors. Though there were many times the railroad seemed inevitable, on November 25, 2015, the Tongue River Railroad Company asked the federal STB to suspend work on the railroad's application. NPRC responded to the company's request by filing a formal petition with the

[21] "Derail the Tongue River Railroad Newsletter," September 1997, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[22] Document "Elements of the Tongue River Railroad Issue that Might Make a Good Story" c. 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[23] Teresa Erickson, interview by author, August 3, 2022.
[24] Alaina Buffalo Spirit, video interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, 2016, Northern Plains Resource Council digital archives, Billings, MT.

STB requesting dismissal of the application. While the railroad company argued the project was still viable, NPRC learned that one of the coal companies who had invested in the project had already lost their lease for half the coal tracks. Without that half, the remaining coal was not economical to mine. NPRC notified the STB on April 15, 2016. Eleven days later, the STB formally denied the permit application for the Tongue River Railroad, putting the project to rest at last (*Great Falls Tribune* 2016).

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At the turn of the millennium, it seemed El Salvador was well on the trajectory of exploiting its precious metals until there was nothing left. But parallel to the growth in mining interest was increasing concern of the effects of outside mining interests on the economy, pollution, and violence. In 2007, the University Institute of Public Opinion of the University of Central America surveyed rural communities across the country to gather data on public opinion on mining. The survey found that 67.6 percent of the population considered mining projects to contribute little or nothing to economic development. 62.5 percent of the population considered El Salvador not to be an appropriate place for metal mining at all (McKinley 2015, 4). Another study showed similar opposition, but with qualitative data. In one of their interviews, a Salvadoran farmer said, "it's more than just having employment alternatives to mining, it's about having a future for Salvadorans created by Salvadorans, where all perspectives are respected" (Zakrison et al. 2015, 5).

Concerns over mining grew loud enough that Antonio Saca of the right-wing ARENA party put the first moratorium on mining in 2008 before being expelled for violating the party's principles (Westervelt 2015). In 2009, El Salvador elected Mauricio Funes, the first president from the FMLN party, who finalized Saca's moratorium. At this time, Pacific Rim was exploring the old El Dorado mine in Cabañas, a mine that was closed during the war but was now ready to reopen. Upon hearing the news of the moratorium, Pacific Rim sued the government of El Salvador through the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes of the World Bank based in Washington D.C. for USD 77 million (McKinley 2015, 4). Pacific Rim cited CAFTA's clause that protected investors from "discrimination" and "indirect expropriation."[25] In 2013, the Australian company OceanaGold bought Pacific Rim. By 2014, the total sum

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[25] Anti-mining resistance in El Salvador: a primer in three pages, 2013, Box 1, Folder MT-01-53, Project Solidarity Archive, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

Pacific Rim/OceanaGold demanded from El Salvador was USD 315 million (Dougherty 2017).

It was in this context, when mining operations accelerated throughout Central America while popular opinion was against it, that the social movement formalized its organizing with the creation of *La Mesa Nacional Frente a La Minería Metálica* (The National Roundtable Against Metal Mining, or "La Mesa"), which was composed of many civil society, grassroots groups like CRIPDES. In 2005, La Mesa began investigations and community outreach programs surrounding foreign mining plans. Through their efforts, they generated broad support from both the right and the left. In 2007, U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities, the transnational solidarity branch of CRIPDES, reached out to other solidarity organizations from the U.S. and Canada to form International Allies Against Mining in El Salvador ("Allies") and accompany La Mesa's work. Eventually, seventeen non-profit organizations from the U.S. and six from Canada made up La Mesa's international solidarity partnership.

Like Montana, El Salvador's anti-mining campaign was organized at three different levels: community, national, and international. At the local level, communities organized referendums to vote on whether they wanted to allow or ban mining in their municipality. This was called a "*consulta popular*." The strategy was for enough communities to vote "no" on mining that the movement would reach a national level. It was within these three levels of organizing that Sister Cities accompanied the anti-mining movement. One of the main roles international solidarity played in El Salvador's anti-mining campaign was sending international delegations to El Salvador to observe their mining referendums. Community Organizers from CRIPDES worked to organize international delegations to act as observers and reporters for the community referendums. The first communities to hold the referendums were in Chalatenango, the first region to repopulate after the war and the first working-class people to own land. They each overwhelmingly voted against allowing mining in their municipalities.

While communities were busy organizing the referendums, the lawsuits continued working their way through court. The International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, a faction of the World Bank, handled the cases and created a tribunal to oversee trade disputes. The social movement criticized the arrangement due to the World Bank's advocacy for neoliberal policies. The case ran from 2009 to 2016 when, to most people's surprise, the tribunal dismissed the case because OceanaGold was an Australia company and Australia was not a part of the CAFTA agreement. The tribunal ordered OceanaGold to pay eight million dollars to cover the case's legal fees (Tawil, Stern, and Veeder 2016). OceanaGold did not pay these fees, but they did withdraw from El Salvador. This ruling was the final catalyst in the anti-mining ban. Salvadorans

continued to mobilize at the local, national, and international levels, pressuring the Salvadoran government to ban mining and educating the population of the threats mining posed on the Salvadoran landscape. On March 27, 2017, sixty-nine out of eighty-four of El Salvador's Legislative Assembly voted in favor of banning all metal mining exploration and exploitation throughout the entire country (Cabezas 2017).

Conclusion

Stories from these two American river basins highlight how fighting for economic, social, and environmental justice are interwoven, not just in the "Global South," but in those places where people establish roots and care for their land. In the case of the Tongue River, the Northern Cheyenne and white ranching families had established themselves through utilizing the land to raise cattle and grow crops. When outside interests sought to disrupt their way of life through coal development, the locals used their knowledge of the land to argue that the sodium rich coal was incompatible with the river's wellbeing, and even to most coal markets. They formalized their organizing efforts by creating the NPRC, which allowed them to fight legal battles and recruit a variety of allies to grow their movement and amplify their voice. They prevented the construction of the Tongue River Railroad for over three decades, which was long enough that coal demand became obsolete, and the project went bankrupt.

In the Río Lempa, organizers were exiting a war and transitioning to peace when mining interest from foreign companies accelerated throughout the country. Formalized during the war, CRIPDES was able to apply similar strategies they had developed during wartime, including educating and mobilizing campesinos and building local and international allies. They knew from even before the war that their struggle would be long – they would have to continue organizing indefinitely toward their utopia. Like the people in southeastern Montana, CRIPDES focused their organizing efforts around mining through co-creating and joining La Mesa. Formalizing and focusing the work allowed them to pool resources, have a unified identity in legal cases, and create name recognition as the movement grew.

Comparing two case studies shows how the core-periphery dynamic operated at different scales in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Placing case studies from the U.S. West and Latin America in conversation with one another provides a better understanding of the extent human history from different regions is linked to destruction of the non-human environment. Studying the Americas as a region uncovers new links between producing regions and economically rich regions, extending beyond a dual comparison

of nation-nation or city-country to observing the pattern at different levels (Tucker 2000). This process can help reconstruct our understanding of the region (Fernández-Armesto 2005). This approach questions the Global-North-versus-South dichotomy, showing how struggles in the Americas are connected and interdependent. U.S. hegemony is a product of history and will not last forever. Studying the shifting power dynamics in the Americas can help us understand how unequal power dynamics in the Americas started and their temporality (Fernández-Armesto2005).

Environments in the periphery are often exploited, but they can also fight back and challenge or even overturn this relationship. Declensionist stories are important for understanding how humans have altered the planet in a way no other species has done. However, historian Linda Nash worried that narratives of decline would lead back to the old nature-culture debate and advocated for more success stories and the "need for narratives of justice and freedom, but grounded in the material environment" (Sutter et al. 2013). As neoliberalism continues into the twenty-first century, with climate change and human displacement as consequences, stories of success will be a tool for communities as they organize and navigate new realities.

The people who fought mining projects along the Tongue River and Río Lempa did not necessarily consider themselves to be environmentalists. They were driven by the need to make a living in the places they loved (Radkau 2008). Their stories were not pure hero-versus-villain tales (though they sometimes told them that way to recruit allies and advocate change), instead they were stories of labor tied to landscape which motivated them to push back against more powerful people and institutions at the core. Companies and governments tried to sell democracy and development as intricately linked, but Salvadorans and Montanans called out false promises and hypocrisies; they knew these two ideals were incompatible (Grandin 2004).

Historical narratives are choices communities make and shape our beliefs in what the land is for us. In the United States – the U.S. West in particular – mining can at times be glorified, a symbol of frontier, power, technology, and empire. This is a strategic construction. Deregulation becomes much easier when politicians and companies can tap into the positive collective memory about mining (Isenberg 2017). In the case of El Salvador, memory of centuries of oppression and resistance galvanized campesinos to organize against mining. But this cannot be taken for granted. Salvadoran journalist Roberto Lovato argues that El Salvador is in a "state of amnesia," and the people are forgetting their past, as evidenced by support for a president who is arresting thousands of people without due process, including members of the anti-mining campaign. The Americas are an example of people under the "fugue state," which generates

collective ignorance (Anastario 2019). History and memory are antidotes to the process of forgetting (Lovato 2020).

We were able to learn from these stories because both the NPRC and CRIPDES saw the benefit of keeping their documents and sharing their histories of resistance. They are advocates of unforgetting. They are revitalizing collective memory by formalizing their archives and encouraging historians like me to help tell their stories. This is a political act. By preserving their histories, the NPRC and CRIPDES are democratizing knowledge, history, and memory (Weld 2014). Present circumstances of social groups are determined by the past, so consciousness of their history is essential (Trouillot 1996). Their archives, like all archives, are incomplete reflections of the past. Yet they are also a way of leveraging people power to continue the struggle of protecting their land and way of life.

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[26] As noted in the introduction, much of the information for this chapter comes from three private archives. The Northern Plains Resource Council houses all their own documentation. They have worked with an archivist in the past, and their boxes and folders are labeled. I have kept those labels in my footnote citations. The part from the Project Solidarity Archive is currently in Bozeman, Montana, but will eventually be transferred for long-term preservation and public access. The labels for the archive come mostly from the donors of the materials, but the Montana State Public History lab added some folder and box names to unlabeled material. The footnote citations reflect what the labels showed at the time I accessed the materials. Finally, the CRIPDES archive has only recently started to be formally organized. None of the boxes nor folders were labeled when I accessed the materials in January 2023. I created my own labels for notes (i.e. "Box A, Folder 7"), but the materials themselves are still unlabeled. CRIPDES is currently deciding where to store their collection long-term.

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Crises and Contestation: Territorio, Comunas, and Black Territorial Struggle in Northern Esmeraldas, Ecuador[27]

Tathagato Ganguly

Upon Inés' invitation, I arrived at the office of MOMUNE[28] early in the morning. The office, located near the fishing docks of San Lorenzo town, was housed in a small two-room and a hall layout. Like most of the houses in the area, it was made partly of cement and partly of wood, with galvanized iron sheets as the roof. As this was the first time that I was attending a meeting of this nature, I introduced myself and explained the reasons behind my presence there. Towards the end of the meeting, Inés introduced me to Jairon Quintero, an environmental scientist by training, and an active participant in the territorial struggles of the Afroesmeraldans[29] of the region. As I sat down next to him, he immediately remarked, "*Nosotros acá hablamos de territorio…¿sabes que es territorio?*[30]" As I nodded positively, he probed further "*pero, desde una mirada occidental o que*?[31]"

These were still the early days of my fieldwork, but it was not the first time that my research plans, which prior to fieldwork were developed with a singular focus on the *comunas*, were now unraveling under the conceptual weight of *territorio*. The more I spoke to the people of the region the more convinced I was that people were more interested in talking about ancestral territories, variously termed as *territorio ancestral, territorio de nuestros antepasados/nuestros*

[28] *Movimiento de Mujeres Negras del Norte de Esmeraldas*, Black Women's Movement of Northern Esmeraldas.
[29] The chapter uses different terminologies, namely Blacks, Afro-Ecuadorians, Afrodescendents and Afroesmeraldans to highlight the subtle differences these terms imply. While Afroecuadorian is a statist term, Afrodescendent is a more generic term referring to the Black population of any region. Afroesmeraldans is a term used specifically for the Black communities of north Esmeraldas who claim the heritage of the maroon societies of the Pacific lowlands of south-western Colombia and north-western Ecuador.
[30] "Here, we prefer using the term territory. Do you know what territory refers to?" (All translations in the text are mine, unless mentioned otherwise)
[31] But, from a Western perspective or something else?

mayores[32]. On the other hand, the usage of comuna was usually restricted to the narratives of land titling process that began in the mid-1990s or when a particular comuna would gather for a meeting, even then people would usually prefer to use the name of their respective comunas (Santa Rita, Ricaurte, La Boca, and so on) rather than using the term comuna.

This "overlapping territoriality" (Agnew and Oslender 2013, 121-40) is what is at the heart of this chapter. The central concern of this chapter will be to bring forth the two competing ideas of territory that is at play in northern Esmeraldas. One is the concept of *territorio ancestral* or simply territorio that encapsulates an expansive notion of territory that goes beyond land, rights that are perceived as inalienable and a channel and precondition for socio-political rights (racial equality and autonomy of forms of life). The other is that of the comunas, a spatio-legal entity that is recognized by the Ecuadorian state, which, by recognizing only collective property rights, seeks to reorganize the control over land and resources, leaving the dominant forms of power and economic organization untouched.

In the recent past, across Latin America, territory has become a rallying point of several Indigenous, Black, peasant, and urban neighborhood movements (Bryan 2012; Clare, Habermehl, and Mason-Deese 2017; Halvorsen 2019; Leff 2017; Rivero 2014; Schwartz and Streule 2016; Sandoval, Robertsdotter, and Paredes 2016; Zibechi 2012). This shift, as some have argued, has coincided with the "territorial turn" that happened with the adoption of neoliberal multiculturalism and constitutional reforms carried out by the Latin American states in the 1990s (Berman-Arévalo 2019; Cárdenas 2012a; Hale 2011; Restrepo 2013). Consequently, some perceive the ensuing process as "territorialization of ethnopolitical reforms" (Jaramillo 2014). Building on these insights, this chapter looks into the Afroesmeraldans' struggle for territorio, the titling of their territories as comunas, and the dissonance between the two. By doing so, it attempts to explore how territory is both the terrain and the outcome of politics. Further, it argues that any understanding of territory (statist and/or non-statist) must take the question of power into account, that is, how power works *in* and *through* territories.

But one might ask, why territory? As mentioned in the above paragraphs, while constitutional reforms recognized the collective property rights of some

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[32] Territories of our ancestors, our elders, ancestral territory. The usage of the gendered pronoun is not an oversight. However, using gender-neutral pronouns remains a practice that is still limited to certain niche areas of urban academic and activist circles in Ecuador. In these parts people still adhere to the "standard" Spanish wherein the default pronoun is the masculine one. However, this should not be taken as an endorsement of such usages; rather, the intention is to re-present these statements/narratives/stories as I encountered them.

groups and provided them with certain legal guarantees and protection, it has not deterred the intensification of extractive activities in the region. As a matter of fact, it was precisely the period after the "territorial turn" that Latin America as a region experienced a steep escalation in its extractive activities, a process variously dubbed as "commodities consensus" (Svampa 2015) and "neoextractivism" (Gudynas 2015, Acosta 2013). Given this context, territorial struggles have become one of the stumbling blocks of capitalist accumulation. Underlying the resurgence of territory as a key political expression is the strong demand for reconfiguring socio-environmental relations anew. Thus, it is imperative that we take these developments seriously and how these shifts have profoundly changed the way we understand and conceptualize territory, and its implications for theory and politics alike.

In order to carry out the aforementioned tasks, this chapter is primarily divided into three sections and a brief concluding section. The first part introduces the various ideas of territory, as it has been understood within different disciplines, especially geography. Instead of covering the vast literature and trying to arrive at a synthesis, a task that has already been carried out more efficiently elsewhere by others,[33] this section attempts to broadly outline the conceptual transformations of territory within the Euro-American tradition. Further, it seeks to bring these insights in dialogue with how territory has been thought anew by the various territorial movements in Latin America. It attempts to tease out, how and why territory became a rallying point for the Black, Indigenous and rural peasant communities. Consequently, how these shifts have profoundly changed the way we understand and conceptualize territory, and its implications for theory and politics alike.

The second part focuses on what is referred to as "the territorial turn" within the ambit of multicultural constitutional reforms initiated in the 1990s. The aim of this section is to highlight the various actors that were involved in the "territorial turn" and their respective, and at times, contradictory interests in the land-titling process. Lastly, the chapter turns its attention to the two distinct forms of territoriality that are at work in Northern Esmeraldas, namely, comunas and territorio. We will see how the state responded to the demands of the Afroesmeraldans and channeled them through legislations on land rights while Afroesmeraldans continue to struggle for their distinct idea of territorio. The second section of this part focuses on the idea of territorio as understood by the Afroesmeraldans – taking the formation of territorial organizations by

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[33] For a detailed review of territory, see Agnew 1994, 2010; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Capel 2016; Elden 2007, 2009, 2010; Raffestin and Butler 2012.

the Afroesmeraldans after the 1994 Law of Agrarian Development as one of its manifestations – and the impact it had on the overall Black politics in the region.

Territory: A Primer

Territory, like many other concepts, has often evaded serious exploration as its meanings are considered to be given or self-evident. Unlike space or place, which received considerable attention in the 1970s and 1980s across disciplines, territory remained on the fringes. Marginalization of territory as a category was further accentuated by the rising interest in the "de-territorialization," "borderlessness," and "flows" of the globalization thesis. On the other hand, the older and far more dominant understanding of territory that conflates it with clearly demarcated sovereign boundaries has often assumed the meaning of territory to be a given. While the former asserts the triumph of capitalism over territory, the latter presumes the state-centric territorial category to be the only one that is valid. While both these positions hold some truth, this "impoverished binary" (Ince 2012, 1) tells us more about the state's authority, or lack thereof, over its borders than it does about territory. Then we must ask ourselves, does territory as a category hold any analytical relevance? And are sovereign territories the only possible way of thinking about territories?

Beyond the Territorial Trap

As already mentioned, the dominant understanding of territory equates it with being sovereign containers, that is, the naturalization of territory as what is enclosed within the borders of a state. Such an idealized version of territory, deeply entrenched in mainstream political theory and international political economy, has been criticized as the "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994). The territorial trap, according to Agnew, involves the assumption of the state's authority over a clearly defined territorial jurisdiction, including the economic processes that unfold within it, the implication being that economy and society are strictly defined by state boundaries (Agnew 1994, 71-72). Another related line of argument that points out the drawbacks of sovereign territorial constructions is that it is inadequate to comprehend the flows of political, economic, and ecological activities and that territories can also be constructed through practices that exceed sovereignty (Kuehls 1996, 30-35). Heeding Agnew's call, the recent surge of interest in territory has been careful to avoid the "territorial trap" and has argued for the need to rethink territory in a relational manner, more attuned to social, political, and historical factors (Blomley 2023; Elden 2010, 2013; Ince 2012; Sassen 2013; Storey 2012).

One of the most extensive and sophisticated accounts of rescuing territory from the clutches of the territorial states in recent times is Stuart Elden's *The Birth of Territory* (2013). Employing a mix of genealogical method, history of ideas and "analysis of practices and workings of power," Elden sets out to investigate territory conceptually and historically (2010, 800). Territory in his account, though related to, is more than land (political economic) and terrain (jurídico-political). Hence, he argues for understanding territory as a "political technology" that comprises "measuring land and controlling terrain." The modern idea of territory as "bounded space under the control of a group of people, usually state," was an outcome of one such political technology that had developed over the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Western Europe (Elden 2013, 322-23). Thus, for Elden, territory needs to be thought of in its historical and geographical specificity, as a historical question that is "produced, mutable and fluid" (Elden 2010, 812).

Different in her approach while in agreement with the main thrust of Elden's argument, Saskia Sassen too argues for the conceptual autonomy of territory from the national-state territory (Sassen 2013, 22). According to her, it would be more fruitful to define territory as "marked by embedded logics of power and of claim-making" (Sassen 2013, 39). This, she argues further, would allow us to think of territory analytically and engage with its diverse meanings. Whereas for Paasi (2003), territories are a social process in which social space and social action are inseparable; territory, according to him, comprises different dimensions: material (land), functional (control of space), and symbolic (social identity) (109-10). Questioning the foundational role of territory for state power, Joe Painter stretches the meanings of territory as an effect of extensive networks of human and non-human actors. Thus, for Painter (2010), territory is interpreted principally as an effect, understood as an "outcome of networked socio-technical practices" (1093).

It is important to point out here that, in the above-mentioned works, the critique is directed towards the assumption of territorial states as a preconstituted unit for social analysis. Notwithstanding the merits of these works, they do leave us wanting in terms of concrete expressions of non-state territoriality in contemporary times. Thereby, once again we are stuck with, as exemplified by the work of Elden, a kind of latent statism in conceptualizing territory. While Elden traces the "birth" of territory, eventually, for him:

> territory is the space within which sovereignty is exercised: it is the spatial extent of sovereignty. Sovereignty, then, is exercised over territory: territory is that over which sovereignty is exercised. (Elden 2013: 329)

Despite the clarification that he is dealing with one type of territory that emerged in modern Europe, we still end up with the territory-sovereignty coupling. Paasi (1997) takes a measured approach in this regard when he claims that territories are not necessarily state-spaces, but the role of the state in "territory-making" is too significant to be brushed aside (41). But once again, not much is said about possible non-state or non-sovereign territories.

Finally, in Sassen's work, which explores the territory of global finance, digital networks, and global cities, we do get a sense of what non-sovereign territorial formations look like. Nevertheless, the examples she offers focus more on the contestations between the capitalist and territorial (statist) logics of power. One possible reason behind such an approach is the scale at which she is working with these concepts; that is, they are geared more toward a macro-level analysis. Sassen's (2008) aim is to examine what she refers to as the medieval, modern, global state assemblages, and she does so by interrogating three interrelated terms – territory, authority, and rights. Thus, it is the combination of these three key terms and how they play out at particular points in time that is her primary concern.

But this still does not explain the fact that all the above-mentioned formulations are derived exclusively from Euro-American experiences. In fact, such biases within anglophone geography have been pointed out in recent times (Claire et al. 2017; Ince and de la Torre 2016). Consequently, the calls for "decolonizing," "unsettling," and "rethinking" territory that seek a more extensive engagement with articulations of territory beyond the Euro-American context are gradually gaining ground (Correia 2019; De Leeuw and Hunt 2017; Diagle and Ramírez 201; Halvorsen 2018). While not exclusively of Latin American provenance (Delaney 2005), territory has notably gained prominence within the region's social movements and literature. One of the crucial contributions of these movements has been to disrupt the either/or position regarding deterritorialization/reterritorialization, and to account for the uneven and contested processes of territorialization, thereby allowing us to glimpse the various possibilities, forms, and claims for non-sovereign territories.

Contested Territories: Lessons from Latin America

The idea of territory as the physical-geographical base for the exercise of state sovereignty, claims the Brazilian geographer Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves, is deeply entangled with the colonial history of the Americas (Porto-Gonçalves 2015) and the recent bottom-up reinvention of the idea of territory has challenged this understanding to varying degrees (Porto-Gonçalves 2012). Porto-Gonçalves is not alone in making this observation. Across Latin America, the neoliberal

moves had generated immense conflicts between the state and various Indigenous, Black, and peasant communities. Territory has been central to many of them: the Zapatistas in Mexico (Reyes 2016), the Seringueiros (Porto-Gonçalves 2001), the Quilombos (De la Torre 2013) and the *Sem-terre* movement in Brazil (Haesbaert 2004), the Piqueteros in Argentina (Svampa and Pereyra 2003), the Miskito people in Nicaragua (Hale 2011; Offen 2003), Black communities on the Pacific coasts of Colombia and Ecuador (Oslender 2016; Escobar 2008, 2014; Cárdenas 2012b; Berman-Arevalo 2012; García and Walsh 2018) – what is common to all of these different contexts is their insertion of territory as a political category and practice.

While the strategy and achievements of these movements have varied from context to context, what was common to these movements was their challenge to the Westphalian model of state sovereignty. Territory, in this instance, came to be understood as space determined by power exerted by multiple actors, thus essentially an instrument of exercising power (Lopez de Souza 1995, 78). As the Brazilian geographer Rogerio Haesbaert has argued, in most of the deterritorialization-reterritorialization theses, the category of territory itself largely remains unclarified. Bringing territory back into the agenda, Haesbaert has expanded our understanding with his triadic conceptualization of territory. According to Haesbaert (2004), territory comprises three basic dimensions: a space controlled by institutional power (juridico-political dimension); an outcome of the symbolic appropriation by a collective (symbolic and cultural dimension); and a source of resources (economic dimension). While the conventional understanding of territory has either focused on the first or the third dimension, Haesbaert argues for the need to give equal emphasis on all three dimensions. Thus, for Haesbaert, what we are witnessing in Latin American social movements is the rise of a new type of territory, one that takes the idea of multiterritoriality more seriously.

Another line of thought that has gained much prominence in the recent times can be framed as territory as political ontology. Exemplified in the works of Arturo Escobar, Mario Blaser, and Marisol de la Cadena, within the political ontological approach the most important dimension of territory – other than the usual social, economic, cultural, ecological, and technological ones – is the ontological (Escobar 2014, 76). Political ontology here refers to the power-laden processes that bring about a particular "world" and a field of study which investigates said "world" and its conflicts and negotiations with other conceptualizations of the world as they strive to maintain their respective existence (Blaser 2010, 2013). Within this framework, state-led development projects or capitalist extractivist projects are strategies for ontological occupation for territories. Consequently, struggles against them, according to Escobar (2014), are ontological struggles.

To be clear, seeing territorial, collective social, and environmental struggles as ontological struggles is only a part of a broader argument made by, if we can use the term, the political ontologists. Framing the said struggles in this fashion allows them to further the oft-cited Zapatista call for a "world where many worlds fit," thus opening up ways toward what is referred to as the "pluriverse" (De la Cadena and Blaser 2018). Therefore, the territorial question here becomes a confrontation of competing power strategies or "worlds" for the construction of life-forms.

The aim of this short review was to conceptually unpack territory as it has been understood within the larger academic literature. While doing so, the intention was to bring out what is at stake in the ways we tend to understand territory and to identify possible questions and problems that can be raised. The question of power, as we saw in both its sovereign and non-sovereign iterations, is central to territory. The power to define territories also enables their control and use in particular ways. This is an essential takeaway especially given the context we are dealing with. Territory, in our rendition, is a process, produced *with* and *against* the state through contestation. This is where I also part ways with the political ontological framework, as territorial conflict "always already entails struggles over the constitution of the world and its spaces" (Wainwright 2005, 1039), a point that I will try to argue in the course of this chapter. Moreover, the understanding of territory that I will employ seeks to avoid a neat distinction between social and institutional aspects of territory. Territories are processual: made and remade over time. Also, such a division risks positioning social life as separate or independent of the institutions that seek to govern it. I understand both these aspects of territory to be interrelated and co-constitutive of each other. In agreement with the critical currents emerging within the Latin American social movements, I also understand territory as an appropriation of space in pursuit of political goals (Escobar 2008; Halvorsen 2018; Manzanal 2007). However, it is equally important to point out that the space being appropriated is not neutral, it is one where capitalist and sovereign territorial logics of power are hegemonic.

The Territorial Turn in Latin America

The "territorial turn" in Latin America that the introductory section of this chapter refers to a form of "administrative devolution of territory to Indigenous, and to lesser extent Black peoples" who at different times have made claims to it (Offen 2003, 43). These developments were historic in the sense that up until then, these areas were either controlled or concessioned or otherwise demarcated as *tierras baldías* (literally wasteland, but in this context, empty or unoccupied state-land) by the state. This was in spite of the fact that these lands were mostly inhabited

by Indigenous, Black, and peasant communities who did not have formal titles to them and, more often than not, vociferously challenged such regulations. But despite such objections, historically, the Latin American states refused to recognize these communities' right to their territories and the diverse ways they were managed.

The wave of constitutional reforms that took place between the late 1980s and early 2000s was a significant departure from this traditional approach of the Latin American states. Contrary to their prior approach, states now seemed keen to recognize their respective countries as multi-ethnic and multicultural as they extended specific rights to Indigenous groups and the Black population in some cases. Between 1987 and early 2000, seventeen such reforms of varying degrees were undertaken across Latin America (Van Cott 2000). Among other things, a big part of these reforms was the issue of land, that is, Latin American states were now actively promoting the demarcation and titling of lands occupied by the Indigenous, Black, and peasant communities. The movements led by the respective communities who were to be the beneficiaries of these reforms primarily drove this shift in approach. Furthermore, certain external factors also played a significant role in the said development. As various international bodies like World Bank (WB), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and several United Nations (UN) agencies started focusing on issues of human rights, biodiversity conservation, land rights, and so on, they used their clout to influence respective states towards their adoption (Brysk and Wise 1997; Yashar 1999). One such significant instrument of reform was the ILO's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, commonly known as ILO 169, promulgated in 1989. ILO 169 requires that governments recognize Indigenous land rights and that Indigenous peoples be granted at least some form of administrative autonomy in the management of these lands. To date, thirteen Latin American countries have ratified the convention.[34] While ratification does not necessarily translate into implementation of the concerned directives, it does, however, make the ratifying countries subject to supervision and complaints in the case of non-compliance or any transgressions.

The subsequent changes ushered by these ethno-racial reforms have been the subject of several studies that provide a panoramic view of and different perspectives on these changes. One explanation for the adoption of these policies in the past three decades is that neoliberal reforms, especially economic adjustment policies, challenged Indigenous local autonomy and livelihoods, leading to increased ethnic mobilization, which in turn forced Latin American

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[34] Argentina (2000), Bolivia (1991), Brazil (2002), Colombia (1991), Costa Rica (1993), Ecuador (1998), Guatemala (1996), Honduras (1995), Mexico (1990), Paraguay (1993), Peru (1994), and Venezuela (2002). The latest entrants in this club are Chile (2008) and Nicaragua (2010).

states to agree to Indigenous demands (Brysk 2000; Wise 2003; Yashar 2005). In a similar vein, it has been argued that national elites pursued multicultural citizenship reforms as a means of enhancing the domestic legitimacy of the state at a time when Latin American states have found it increasingly difficult to meet the material demands of their citizens (Van Cott 2000). Furthermore, some have suggested that the neoliberal states in Latin America are meeting certain demands by Indigenous and Black groups via formalization of property rights in order to delegitimize more radical claims (Bryan 2012; Hale 2002, 2005, 2011; Offen 2003). Lastly, there is a strain of thought that perceives these changes as primarily an exercise in "market-based land reform" carried out under the auspices of multilateral and bilateral institutions, instead of state-led land reforms. The central argument is that the formalization of property rights does little or nothing to challenge the power of large landholders (Kay et al. 2008).

In the case of Ecuador, rural development projects focusing on land titling and economic infrastructure backed by the World Bank (WB) and InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) started gaining prominence beginning in the mid-1980s. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also financed land management and rural development projects that focused on land titling and the development of economic activities in farms. But the biggest of them all was the "Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples Development Project." Co-financed by the WB, IFAD, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Ecuadorian State, and potential beneficiaries at the cost of 50 million USD, the primary objectives of the project were the institutionalization of local membership organizations, the regularization of land and water rights, and rural investment to facilitate increased access to services and markets and augment rural production (WB 1997). The supposed beneficiaries of these projects were spread across the three regions of Ecuador – the coast, the highlands, and the Amazon – and included 228 rural parishes, roughly one-third of the total parishes in the country.

Initial studies tended to perceive the implementation of these sets of policies as a part of a region-wide move towards "multicultural" constitutional reforms. But three decades later, with the privilege of hindsight, it can be argued that these processes have been far more varied in their execution and outcomes. The "hollowing out" – when states either withdraw or refuse to implement or only make empty gestures– of legally recognized rights has not only demonstrated the limits of a rights-based approach but has also brought out the contradictions of engaging with the state (Hale, Calla, and Mullings 2017, 84). But however tenuous, it cannot be denied that there was some degree of "multicultural recognition" (Hooker 2020, 8), and as we will see in the course of this chapter, while it opened up certain political possibilities for different ways of organizing

around the issue of territory, it was full of contradictions from its very outset. What did happen, however, was that it reconfigured both the state and rural Black movements, and the relation between them.

In the case of Black communities especially, states adopted distinct approaches in different countries. In her comparative study of Black rights in Colombia and Brazil after the multicultural reforms, Tianna Paschel (2016) has argued that we can clearly identify two distinct phases of these reforms that are primarily influenced by what she calls "political field alignments" (1-28). That is to say, the two phases represent two "distinct moments of interplay between domestic and global politics" (4). While in the first phase, which she terms "the multicultural alignment," whose genesis can be traced back to the late 1980s, the focus was more on the issues of cultural difference and autonomy (81-83), the second phase, from 2000 onwards, is termed "racial equality alignment," wherein another wave of reforms were undertaken for racial equality and combating racial discrimination (117-18, 120-22). While the first phase was far more localized in the rural parts and included both Indigenous and Black people, the second phase was more focused on the urban context and mostly on the Black population. Both Hooker (2020) and Paschel (2016) go on to argue that throughout these three decades what was achieved can, at best, be described as "partial victories."

In agreement with Paschel's argument, we will try to argue further that Black mobilization in the region and its outcome, successful or otherwise, varied from context to context, and that it depended not only on how Blackness was politicized in each context but also on how Blackness was constructed historically within particular national contexts. In order to justify this argument in the Ecuadorian context, we would first need to understand what exactly the comunas are and how the *Ley de Desarrollo Agrario* (LDA, Law of Agrarian Development)[35] paved the way for the Afroesmeraldans to get their territories titled as *comunas*.

Comunas *in Ecuador: A Brief History*

Comunas emerged as a category in the first half of the twentieth century as a part of a series of interventions made by the Ecuadorian state to appropriate land and to restructure the agrarian structure in the countryside by using various legislation related to land tenancy and ownership. These developments can be traced back to the 1860s. However, the history of state intervention and the agrarian structure of the Ecuadorian countryside is a topic that will be dealt with in detail in the following section. At the moment, we will only focus on the comunas, how and

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[35] Ley de Desarrollo Agrario approved on June 14, 1994 and codified on April 30, 1997, Registro Oficial (461, 55)

why they emerged as a category of territorial organization, their professed aims, and what they actually accomplished in practice.

Given the nature of the anticolonial struggle in the region, Ecuador, in its initial years, was still divided by the two competing interests of the highland (*serrano*) and coastal (*costeño*) elites. While the coastal elites adhered to free trade policies oriented towards international capital the highland elites, the traditional landowning class (*terratenientes*), favored agriculture and industry that is protected from the international capital via a strict custom policy (Moncada 1975, 123). The resulting antagonism and the fact that vast areas of land inhabited by Indigenous and Black communities in the province of Zamora and Esmeraldas, respectively, were concessioned to English companies as a form of repayment for the money borrowed to sustain the Wars of Independence that had made the sovereign territorial order of Ecuador unstable. It is in this context that the successive laws regarding tierras baldías, gained significance.

Between 1865 and 1936, several crucial laws regarding tierras baldías were promulgated. These laws allowed not only the land-owning elites to further extend their landholdings thereby retaining their sway over the state but also the state to ensure that its territorial order, however fragile or dependent on the landowning elites, was maintained. The implementation of these laws resulted in large swathes of land, especially in the highland and coastal areas, that were used collectively by the Indigenous, Black, and peasant groups to be turned into state property, which was then auctioned off. Not only did the state alienate these groups from their lands through these legislations, but it also effectively pushed these groups into a situation where they were at the mercy of the landlords. The upheaval caused by these invasive policies of land occupation were met with strong resistance from the different sectors of the population, especially Indigenous groups. The frequent confrontation between the Ecuadorian state and its elites on one side, and the Indigenous groups and the socialist party on the other often ended in brutal repression, including massacres of the latter (Albornoz 1976, 80-95).

It was within this context, in order to control the discontent and conflict generated by these laws, that the Law of Organization and Regime of the Communes (LORC, *Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas*) came into effect in 1937. [36] Comuna, in this instance, afforded the opportunity for the peasant communities to get legal recognition of their land, exercise their rights communally, and seek better attention from the government. It did not grant any special privileges or rights to any group. According to this law, a commune can be constituted by any group of people who dwell in areas that are not categorized

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[36] La Ley Orgánica de Comunas approved by the Decreto Supremo No. 142, on July 30, 1937, further modified and codified on April 16, 2004 (Registro Oficial 558, 186, 315)

as parishes[37] (LORC 1937, Art. 1). The law underwent few minor changes in 1974 and 1976 and was codified for the last time in 2004. In its latest iteration in 2004, comunas were defined as "populated center[s], represented by Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Montubio communities, peoples and nationalities, which do not meet the conditions to be considered as parishes, but which are subject to the territorial circumscription of the urban or rural parish in which they reside" (LORC 2004, Art. 1). Comunas, fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial organ of the Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for overseeing the adjudication and allocation of the land titled as comunas.

As the import substitution model of the 1970s entered into crisis, the LDA of 1994 annulled all previous agrarian reform laws and took a clear turn towards the consolidation of neoliberal policies, favoring medium and large landholdings. Consistent with the regional shifts mentioned previously, clarity regarding land ownership, that is, land-titling, not land reform, became one of the cornerstones of the said law. The LDA of 1994, was a unique landmark law in the republican history of Ecuador as for the first time, it was within the legal ambit that the Ecuadorian state recognized Afroecuadorians were indeed in possession of ancestral territories and that the state through *Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario*[38] (INDA, National Institute for Agricultural Development) would facilitate the titling of the same (LDA, Art. 38). The professed aim of the LDA was to improve production systems and "modernize" the rural agrarian structure through the formalization of collective property, the implementation of technological inputs, and the diversification of seed usages (LDA, Chap. 6, Art. 38).[39]

INDA, in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like *Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio* (FEPP, Ecuadorian People's Development Fund), a non-profit organization backed by the Catholic church, and Project CARE-SUBIR (funded by USAID) implemented the process of land titling in northern Esmeraldas. The process received further legitimation as the 1998 constitution recognized the collective character of the Afrodescendents'

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[37] "Todo centro poblado que no tenga categoría de parroquia, que existiera en la actualidad o que fuere conocido con el nombre de caserío, anejo, barrio, partido, comunidad, parcialidad o cualquiera otro designación,llevara el nombre de comuna, a más del nombre propio con el que haya existido o con el que se fundare" (Art. 1, LORC).

[38] National Institute of Agrarian Development

[39] "EI Estado protegerá las tierras del INDA que se destinen al desarrollo de las poblaciones montubias, indígenas y afroecuatorianas y las legalizará mediante adjudicación en forma gratuita a las comunidades o etnias que han estado en su posesión ancestral, bajo la condición que se respeten tradiciones, vida cultural y organización social propias, incorporando, bajo responsabilidad del INDA, los elementos que coadyuven a mejorar sistemas de producción, potenciar las tecnologías ancestrales, lograr la adquisición de nuevas tecnologías, recuperar y diversificar las semillas y desarrollar otros factores que permitan elevar sus niveles de vida. Los procedimientos, métodos e instrumentos que se empleen deben preservar el sistema ecológico."

ancestral territories. Similar guarantees were granted by the Constitution of 2008, the current constitution of Ecuador in Articles 56-58.

Comunas, then, were not necessarily about collective rights nor did the law recognize the territorial authority of said groups. Indeed, as several scholars have argued, the law was basically a legal instrument that rearranged populations in the context of the new socio-productive conditions imposed by the economic order, both in an attempt to curb radicalized political activity in some regions and with the purpose of extending social control influencing the local life of the communities (Alvarez 2002; Becker 1997; Breton 1996). Although the law can be viewed as an approximation of the state and the various sectors of its population, in no way can this be interpreted as a recognition of the distinct territoriality of the said groups (Figueroa 1994). Furthermore, scholars have also argued that this norm constituted a mechanism of social control and assimilation to the Ecuadorian nation-state project, especially of the Indigenous groups, rather than becoming a mechanism that promoted a genuine recognition of their territorialities and collective rights (Burgos 1992; Prieto 2006). As mentioned earlier, the law was last codified in 2004 based on the principle enshrined in the 1998 constitution of the republic. This was the first and the only instance that this law included and recognized the collective rights of the "Indigenous nationalities" and the "Black people or the Afroecuadorians" (LORC 2004, Art. 3). However, we will see in the remaining sections of this chapter what kind of political processes were generated to recognize and implement collective territorial rights.

"No es fácil crear los sueños"[40]: *Comunas and Afroesmeraldan Territoriality*

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, ancestral territories hold a special place within the Afroesmeraldan culture. Comunas on the other hand are only a partial recognition of the much more expansive idea of territorio.[41] The purpose of this section is to shed some light on this apparent contradiction that one witnesses today in northern Esmeraldas. The focus of this section will be on the exercise of the said territoriality within the constraints imposed by the larger Ecuadorian society and state. That is to say, despite the inherent limitations of the comunas to represent Afroesmeraldan territoriality, Afroesmeraldans have

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[40] It's not easy to create dreams.
[41] For the ease of presentation, I use the term territorio throughout this section to denote the Afroesmeraldans conceptualization of the term distinguishing it from other usage of the term territory.

creatively used the opportunity to put forward their own conceptualizations of territoriality and the management of their *territorio*.

This section will focus on the two simultaneous processes of how they got their territories titled as comunas after the 1994 LDA and how in that process Afroesmeraldans were able to propose their own territoriality as represented by the *Consejo Regional de Palenques* (Regional Council of Palenques), currently known as *Confederación Afroecuatoriana del Norte de Esmeraldas* (CANE, Afroecuadorian Confederation of Northern Esmeraldas). This is not to say that Afroesmeraldans lacked a proper sense of *territorio* prior to the promulgation of said law in 1994. Rather, it was within the political churning that took place during their efforts to get collective title to their land that Afroesmeraldans collectively organized and articulated their understanding of *territorio*. The assumption driving this approach is that place meanings and spatial organizations are not ontological givens but entrenched in the historical experiences that breathe life into them.

Since the promulgation of the LDA, thirty-seven Afroesmeraldan communities have received collective titles to their lands that cover an area of 128,279.28 hectares (see Table 1). All the concerned comunas are located in the two northernmost cantons, San Lorenzo and Eloy Alfaro, of the Esmeraldas province. Most of these comunas received their formal titles between 1996 and 2002, except *Comuna Río Santiago-Cayapas*, the largest of them all, which has been under the collective possession and management of multiple Afroesmeraldan communities since 1885. The process of formalization of collective property also simultaneously initiated a movement for revalorization of Afroesmeraldan cultural practices and knowledges.

Table 1: Afroesmeraldan Comunas and their titled land in Northern Esmeraldas

S. No.	Name of the *Comuna*	Number of Families	Area of titled land (in hectares)	Parish	Canton
1	Arenales	65	2296.63	San Francisco	Eloy Alfaro
2	Asociación 9 de Octubre (Telembí)	35	695.95	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
3	Asociación Campesina de Majua	28	524.62	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
4	Asociación de Negros del margen derecho del Río Cayapas	30	923.44	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
5	Asociación de Trabajado- res de Viruela	28	1605.3 319.42	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
6	Los Atajos	75	83.55	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
7	Bella Vista del Río Ónzole	22	588	Anchayacu	Eloy Alfaro
8	Buenos Aires	18	292.39	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
9	El Capricho	10	1612.06	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
10	Chispero	150	881.17	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
11	Comuna Río Ónzole	276	10,218.63	Santo Domingo del Ónzole	Eloy Alfaro

12	Comuna Río Santiago Cayapas	2600	61,900.00	9 parroquias	Eloy Alfaro
13	Loma de Izcuandé	35	897.76	Anchayacu	Eloy Alfaro
14	Palma	20	305.29	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
15	Pampa	33	223.65	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
16	Playa de Oro	75	10,406.67	Playa de oro	Eloy Alfaro
17	Ranchito	16	17.39 728.57	Borbón	Eloy Alfaro
18	San Francisco del Ónzole	66	2600.12	San Francisco del Ónzole	Eloy Alfaro
19	El Tigre	28	112.46 748.43	Telembí	Eloy Alfaro
20	Los Ajos	75	2415.00	San Javier	San Lorenzo
21	La Alegría	55	1304.99	Tambillo	San Lorenzo
22	Asociación de trabajadores de Wimbí	25	663.79	Wimbí	San Lorenzo
23	Barranquilla de San Javier	50	1430.80	San Javier	San Lorenzo
24	Bellavista del Bajo Borbón	12	216.45	Tambillo	San Lorenzo
25	La Boca	80	991.40	Carondelet	San Lorenzo

26	Carondelet del Bogotá	59	819.80	Carondelet	San Lorenzo
27	La Chiquita	18	365.36	Ricaurte	San Lorenzo
28	Comuna de afro ecuatorianos Lucha y Progreso	60	1566.94		San Lorenzo
29	Comuna Río Bogotá	28	1416.30	Concepción	San Lorenzo
30	Comunidad de Wimbí	100	9350.00		San Lorenzo
31	Guabal de Cachabí	100	2508,40	Urbina	San Lorenzo
32	Loma del Bajo Borbón	42	1575.21	Tambillo	San Lorenzo
33	Los Olivos	4	68.94 11.54	Tambillo	San Lorenzo
34	El Progreso	70	1947.40	Tambillo	San Lorenzo
35	San Francisco del Bogotá	452	2690.40	Santa Rita	San Lorenzo
36	Santa Rita	60	1004.80	Santa Rita	San Lorenzo
37	Winbicito	50	1175.62	5 de junio	San Lorenzo
Total			128,279.28		

(FEPP and ACNUR 2012: 40-41)

Jacinto Fierro, or Don Jacha as he is fondly called by the locals, is considered as one of the veterans of the territorial struggles in northern Esmeraldas. Trained in philosophy from the Catholic University (PUCE) at Quito, he returned to his native town of San Lorenzo in 1990 as a part of an NGO that was leading a community development project. It was during this phase that he came in contact with Juan García Salazar,[42] who convinced him to join his long-standing project of collecting oral testimonies of Afroesmeraldans. Don Jacha is known for being a busy person, almost always in a rush to finish a task only to take up another. In one of the interviews, he narrated the heady days of the mid-1990s when he, along with others, was constantly traveling from one community to another, conducting workshops, interviews, and collective oral narratives, as well as trying to initiate community-mapping projects. "It was exhausting but maestro Juan always made us see the importance of this task. I mean, we never considered it as a work. Maestro Juan was the brain, I only assisted him in organizing the process. Although, he [Juan García] was a firm believer of our ancestral forms of territorial organization and would always warn us about the perils of being appropriated by the state" (Jacinto Fierro, Personal Interview).

That the titling process was and is fraught with contradictions is a theme often touched upon by Don Jacha and others who have been involved with the process since its inception. Recalling the numerous meetings they organized, he said, "differences were there. The process generated lot of debates within the community and there were occasions when the issue of private title came up and some supported it" (Jacinto Fierro, Personal Interview). However, he quickly adds that while there were occasional fissures, the elder members of the community made sure to convey what was at stake in these discussions, that is, the centrality of territorio to Afroesmeraldan existence. Elaborating further, he said:

> The more we spoke to the elders, los sabios, las matronas of our community, the more it became clearer that we have our own (nuestra propía) ways of interacting with and being in our territories. It involves a deep knowledge of navigating these lands and rivers, managing its resources, practices of cultivation. Maestro Juan was already aware about these issues but for me the significance of these aspects was new. (Jacinto Fierro, Personal Interview)

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[42] Juan García Salazar (1944-2017) is one of the most prominent Afroesmeraldan personality, who single handedly collected several hundred testimonies from the various rural settlements of Northern Esmeraldas. Today, these recordings are part of the Afro-Andean Archive housed in Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar. Salazar, known for his unwavering belief in the ancestral ways of Afroesmeraldans, remains a guiding light for them in their struggle for territorio.

Doña Inés, another important political figure of the Afroesmeraldan community and currently one of the heads of CANE, concurred with these observations, "Obviously there were differences, we went around from one community to other telling people do not sell, do not sell…because it is not ours to sell. We have always known that the land belongs to the entire community and not to an individual or a family." Following up, with a turn of phrase, she emphasized that while differences of opinion arose, it also provided the opportunity to reinforce one of the fundamental insights of our ancestral ways, "We belong to our territorio, it is not the other way round" (Inés Morales, Personal Interview). Similar sentiments were echoed by several people during the course of my fieldwork, especially by those who were part of the initial process of organizing for collective titling of land. This raised an obvious question: Did they perceive comunas as synonymous with their territorio? Once again, this was a topic that brought out diverging opinions. While some saw it as a necessity to protect their community lands, some perceived it as a compromise.

The decision to formalize their territories was, in fact, a strategic maneuver whereupon having no other legal protections whatsoever, the Afroesmeraldans saw the comunas as the only way to bring their territories under some sort of legal protection. What necessitated such a decision can be explained by several factors. Prominent among them was the constant flow of *colonos*[43] from the neighboring provinces, especially Manabí. Don Jacha further emphasized the urgency with which they faced the decision to legalize their lands: "They kept coming in and settling in our land, while initially we were not bothered by it but eventually, we were left with no other option but to legalize our territories as comunas as they started coming in large numbers" (Jacinto Fierro, Personal Interview). Furthermore, as the anthropologist Pablo Minda, himself an Afrodescendent, pointed out:

> Earlier, the Black people of the region were considered simply as peasants, so anyone wanting a legal title had to pay for it and would receive an individual title to land. But getting a title was expensive, nobody had that much money, not for getting a title, at least. This was also due to the fact that the idea of individual property was not that well known in these parts. (Pablo Minda, Personal Interview)

Lack of formal title was gradually leaving Afroesmeraldans vulnerable to different kinds of challenges. As already mentioned, the settlement of colonos in large numbers was creating a situation of conflict as they often settled in lands that were already being managed by a community. Furthermore, their ways of using the land and resources differed significantly from those of the

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[43] Landless peasants who settle and work on land.

Afroesmeraldans, thereby creating friction among the two groups. However, colonos were not the only threat; a lack of legal protection also meant complete vulnerability to incursions and invasions by mining and timber companies. A title would at least allow them to take a legal course and make demands to the state to fulfill its obligations.

As these brief snippets of the recollections demonstrate, the protagonists or the participants of the movement to legalize the collective possession of land were aware of the partial nature of recognition that the comunas would bring, however, they also understood it to be a practical necessity. On the other hand, a minority opposed the proposition of collective titles to land. The point of these narratives was to demonstrate that Afroesmeraldans were not passive recipients of the top-down mandates of the international bodies and the Ecuadorian state. Rather, they exercised considerable agency as they negotiated with the choices they were forced to make. Taking this point further, the argument is that "territorial turn" was not a one-sided phenomenon, as regional and national political processes played a significant role in it. Lastly, Afroesmeraldans, like many other communities, must be considered producers of knowledge. As they maneuvered a seemingly adverse situation – and did so quite tactfully, being cognizant of their limitations – they also opened up within the process possible avenues to articulate their own understanding of their territorio. The significance of this move cannot be downplayed, especially considering the how the larger Ecuadorian society perceives Black people, in general, and Afroesmeraldans, in particular. Racist caricatures and stereotypes of being "uncultured" and lazy were and continue to be deeply engrained within the dominant *mestizo* population of Ecuador. On the face of such adversities, Afroesmeraldans organizing and claiming their rightful place was not a small achievement.

The Counter Territoriality of Confederación Afroecuatoriano del Norte de Esmeraldas (CANE)

While the process of collective land titling progressed, the diffused ideas about territorio and its centrality within the Afroesmeraldan culture started crystallizing in the form of territorial organizations. But before we delve into the counter-territoriality exercised by the Afroesmeraldans, let us get back to the question presented in the opening vignette: What is territorio? It was only appropriate that I posed this question back when I finally got the chance to do an extended interview with Jairon. Despite the naïve framing of the question, or perhaps because of that, he gave a brisk reply, "It's everything." Noticing my questioning look and the readiness with which I was holding my pen so as not to miss what was about to come, he explained further after a small pause, "see, all

this physical space…I mean, the rivers, the forests, the mountains (*monte*), and the land, territory includes all of them." In fact, this was one of the most common ways Afroesmeraldans would describe their idea of territory. Don Walter, one of the community elders from the comuna La Boca, further expanded this idea, "but it is not that this physical space only belongs to us, it also belongs to other beings, the *jabalí* (wild boar) that runs through the forests, *la catanga* and *el zavalo* that swims in these rivers, they are also part of territorio like us. Obviously, we are the ones who are capable of navigating both on the land and water. But that does not mean we assume all the importance for ourselves."

It is often assumed by the state and larger Ecuadorian society that Afroesmeraldans do not have the same sense of attachment or ties to their territories as their Indigenous counterparts.[44] But this is not entirely true, in fact, the land, the rivers and its tributaries, and the estuaries in the region are not merely physical aspects that are part of *territorio*, they are also deeply tied with the feelings of belonging. Allow me to illustrate this with an example. In northern Esmeraldas, asphalt or mud roads were largely absent even two decades back. Even today, a sizeable number of comunas are only accessible via rivers, especially in the inland region of Santiago and Onzole river basins. Thus, it was a very common practice and continues to be to this day in certain parts of the region to ask newly made acquaintances: ¿De que río es usted? (Which river do you belong to?). Furthermore, and again such refrains are becoming less and less common nowadays, it was quite a common practice in northern Esmeraldas to refer to one's place of birth with the phrase "*aquí estoy enterrado*" (I'm buried here) (Pablo Minda, Personal Interview). Such locutions make sense in reference to the erstwhile prevalent practice of burying a newborn's umbilical cord in the community where they were born.

But territorio is not simply an abstract ideal. As already mentioned in the quote by Don Jacha in the previous section regarding the specific ways of management of territories, territorio also encapsulates their socio-environmental relations. These practices have been developed over generations, an outcome of their continuous presence on the Pacific coast of present-day Ecuador and Colombia for almost five centuries. The history of the free settlements (*Palenque*) of the maroons (*cimarrones*) along the Pacific coast of present-day Ecuador and Colombia and its significance in today's politics of the region is a theme that cannot be covered owing to limitations of space. Suffice it to say that the history and experience of marronage is one of the fundamental axes on which claims to

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[44] This is an interesting aspect that is worth probing further, that is, how the Ecuadorian state and its mestizo elites have historically perpetuated rifts by pitting one marginalized group against the other by delegitimizing one groups' claim. However, it is something that remains beyond the scope of this paper.

territorio revolve. It is these historically conditioned and place-based practices that frame the way Afroesmeraldans interact and manage their territorio.

As a matter of fact, this is another way that comunas disrupt Afroesmeraldan territoriality. Doña Marlene, a *comunera* belonging to Chispero, a comuna located in the Santiago River basin, emphasizes this point: "Black settlements were always spread out in these parts of the region, and our interaction with our environment depended upon the location of the settlement. But we understood territorio in a broader sense which included all these settlements, comunas have now partitioned our territorio into these parcels of area" (Marlene Corozo, Group Discussion). Doña Fani, Marlene's sister, nodded in agreement and chimed in:

> Some think that we are simply occupying these areas, but in reality, we are the ones who know this area better than anyone…we have cared for this land and it took care of us. You see, this is the inheritance that our ancestors left us, the knowledge of navigating these lands and rivers. The Black people residing in the lower river region have been engaged in artisanal gold mining, as that's where the deposits are. The upper river region, much closer to the sea, has been traditionally involved in collecting mollusks, crabs, shells. Those settled in between cultivated plantains, rice, and were involved in other agricultural activities. Forests have always been the source for our different needs, collecting wood which we use to build our houses, canoes; we use it for hunting animals and collect other resources. But we do not behave like these greedy companies…every child in our community is taught to identify which tree is to be felled and which one is to be left, how to identify rastrojos[45] that needs to be left alone…El bombero[46] makes sure that we do not kill animals more than we need to. Earlier, all these resources were shared and exchanged when needed, the river connected different settlements of Blacks. This is how we continued to cultivate our sense of territorio. (Fani Corozo Estupiñan, Group Discussion)

Citing this long quote was necessary to reiterate the point that territorio is the Afroesmeraldans' historically specific understanding of their bio-physical environment, including the knowledge of how to interact with this environment. Further, the attempt was to flesh out the ways comunas and territorio are incongruous. It is to articulate and sustain such an understanding that the Afroesmeraldans initiated the process of forming territorial organizations. It is to this aspect that we would turn our attention to briefly.

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[45] While rastrojo usually means stubble, in this context, it refers to trees that have fallen on their own and needs to be left as it is.
[46] A mythical forest-dwelling spirit.

Organizational Structure of CANE

The first such organizational form that came into existence in the mid-1990s was the *Unión de Organizaciones Negras del Norte de Esmeraldas* (UONNE, Union of the Black Organizations of Northern Esmeraldas). In 1997, UONNE was rechristened as *Consejo Regional de Palenques*, comprised of regional "*palenques*" (literally palisades), which in turn are comprised of local palenques. Given the growth of the organizational units, CANE was constituted in 1999. CANE, like its antecedent, was further divided into nine palenques, each comprising different settlements or comunas in a particular zone of northern Esmeraldas. The nine palenques that form CANE are as follows:

- FEDARPOM - *Federación Afroecuatoriana de Recolectores de Productos Bioacuáticos del Manglar San Lorenzo*
- FEDARPROBIM - *Federación Afroecuatoriana de Recolectores de Productos Bioacuáticos del Manglar Eloy Alfaro*
- FEPALUM - *Federación de Humedales de la zona de Eloy Alfaro*
- UONNE - *Unión de Organizaciones Negras del Norte de Esmeraldas*
- FONAO - *Federación de Comunidades Negras del Alto Ónzole*
- FECONA - *Federación de Organizaciones del Alto San Lorenzo*
- UCAMER - *Unión de Organizaciones de Río Verde*
- FEDOCA - *Federación de Organizaciones Culturales de San Lorenzo*

This is the organizational structure that is in place today. The appellations used to name these organizations, like the word palenque is telling. The evocation of palenque, on the one hand, reaffirms the historical presence of the Black people and their autonomous forms of life that were developed in the region. On the other hand, it is an assertion of the spatial organization of such settlements and the management of resources within them, the significance it holds in terms of ancestrality (*ancestralidad*) claimed by the Afroesmeraldans. Additionally, the positions within CANE are usually denoted by *Palnquera/o mayor, Palnquera/o menor, Madrina de Agua, Padrino de Uño* instead of President, Secretary, etc. Such usages are not simply ornamental. Rather, they need to be considered as a form of making a claim, a claim to their territorio and the right to live with and manage the resources within it.

Among the present leaders of the organizations and several other local palenques, many continue to demand the recognition of this particular form of territoriality and not that of the comunas. However, this should not be construed as a simple harking back to some past ideal; rather, it shows how local practices that were developed over a long period of time can be instructive in confronting

the problems of the present. In the words of Don Pablo, one of the founding leaders of FEDARPOM:

> Territorio, in our understanding, is a synonym for collectivity. It is different from terreno or lote.[47] The present generation needs to understand how these words differ in their meaning. These lands that you are seeing are territories of sustenance (territorios de respalda); that is how our elders used to call them. It is not a space solely for economic production. These days many people within our community seem to have forgotten this aspect. In the initial days, as we started organizing, I was very hopeful, but it is the process itself that has taught me that it is not easy to create dreams. (Pablo de la Torre, Personal Interview)

To this end, that is, to implement their own understanding of territorio, CANE's long-standing demand since 1999 has been that the idea of territorio would be best represented by the creation of a "territorial circumscription," which would be based on the principles of palenque. A territorial circumscription refers to the "physical, political, administrative, and delimited space within which political, economic, social, cultural and administrative collective rights can be exercised" (Consejo Regional de Palenques 1999, cited in Antón Sanchez 2015, 115). To this end, a territorial circumscription would involve a delimited area in which autonomous political and administrative rights could be exercised. The definition of autonomy that is provided by CANE demands that "Black communities should be auto-governed according to their own traditions, customs, and culture, which would give them the right to plan and develop the administration and management of their territories, the resources within such territories" (ibid.).

As indicated above, while comunas did indeed grant a semblance of legal guarantees on whose basis any illegal invasion or occupation could be challenged, it has also meant a partial implementation of what many have desired. Furthermore, as there remains a huge gap between legal guarantees and their functional implementation, these insights gain more significance, especially if we consider the rampant violation of the said guarantees and land dispossession due to the ever-expanding frontier of extractive activities in the region. Secondly, the constitution of comunas and the process through which these were formed left the communities politically divided, since such fissures have only intensified over time as the Ecuadorian state has used them to further wedge divides within the communities (De la Torre and Sanchez 2014).

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[47] Plots owned by individual(s).

Territory as Strategy, Territorio as Praxis: Territory as a Political Actor?

> *The Philosophy of Praxis is realized through the concrete study of past history through present activity to construct new history.* (Gramsci 1971, 427)

The chapter began with the idea of overlapping territorialities and tried to demonstrate how multiple territorialities can function within a given space. This was done by taking up comunas and territorio as two distinct spatialities that exercise two distinct territoriality. Whereas comunas are legally protected collective property in land, territorio as understood by the Afroesmeraldans attempts to articulate the co-constitution of a people and its bio-physical environment. But, unlike essentialist conceptualizations of the relations between a people and its environment, territorio is a thoroughly historicized concept rather than an expression of some transhistorical biological imperative. A history that is traced back to the experiences of marronage and slavery. The argument here is that we need to be more attentive towards the "different and diverse ways in which relations […] are differently territorialized" (Blomley 2023, 3).

Secondly, as we saw in the course of this chapter, non-sovereign territorialities are always exercised *within* the constraints of the hegemonic sovereign territoriality. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to understand them as contesting territorialities vying for power within a given space. Since, the power to control also gives the power to define these territories and how they should be used and managed. Thus, the exercise of a particular territoriality is thoroughly mediated by politics; that is, it has been through political activity that Afroesmeraldans articulated their idea of territorio and asserted their collective aspirations, thereby turning territorio itself into a political actor.

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The Politics of Presence of Black Women Politicians in Brazil. Reclaiming 'Political Representation' as a Territory to be Occupied

Livia de Souza Lima

The assassination of Black councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver Anderson Gomes in 2018 stands out as a poignant and unforgettable event in contemporary Brazilian politics. In the wake of this tragic incident, communities across Brazil came together the following day, united by a shared sense of grief and disbelief. Beyond the immediate shock and collective emotional turmoil, Marielle Franco's impact goes far beyond the circumstances of her untimely death. She has transcended her tragic fate to become a symbol with profound political implications. Marielle's image and the unequivocal condemnation of the act have emerged as a central rallying point in diverse public demonstrations and protests. These movements, specifically centered on advocating for gender, race equality, and human rights, find inspiration in Marielle Franco's enduring legacy. Her life and activism resonate as a powerful symbol, igniting a collective pursuit of justice and equality across various societal spheres. Marielle Franco stands not only as an emblem for Black feminists but also for those committed to the broader fight for justice and human rights in Brazil (Roth 2020; Pait and Nagamine 2018; Rocha 2018).

Within the diverse consequences and potential impacts arising from Marielle Franco's assassination, this chapter focuses on a specific outcome: the transformation of Marielle Franco into a symbolic representation of the struggle faced by Black women and human rights defenders aiming to establish a presence in institutional politics as elected representatives. Examining the landscape of Black women in politics reveals a notable surge in candidates aligning with the principles advocated by councilwomen, dedicated to advancing human rights and a Black feminist agenda, irrespective of their election outcomes. Moreover, a determined cohort of candidates seeks to reshape the predominantly white male-occupied political and institutional space incrementally. Monique Oliveira (2021) characterizes this phenomenon as a Black feminist uprising, highlighting steps these women have taken to enter the political-institutional sphere, occupying representative houses, and continuing the legacy of Marielle Franco. Among them, we can mention names such as Erika Hilton, Dani Monteiro, Mônica Francisco, Talíria Petrone, Áurea Carolina, Andréia de Jesus, Renata Souza, Erika Malunguinho, all of them elected in 2018 at various levels of national administration. In 2022, Renata Souza was re-elected as the best-voted representative in Rio de Janeiro. Talíria Petrone was re-elected as a federal

Congresswoman with double the votes she had received in the previous election. Erika Hilton made the leap from state parliament to the National Congress, becoming the first trans woman to be elected as a federal Congress member in the history of Brazil. Carol Dartora was elected in 2022 as the first Black woman elected by the state of Paraná. More than citing these as episodic cases, I aim to stress that Black women collectively mobilize to transfer their long-standing activist and oppositional political tradition to the institutional sphere, based on the understanding that representative politics is a crucial arena where political struggles should be conducted.

The qualitative attributes of these cases hold greater importance than sheer quantity, and I propose to understand this phenomenon through the discursive key of occupying institutional political spaces. The rhetoric of political occupation has been employed directly or indirectly by black women aspiring to or already participating in institutional politics on varying public communications and platforms. With this analogy, Black women convey their resolve to engage in institutional politics and actively participate in decision-making processes as elected representatives. This claim aims to expand their struggles from local communities, streets, and collectives to the institutional political arena. While occupying is a practice that mostly has a place in the contentious repertoire of social movements, I am interested in understanding what meanings are conveyed in this analogy and their potential significance to further understanding political representation and the status of democracy in Brazil and beyond. I align with the perspective presented by Perissinotto and Swako (2017), recognizing social movements as entities that function akin to political theorists. Beyond advocating for rights, these movements engage in the analysis and prescription of solutions for social realities. Building on Vilma Reis's (Figueiredo et al. 2020) assertion that black women are producing scientific, political knowledge from their experiences and narratives, this exploratory analysis focuses on key discursive moments observed in the discourses articulated around the rhetoric of political occupation to investigate their relation and further inputs to democratic political theory.

To explore the rhetoric of political occupation, I engage in a discussion with four Brazilian politicians deeply entrenched in the current Black feminist uprising in Brazil: Erica Malunguinho, Mônica Francisco, Vilma Reis, and the late Marielle Franco. Among these four women, only Vilma Reis has not held an elected representative office to date. While not elected, Reis occupies a prominent position within the Black feminist movement and is a key advocate for political representation. Her influence has grown, notably when she emerged as a pre-candidate for the mayoral position in Salvador-Bahia and later as a candidate for the national Chamber of Deputies in 2022. Erica Malunguinho made history by

becoming the first transgender woman elected to the São Paulo State Legislative Assembly in 2018. Her political journey is characterized by active involvement in promoting Afro-Brazilian culture and advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights. Mônica Francisco and Marielle Franco share a similar trajectory. Both Black women from favela territories in Rio de Janeiro, they have been tireless advocates for social and human rights in their communities, often marred by constant human rights violations. Marielle Franco, elected as a Councilwoman in 2016 for the Municipal Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, tragically fell victim to a political feminicide in 2018. As of the time of writing, answers to her assassination remain elusive. On the other hand, Mônica Francisco was elected as a state representative in 2018, serving at the Rio de Janeiro Legislative Assembly until 2022. Despite not securing reelection, she continues her active engagement in Black feminist politics and the defense of human rights. It is important to note that this selection and the discursive moments explored for this reflection are a specific subset and do not comprehensively encapsulate the diverse narratives employed by Black women in their critical political expressions. This specific collection represents an initial foray into the rich tapestry of their voices, and I do not claim to exhaustively capture the entirety of their perspectives. The choices made in this exploration stem from my role as an observer of Black women's activism in Brazil, particularly within the more recent movements of participation in representative spheres, and I have selected some instances that offer valuable insights to the discussion here proposed.

In this chapter, I aim to establish a correspondence between the rhetoric of political occupation and the politics of presence, shedding light on the intersection of feminist practices with democratic theory. The rhetoric of political occupation aligns closely with the concept of politics of presence, framing politics as a space shaped by power dynamics and disputes regarding participation, utilization, and regulation. Likewise, viewing space as a product of power relations and conflict resonates with the notion of territory as it is employed in critical and feminist geography. Treating political disputes akin to territorial disputes provides insights into how the political realm is both generated and perpetuated through a complex interplay of social rituals, daily practices, and historical behaviors. I initiate the article by forging connections between the metaphor of political occupation and the theoretical discourse known as the "politics of presence." This conceptual framework closely resonates with the concerns expressed by Black women regarding the condition of democratic governance institutions in Brazil. In the first phase of the discussion, I delve into the articulated discourses of Black women, emphasizing their advocacy for the fair distribution of political and decision-making authority. This preliminary investigation aims to clarify the idea of political presence and enhance our theoretical and normative comprehension

of political representation. To unite the various elements discussed, I adopt the concept of territory, focusing on politics as a territory, as a comprehensive framework. This framework is designed to encompass the diverse components that emerge from the discourse of occupation, as exemplified by the discussions of Black women in the instances explored here.

Occupying Politics and (Re)-Shifting Power Configurations

As I engage in a dialogue with Black women's political assertions and critical perspectives, I reflect on potential meanings conveyed by the metaphor of occupation. I see this concept as valuable in encapsulating the Black feminist uprising's call for increased political power and influence. The phenomenon of occupation can be visually contemplated as a record of diverse bodies and identities entering physical spaces and institutional buildings, which are historical symbols of political power. These are Black, trans, and women's bodies that diverge, contrast, and challenge the conventional image of the "white man" as the archetype of a politician and assumed occupant of the highest power positions in various fields of social interaction.

The demand for occupying politics resonates with one of the central debates within the thematic area of political representation, namely the notion of "politics of presence"[48] (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995, 2020; Young 2000). In grasping the importance of political representation for democratic governance, the politics of presence challenges an elitist democracy model that accepts the persistence of political inequalities and power imbalances and the concentration of power in the hands of politically skilled elites. Focusing on results, the elitist model prioritizes outcomes over democratic processes and procedures. It operates under the assumption that social welfare and justice can be achieved without necessarily requiring power-sharing mechanisms (Miguel 2018). Reversely, the politics of presence paradigm questions the functioning mechanisms of democracy and starts from the premise that "who does the representation can be as important as the ideas or visions they represent." (Phillips 2020, 176) The underlying argument dismisses the notion that representative arrangements and relationships should be normatively evaluated solely based on their substantive outcomes. As part of the proposal to enhance the democratic quality of representative arrangements, there is a call for a more heterogeneous composition of spaces of power. This

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[48] The 'Politics of Presence' paradigm shares with other concepts such as 'Politics of Inclusion' (Young, 2000) and 'Representation of Groups' (Williams, 1998), the understanding that there is a relation between the who, the how and the what of political representation. For this chapter, I will use the term "Politics of Presence" for its closer resonance with the rhetoric of occupation. Still, it is essential to acknowledge that other terms refer to the unequal distribution of decision-making power in institutional politics.

approach aims to better reflect the diversity of social and political perspectives and experiences in political institutions and decision-making spheres (Phillips 2020). This scholarship bears special significance for feminist political theorists who have been pioneers in illuminating the connections between gender and politics or, conversely, the lack of a gendered perspective in democratic political theory. Rooted in the dissatisfaction with gender imbalances within existing power structures, feminist political theories and theorists advocate for measures to achieve greater gender parity across various levels of institutions in democratic governance and representation (Biroli 2017; Celis and Childs 2020; Krook 2009; Krook and O'Brien 2010; Phillips 1991).

The authors affiliated with the politics of presence paradigm mainly substantiate this demand with two types of arguments: principle and consequence. The arguments of principle draw the need for the presence and inclusion of historically excluded groups in spaces of power as a matter of justice. They challenge and oppose the concentration of power by a homogenous group and forward a project of democratic representation based on diversity and plurality (Campos and Machado 2020). The second set of arguments considers the possible effects that plurality and presence might generate for institutional politics. In this case, it is expected that incorporating principles of plurality and diversity in positions of power not only enhances the quality of decision-making processes but also optimizes the outcomes of these processes. In both instances, the expectation is that decision-making processes encompassing a diversity of perspectives can potentially improve decision-making and result in formulating public policies that better address the needs of populations, considering the differences among them (Miguel 2018). The arguments of justice and consequence are of a different order but nonetheless advance in a parallel direction; after all, qualified representation or responsiveness to the wishes of historically excluded populations is also a matter of justice. Justice arguments take precedence as a foundational set of claims, addressing power imbalances stemming from structural inequalities and historical legacies deemed intolerable. In contrast, consequential reasoning links presence and diversity with potential positive outcomes, particularly in fostering enhanced and more responsive representative relationships. Significantly, both perspectives should be considered, as a shared commitment to principles and consequences serves as a means to acknowledge the importance of tangible outcomes while simultaneously addressing and opposing structural inequalities.

Amid the ongoing theoretical discussions around creating justice and equality within democratic political institutions, I intend to compare and contrast the viewpoints of Black women and the politics of presence paradigm. I will analyze the arguments employed by Black women in constructing the claim for their presence in the political sphere and examine whether they diverge from

or align with the established theoretical framework of justice and consequence. The ensuing discussions will explore why Black women find it imperative to engage in political occupation, shedding light on their visions and the potential consequences of their actions for democratic representation. In the following excerpt, Mônica Francisco shares her thoughts on the expectations and potential responsibilities of Black women in politics:

> Black women like me, occupying spaces of power, know of the responsibility of deconstructing this structure in which the white man is always on top. Moreover, of bringing along the ancestral force of all Black women, elaborating public policies that guarantee our bodies occupy all spaces. The future, undoubtedly, is a Black woman who moves slowly but who gets where she wants. Moreover, she does not get there alone. (Francisco 2019, 234)[49]

In this speech, I want to highlight the idea of responsibility that Francisco associates with Black women who are active in positions of power. Francisco suggests that these women, with a shared long history of struggle, are aware of the task of dismantling an unequal structure that concentrates decision-making power in a particular group. Mônica Francisco sees Black women as agents invested in confronting the discourses and practices that legitimize the political identity of the "white man" as an almost natural occupant of the spheres of influence and zones of governance.

Erica Malunguinho echoes this perspective with a concept she terms "alternation of power," offering insight into the pressing need to dissolve a homogeneous domain of authority. Alternate power functions as a procedural articulation objecting to power concentration, emphasizing the importance of diversity and projecting an institutionality of power-sharing and rotation (Carneiro 2021). According to Malunguinho, the alternance of power is, or at least should be recognized as an essential feature of democracy to allow diverse perspectives and courses of action to be represented in the governing processes (Forum 2018). Similarly, the model of power alternation conveys a message of contestation when it comes to interpreting the distinct context of political inequality in Brazil. Like Monica Francisco, Malunguinho positions whiteness as the main target of her critique of the dynamics of power concentration. Whiteness is not considered as a set of characteristics of an individual but rather as a means to identify a system of oppression and dominance that shapes the distribution of social advantages and privileges both in Brazil and beyond (Carneiro 2021). One of these privileges is the symbolic representation of white men as the embodiment of humanity and, thus, as the ideal political agents. This representation often

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[49] All translations made by the author.

places white men at the center of the power dynamics, serving as the standard against which all others are judged (Da Silva 2022).

The deconstruction of an unfair structure is not postulated as an end in itself but as a means of rebuilding the spaces of public governance to guarantee both plurality and the political inclusion of intersectional identities and embodiments. The arguments employed in these discursive moments powerfully and succinctly describe the systematic inequalities of the Brazilian political system and make the political occupation a matter of justice. This involves understanding that achieving the ideal of social justice depends on developing mechanisms for the distribution of political power through the progressive inclusion of members of different social groups in institutional politics, where decisions about people's lives are made. This requires the recognition of differences, and the adherence to the ideal of political equality as a means to achieve social equality (Sacchet 2012).

Moreover, the act of reclaiming political power for Black, trans, and female bodies and identities is viewed as a strategy to overcome the exclusions perpetuated by the historical colonial and slavery-based formation of the Brazilian state and society (Carneiro 2021). Occupying power extends beyond the political realm; it involves actively striving to diminish gendered and racial inequalities across various social domains, both within and outside politics. The arguments of justice and consequence are intertwined, as the occupation by Black women is perceived as a means to diversify the public sphere and challenge a hegemony that perpetuates an unequal political and social system.

The central goal is to catalyze a transformative change in political leadership, championing the fundamental belief that engaging in politics is an inherent right for all. Black women, through their deliberate political involvement, are not only asserting this right but also spearheading an essential movement toward reinvigorating political leadership. By steadfastly affirming participation in politics as a core right and actively advocating for the inclusion of a myriad of perspectives, particularly those of Black women, they are sowing the seeds for a more dynamic and inclusive democratic landscape. In essence, their impactful actions are paving the way for a revitalized and enriched political leadership that truly reflects the diversity and pluralism essential for a thriving democracy.

Embodied Politics and "Changing the Photography of Power"

In the previous section, I have discussed the normative concept of "politics of presence" and its relation to the rhetoric of political occupation articulated by Black women and their feminist uprising. Expanding on that notion, I explore two discursive instances where claims of occupation help us uncover

additional layers to the meaning of presence for the very definition of political representation. The creation of presence encompasses more than a normative debate initiated to address the democratization of political representation. Creating presence is foundational and intrinsic to representative arrangements in conceptual and practical ways. In representation, as per Hanna Pitkin's classical definition, something not literally present is considered as present in a nonliteral sense (Pitkin 1972, 9). Representation, according to this notion, is the act of bringing the citizens and their ideas and preferences into political presence, which then becomes the common ground on which the feasibility of democratic representation is built. In short, this means that citizens are politically present if their preferences, needs, and world views are equally represented and have a place in collective decision-making processes. So, the creation of political presence and the appropriate ways of doing so are relevant to exploring the conditions for empirically realizing the political presence of citizens and constituencies and making political representation happen (Castiglione and Pollak 2018). Viewing presence in a political and non-literal sense introduces a certain ambiguity to the changing power dynamics. Suppose presence can be constructed through a representative process that considers diverse perspectives, standpoints, preferences, and needs of various constituencies. In that case, the urgency of addressing the division of power may be mitigated.

The rhetoric of political occupation is nonetheless arguing for something different by reaffirming the embodied character of politics, as Black women are not only making demands for being heard or taken into account, they want to sit at the table, to be physically present, and to become representative agents that also participate in setting the political agenda. This does not necessarily imply supposing a model of direct democracy that suggests the individual as the optimal representative for oneself. Instead, it highlights the significance of being physically present in political institutions, stressing that this aspect should not be overlooked entirely. While it is crucial to prioritize the outcomes of political representation, solely concentrating on them may obscure or impede a meaningful discussion about the tangible impact of physical presence. This narrow focus can hinder a thorough exploration of how diversity, including race, gender, origin, and sexuality, impacts democracy and its processes and institutions. The subsequent discussion explores how political presence is expanded by Black women and the transformation it may bring about.

An expression coined by Vilma Reis illustrates other ways to access the relationship between presence, political representation, and occupation of spaces of power. Reis uses the expression "changing the photography of power" in several public interventions, interviews, and conversations and in her campaign for National Congress in 2022. This expression can be seen as a jargon associated

with this Black feminist and an illustration of the critical framework Reis has been constructing over the course of her intellectual and activist trajectory. By referring to power as a photography, Reis provides some insights into the political dynamics of Brazil:

We have a photography of power in Brazil that is disconnected from who we are. What we, Black women, are struggling to change is exactly that. […] In Brazil, we have a white left-wing circle, constituted in the 1980s, that governs the parties with an iron fist. White men, older, from the upper middle classes, suffering from class amnesia and, even saying that our most potent struggles (black, feminist and trans) are nothing more than identity discourse. (Gomes, Pereira, and Loeding 2021)

She reverberates the critique articulated by Erica Malunguinho and Mônica Francisco about the problem of the concentration of positions of power in the figure of white men – to which she adds – that come from the economically privileged sectors of Brazilian society. However, she does so by appealing to the world of images and representations about power, politics, and dynamics of absence/presence and inclusion/exclusion. Reflecting upon these mental images of inequality elicits a disquieting feeling that urges us to scrutinize the legitimacy of our political structures and recognize the inherent shortcomings within this current state of affairs. It prompts us to question why politics tends to be perceived as a domain predominantly occupied by males and individuals of white ethnicity. This inquiry might lead to the realization that there is a fundamental issue with such exclusivity.

Thinking of politics and power arenas as a photograph suggests a visual method to comprehend democratic politics in more tangible ways. It is usual to talk of politicians as a unified class of individuals and politics as an abstract notion when, in reality, it is an embodied practice taking place in concrete spaces. This abstraction of politics might reinforce the idea that it does not matter who our rulers are but only the effects and results of their actions. The analysis and construction of images of power raise questions about representation in a world that is increasingly intolerant of gender and race inequalities. While it is true that white men can legislate and initiate projects that cater to the requirements of various groups, including Black women, the visual portrayal of politics exclusively dominated by this group perpetuates and reinforces the notion that this space inherently belongs to them.

By encouraging the construction of visual imaginations of what politics is, Vilma Reis approaches what Stuart Hall (1997) conceptualizes as regimes of representation, where he examines how visual representations in media and culture have a role in shaping the way we understand the world and construct the social realities we live in. Although Hall deals with images purposefully

positioned in the public sphere and the media and Reis is talking about visual reproductions of realities through photography, the intersection of these ideas lies in the importance that images have for the reproduction of beliefs, ideas, stereotypes, and common senses (Grave 2019). Thinking of power as a photographic composition also expands our understanding of the creative aspect of political representation, in as much as it can also be the reproduction of domination systems that function within a dialectic of empowerment and (dis) empowerment (Gädeke 2019). It says something about how power is exercised and by whom, and it might suggest that politics is also an object of representation, apart from other signifiers like individuals, regions, ideas, and preferences. Conversely, these images play a role in shaping the political identities of individuals, whether they occupy positions of power or are excluded from them. For Black women, such hegemonic depictions hold the potential to solidify the white man as the perceived and accepted representative identity, simultaneously endorsing an improbable and unimaginable connection between black women and positions of power (Carneiro 2019).

Marielle Franco also addressed the embodiment of politics during her time as an elected politician. As an elected politician and a dedicated activist focused on the empowerment of Black women, Franco was a protagonist in the advocacy for increasing the participation of more – especially Black – women in the realm of institutional politics.

> Occupy with our bodies, our hair, our sexuality, our experiences in the city is important because we build, take the bus, and take our children to school. This is the place where we are many. The diversity of women is already in the city, so if we are in the city and build the city, we also have the potential to occupy this space in politics. (Marielle Franco n.d.)[50]

In this statement, Franco emphasizes a perspective that aligns with the assertion that bodies, identities, and lived experiences are crucial in shaping political ideas. By examining Black women's diverse and everyday encounters in the city, Franco advocates for a notion central to Black feminism – the recognition of lived experience as a valid source of knowledge (Curiel 2020). Discussing the challenges faced by families, the issues surrounding public transportation, and the potential inadequacies in services provided to the population, Franco contends that precisely these lived perspectives contribute to a potency, an essential capability for engaging in politics and actively participating in collective decision-making spaces. Franco presents these life experiences as a justification for political involvement, positioning them as an asset in decision-making processes. She

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[50] Excerpt from Marielle Franco's speech at the event "Black Women in Politics" organized in 2017. Last accessed January 2, 2024 from www.ocupapolitica.org

underscores the belief that a diversity of viewpoints enriches decision-making procedures. Furthermore, Franco argues that Black women should bring their bodies, hair, and sexuality into political spaces, emphasizing that a politics of presence entails embodying diversity and intersectionality.

In further congruence with the theoretical debate, this demand contains the argument that ideas are not dissociated from the subject and that the specific experience of being a woman and Black is relevant to how decisions are made, affecting the choices and issues to be privileged and how they are viewed. In this context, the discourse of Black women aligns with the notion that embracing a variety of opinions and perspectives offers an epistemological quality to democratic decision-making. By advocating for the inclusion of different perspectives, especially those of Black women, the argument asserts that diverse voices enhance the quality and relevance of decisions, leading to outcomes that better address the needs and concerns of a more significant portion of the population (Miguel 2018). The inclusion and presence of Black women emerge as a method for correcting injustices, but also as a method of decision-making that attends to the layered complexity of the daily experiences of Black women in their territories. The utilization of personal experiences as a source for generating political knowledge asserts legitimacy for the unique perspectives of Black women in shaping political and social understanding.

These two discursive instances suggest that the descriptive dimension of political representation holds a degree of significance and should not be entirely dismissed as an insufficient criterion for establishing legitimate democratic representative relationships. Representation is not merely a conceptual exercise; instead, it is an embodied practice. The disconnection of body, identity, subjectivity, and political agency is inherently unattainable within the realm of representation.

Taking this into account might have methodological and normative consequences. Recognizing that politics is embodied methodically leads to incorporating other materials for analyzing and observing political representation. It is not just about evaluating the connection between an individual and their representative actions. It is also about examining the relationship between the individual and institutions, which are physical spaces governed by explicit and implicit norms. Additionally, it involves analyzing the interactions between agents within these spaces and the images of power that inform the overall power structures.

In normative terms, with practical implications, one can anticipate both procedural and substantive shifts in decision-making processes. Focusing on the specific case of Black women under discussion, validating their daily life experiences, self-perceptions in urban settings, and common challenges can

serve as a valid approach to mapping out structural and local issues. Furthermore, this approach seems to facilitate the creation of meaningful and effective public policies. Such a substantive production method has the potential to address complex and intersectional issues, bringing attention to aspects that might otherwise be overlooked in the public sphere.

The third potential scenario I anticipate revolves around the mere presence of Black women and other dissenting bodies in spaces that have historically excluded them. The described presence operates as a non-verbal language, serving as a disruptive force that intervenes in the existing order, with the potential to shape political perspectives and imaginations. This intervention holds the capacity to alter the representation of power and identities, challenging historical narratives of oppression and submission. Simultaneously, it may gradually erode commonly held notions dictated by exclusionary regimes rooted in colonial, racial, and sexist discourses. This calls for a commitment to unlearning established norms and beliefs, fostering a paradigm shift. In political representation, understanding the scope of these evolving imaginations becomes crucial, particularly concerning public opinion and electoral outcomes. The presence of these marginalized voices can catalyze a shift in how the electoral landscape is perceived by the public, becoming a focal point for the necessary transition towards a more plural and diverse institutional framework that more closely mirrors the diversity inherent in the population.

Reclaiming and Repossessing Power

As a last discursive moment, I reflect on a political performative event staged by Erica Malunguinho on the occasion of her *Mandata Quilombo*[51] swearing-in ceremony as a newly elected state representative. With 55,423 votes, Erica Malunguinho is the first trans deputy elected to the São Paulo State Legislative House. In an invitation on social media, the elected representative summons people to celebrate this victory and collectively memorialize the moment that she is legitimately recognized as an elected state representative (Malunguinho 2019).

In Brazil, the swearing-in ceremony is called a "Possession Ceremony" (*Cerimônia de posse*) and marks the beginning of a new representative cycle, depending on the elective positions to be assumed according to the results of the last elections. Erica Malunguinho renames the ceremony and transforms her inauguration as an act of repossession, as a gesture of historical continuity

[51] In Portuguese the word *mandato* (mandate) is a masculine noun. Spelling this term as feminine subverts the essentially masculine association of the word and transforms it into something adaptable from a gender and language perspective. *Quilbombo* is the term used in Brazil to refer to what are described as maroon communities or societies in the English-speaking world.

with steps that come from afar, of a collectivity that needs to enter spaces of power of institutional politics. Repossession is thinking over everything built in the country, including its physical and symbolic sites that belong to people but have been taken away from them (Malunguinho 2019). She does not enter this institution alone; instead, the performance takes the form of a procession where Malunguinho elegantly makes her way into the Parliament, accompanied by a group of Black people. Clad in white attire, they showcase aesthetic adornments that evoke African ancestry, making that moment an occasion to celebrate and make a gesture of reverence towards the Black culture in Brazil. (Dias 2019).

During the swearing-in ceremony of a State Legislative house, a series of crucial events unfold in sequence. These typically involve the formal and public nomination of all newly elected members, a collective reading of a solemn commitment to both the population and the constitution, the individual swearing-in with an oath of dedication to politically representing the people, and ultimately, the formal attestation of these declarations through the signing of the oath book. In a ritualistic parallel, this ceremony is equivalent to the enthronement ceremony in monarchies, which is marked for the reception and the placing of a crown over the new sovereign, who also sits on the royal throne. This highly performative set of events alludes to an actual occupation of a physical space, materialized by certain acts that confirm the anointing and incorporation of power. While the two rituals may seem similar in performance, they are grounded in different norms. In the case of monarchies, the coronation enshrines the monarch's divine and hereditary right to rule. On the other hand, the ceremony staged in representative houses performs a rite of democratic rule and the partial and temporary transfer of governing authority from the hands of the people – through the vote – to their elected representatives. Nonetheless, both ceremonies suggest a legitimate occupation of a specific position, albeit on different grounds, and demonstrate power's symbolic and performative dimensions (Rai 2017).

Both forms of investiture hold institutional significance as they pertain to the legitimate authority to wield and govern power over others. However, receiving the crown is a hereditary right, transmitted by blood ties, generation after generation. Queens and kings take possession of something whose ownership is seldom threatened or taken away except in unusual or unexpected circumstances. For Erica Malunguinho, the right to participate in politics and be part of a powerful institution in the position of an elected woman is, in principle, a constitutional right, sanctioned and certified by democratic norms and ideals. According to these principles, all individuals, with few exceptions, have the right and are eligible to participate in political and public life. However, a closer look into it might reveal that the right to full political participation is not

equally distributed, evident by the gender and racial disparities observed in the composition of governments at different levels.

The retaking of possession as a symbolic act indicates the recovery of something that had been lost, of something from which the right to use had been taken away by unequal and unjust circumstances, by acts of dispossession. Dispossession, as described by Judith Butler, is "what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 3). Butler suggests that dispossession is an experience of the deprivation of elements that are rightfully ours and that may be lost through the failure of modes of governance and regimes to sustain rights that have been institutionally and legitimately conferred (Butler and Athanasiou 2013).

This critical exchange between dispossession and repossession of politics perceives the political or political participation not as optative or as something that one can make use of as they see fit, but as a common right. I bring this up because the current democratic systems, primarily based on the conduction of free and fair elections, create the illusion that although politics is for everyone, it is an individual choice to participate in it or not. Nonetheless, the participative conditions and resources are unevenly distributed. Treating politics as a right raises concern about democratic governments and systems that fail to ensure equal access to this right to individuals living in a territory. The different access agents have to politics as a locus of power, especially those most affected by discrimination and violence, is a problem that democracy as an organizational and normative regime must find ways to resolve.

The discursive moments highlighted in this discussion revolve around changing the photography of power, occupying politics, and (re)shifting power configurations. These instances reinforce the idea that the Black feminist uprising aims not only to reject the notion of historically marginalized groups, particularly the Black community, being mere objects of representation but also to actively function as representative agents and engage effectively in political spheres. Repossessing power becomes a form of trespassing imposed limits and barriers, unlocking doors for those who have been silenced, rendered invisible, or deemed undesirable. These acts of reclaiming power represent an act of resistance and defiance, with individuals moving forward to unsettle entrenched spheres marked by multifaceted and transdisciplinary axes of domination.

Reclaiming Politics as a Territory

Black women's mobilization for the occupation of politics demonstrates that the debate on the politics of presence is by no means outdated. This presence is, however, redefined and reaffirmed as a physical presence that, while suggesting

the sharing of decision-making power, gives importance to the symbolic aspect of changing the depictions and cultures of power, that is, signaling the need to imagine politics otherwise, envisioning institutions and political systems as spaces that can be inhabited by diverse bodies and identities, beyond the confines of white masculinities. This occupation further affirms the political content of bodies, thus highlighting a point often overlooked and neglected in political theory and the study of representative democracy.

In analytical terms, the mere presence of Black women in spaces constituted by oppressive arrangements and discriminatory structures generates concrete forms of visualization of political and social exclusion regimes. Black women and other marginalized agents, when entering and taking repossession of spaces that have been historically and systematically denied to them, are not necessarily an exception to the rule but rather a confirmation of the norms and techniques that regulate access to power. However, one should emphasize that these exclusionary norms do not exist in a vacuum but are often instituted and perpetuated by those already possessing dominance within a field. Accordingly, political occupation entails more than presence; it is a transition of power dynamics and weakening of mechanisms frequently instrumentalized to uphold and perpetuate an exclusionary order.

The potential shift in power dynamics will undoubtedly be a contentious and challenging process, an issue mainly addressed by the studies of gender and politics. Two discussions are relevant in this regard. The first one was advanced by institutional feminism, which starts by questioning the conditions of women's participation in a historically masculine space (cf. Krook and Mackay 2011; Kantola 2006). Institutional feminism serves as a valuable framework for examining the conditions of political participation, but its focus on gender may inadvertently overlook other concerns. The case of Black women and the rhetoric of occupation prompts a broader debate on the political sphere, which, as a power arena, often excludes not only women of color but also other identities that diverge from the white male norm.

The second debate centers on gender and racialized political violence, which shows how women, racialized or not, in or outside the normative sexual identities, encounter a wide range of hostilities and violences – physical, symbolic, and institutional (Krook 2020; Lima, Fabris, and Goulart 2022). Political gender violence hampers women's access to and permanence in politics, affects their political performance, and has radical consequences, as we can see in the case of the political feminicide of Marielle Franco (Souza 2020). In Brazil, political parties and their bureaucracies produce double barriers to the rise of Black people in their structures. Vilma Reis expresses this complaint as a trend that also occurs within the political spectrum of the left (Pereira 2023).

When scrutinizing the conditions for participation in spaces governed by implicit and explicit rules, the emergence of participants falling along the spectrum of insiders or outsiders becomes evident. In politics, for instance, there is a recognition of a structured microcosm characterized by its own set of laws, codes of conduct, and regulations. This dynamic presents a paradox for those outside the political sphere, who must navigate the choice between adhering to established norms or challenging them, resulting in a political landscape rife with conflict and tension. Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, politics has evolved into a professional monopoly, demanding conversion or adaptation for effective participation, similar to entering a religious community (Bourdieu 1991, 2011). Nirmal Puwar's (2004) observation, introducing the concept of "space invaders" when women and minorities assume positions of power, adds a layer to the complexities of participation, shedding light on the challenges faced by those breaking traditional norms within these regulated spaces. This multifaceted perspective highlights the intricate interplay between power dynamics, societal expectations, and individual agency in political engagement.

The rhetoric of political occupation, as sustained by Black women, speaks of the transformation of the political field and highlights the need to resist exclusionary norms that perpetuate political inequalities and hinder black women's capacity to act, even if they gain access to these spaces of power. The concept of politics as territory is a helpful metaphor for understanding institutional politics and the decision-making processes involved in collective governance. By viewing politics as territory, we can raise questions similar to those asked in critical geography about who has legitimate control over a particular space, and who is responsible for setting the cultural and regimental rules that govern the dynamics of presence and absence. Critical geography does not start by assuming that the territory is something given. Instead, it views the territory as a space whose cultural, social, political, and material characteristics result from the actions of individuals who either occupy or contest the space. The role of domination structures such as colonialism and racial capitalism in shaping and appropriating territories is often emphasized in critical geography. It examines how territorialities can influence identity construction, practices of recognition and belonging, and the distribution of resources (Raffestin 1993; Santos 2005).

This is due to two essential characteristics of the concept of territory: (i) as a social space constituted by social agents and power relations and (ii) as a stage of change, which infers the possibility of building new territorialities based on the right of use and intervention over them (Stürmer 2017). The spatial, cultural, and socioeconomic rearrangements result from conflicts and tensions waged around the dispute over the use of territories and questioning who has legitimate rights to them.

To consider politics as territory is to understand it as a space necessarily constructed and regulated, both in form and content, by the intervention of social agents. The present situation of political inequalities and imbalances and the difficulties "outsiders" encounter in accessing and remaining in spaces of power turn our attention to analyzing how these norms of access and permanence transform politics into a territory of dispossession. The "other" of politics, the non-natural power identities and bodies, despite having a constitutional and legitimate right to participate in politics as decision-makers and representatives, are systematically displaced from such power positions and dispossessed from it. Black women's movement for political occupation is spotlighting these contradictions. It vividly illustrates how hegemonic and homogenous control of politics turns this territory into an exclusionary zone whose resources can be misused and poorly redistributed.

Reclaiming politics as a right, like the right to territory, is about having a legitimate claim to a space with material and immaterial dimensions. By dismantling the homogeneity of control and introducing diverse perspectives, a political landscape and environment that includes multiple bodies and identities is possible. This process involves not only challenging existing norms but actively engaging in the creation of alternative narratives that better reflect the diversity of voices within society. Reclaiming the political as a territory, as a discourse and practice articulated by a black feminist uprising in Brazil means challenging, dissolving, and subverting dominant discourses and power structures to reimagine, redefine, and recreate the political environment, social representations, and practices.

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Crisis of Environmental Politics

Socio-Legal Mobilizations and Environmental Social Movements in the Anthropocene

Ángela María Ocampo Carvajal

The relationship between human rights and the environment is not an obvious one nor is it uncontentious. Part of the literature has questioned whether international human rights is a useful framework to harness environmental protection (Gearty 2010; Burdon 2015) and, through more critical lenses, it has repeatedly exposed the "epistemologies of mastery"[52] at the heart of dominant conceptualizations of "human rights" and "the environment" (Grear 2017). While human rights critiques are important and compelling,[53] it is also increasingly the case that rights-based legal mobilizations and claims-making practices play a role in environmental protection debates and counter-hegemonic politics that aim to advance environmental justice. How are we to understand these seemingly contradictory processes?

This chapter acknowledges the scholarly and the ethico-political need for a sustained interrogation and unsettling of the hegemonic assumptions that underlie modern, Western, liberal legal constructs. Yet, it enters such a discussion by taking the actor's perspective seriously, focusing on the "sticky," "messy," and often contradictory encounters between people, the environment, and

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[52] This term draws from the work of ecofeminist philosopher Lorraine Code (2006, 2015), who makes a lucid critique of the dominant views of nature in Western culture, inspired by the work of feminist theoreticians such as Val Plumwood (1993) and Donna Haraway (2008, 2016). Like these authors, she argues that such Western assumptions continue to inform the current and operative conceptions of human subjectivity and agency that still foregrounds much progressive thinking, whether on ecological/environmental or human rights fronts, instead proposing a critical engagement with these tenets to advance more radical alternatives.

[53] Some of the most compelling critiques are addressed by post-colonial and feminist scholars. For instance, in his genealogy for what he calls the changing paradigms of human rights, Upendra Baxi (2012) argues that we are currently seeing the contradictions of a "trade-related and market-friendly" paradigm where financial and global governance institutions have become central in the production of global legal and human rights agendas. Similarly, Rhada d'Souza (2018) argues that "far from challenging existing orders of authorities and inspiring historical transformations in the dominant architecture of global power, the world's most powerful economic, political and military alliances […] champion rights alongside the disempowered, the working people, the unemployed and the discriminated" (4-5). A resonant critique can also be found in the work of Ratna Kapur (2018) regarding gender and human rights.

human rights.[54] In effect, through a socio-legal perspective, this chapter aims to be attentive to the contexts and ways concrete people in concrete places participate, intervene, or otherwise interrupt meanings and processes whereby legal rules are defined (Baxi 2012). Through a situated sensitivity, it aims to look at rights-based mobilizations for the environment "from below" through the meaning of *practice* as an angle that allows us to examine its limits and potentialities for opening spaces and opportunities for dissent and participation. Our perspective is one that draws from Code's (2006) *ecological thinking*, which invites us to relocate inquiry and critical reflection "down on the ground" where knowledge is made, circulated, and negotiated. It is not simply "about ecology" or "about the environment" but about how specific knowers, in their situations and circumstances, negotiations, and practices, also claim critical scrutiny over dominant ideas (Code 2006, 8).

Beyond the normative gains and new closures that result from this rights-based legal mobilization, we reflect on the relevance of place and relationality as expressed in the re-engagement that mobilized social actors make of procedural environmental rights. This allows us to consider rights-based legal mobilization as a socio-political practice grounded in specific social, cultural, and material landscapes, *places*, and *networks of relations* and expose its dissenting and political character within environmental governance frameworks. In the context of the Anthropocene-Capitalocene,[55] law – in this case, human rights and environmental law – appears as a critical site of struggle between dominant Western knowledge and the plural knowledges of, broadly put, subalternized peoples and their manifold resistance practices; we argue that looking at the actors' experiences is central to critically observing the potentialities, risks, and also the innovations these practices "from below" carry.

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[54] Our reflection is inspired by Anna Tsing's (2005) work on global connections through the concept of "friction." In relation to the dominant Western definitions of justice and science, she argues that neither is ever really found in their pure form but are engaged through their travels: "Engaged universals travel across difference and are changed and changed by their travels […] Yet they can never fulfill their promises of universality. Even in transcending localities, they don't take over the world. They are limited by the practical necessity of mobilizing adherents […] To study engagement requires turning away from formal abstractions to see how universals are used" (23-24).

[55] The concept of the "Anthropocene," related to the recognition of "humanity" as an Earth system driver due to the extent of human-induced environmental change on a planetary scale (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2013; Chakrabarty 2018) has elicited extensive debates in the field of international law where scholars are increasingly engaging and questioning the modern, Western, and liberal assumptions that have legitimized a certain forms of power over "nature," as well as over "Othered" peoples. As Grear (2017) argues, "international law, capitalism and colonialism are all interwoven with Eurocentric impulses and logics of action fully discernible in the Anthropocene crisis […] The Anthropocene-Capitalocene is an epoch – after all – of eco-violation reflecting well practiced, patterned and predictable global and globalizing distributions of intra-species and inter-species injustice" (85), enacted through laws and governance regimes (See also Grear and Kotzé 2015; Kotzé 2017, for an overview).

This chapter draws from research on environmental conflicts and rights-based legal mobilization in Colombia. Through the lenses of political ecology and socio-legal studies, the research aims to understand the role that rights-based legal strategies play in environmental activist networks by looking at meaning-making processes surrounding the notion of "place/territory." It does so through a multi-site comparative case study analysis to grasp the complex relationship between people's resistance, rights, and the environment. This chapter draws from the qualitative data and documentary analysis used to analyze the case of rights-based legal mobilization for the protection and conservation of the Páramo of Santurbán[56] in Colombia, an environmental conflict from 2009 to 2018.

From the Critique of the Nexus between Human rights and the Environment to the Practice and Politics for Human Rights in Environmental Conflicts

Following Kiran Kaur Grewal (2017), I understand human rights as a *socio-political practice*. Extending beyond a strict focus on legal texts and frameworks, this perspective invites the researcher to observe the multiple ways in which human rights are engaged and re-engaged by different actors, grounded in different contexts and historically contingent realities. From this perspective, I move somewhat away from understandings that see human rights as already constructed objects, which then circulate and are (or should be) applied as they are, toward an understanding that conceives of them as constantly being made and remade in specific locations, through actors, exchanges, and processes (Grewal 2017, 11). In other words, the social life of rights is about how discourse and practice are articulated, how the language of (human) rights enters particular social and political spaces, and how this language is adopted, adapted, subverted or rejected, and used as a political or strategic tool in different social, legal, and political arenas (Grewal 2017; Saillant 2013; Tsing 2005).

As they are highly invested with material and symbolic power, human rights as a socio-political practice are therefore susceptible to different forms of appropriations and negotiations, whether critical or hegemonic (Saillant 2013, 17). The same type of rights-based activism could potentially prompt different consequences in particular socio-political realities, and, therefore, its outcomes should not be assumed a priori. However, what is interesting about this epistemological orientation is its implication for how the relationship between

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[56] *Páramos* are complex highland ecosystems with a marked capacity to capture, regulate, and distribute water within and beyond highland or mountain ecosystems. Their endemic vegetation transforms mist into water droplets that are absorbed in a sponge-like manner within the earth that is then distributed through numerous underground channels forming aquifers and resurfacing as nascent water sources that flow into basins, lagoons, and rivers that flow downstream, supplying freshwater to municipalities and cities, as well as sustaining agricultural and rural livelihoods (Molano 2012).

practice and theory is explored by taking account of the empirical complexities found on the ground. As Goodale and Merry (2007) have argued on several accounts, a perspective that focuses on practices also places subalternized actors, in their plurality, at the center-stage, where "non-elites – peasant intellectuals, village activists, government workers, rural politicians, neighborhood council members – can act [also] as important human rights theorists, so that the idea of human rights is perhaps most consequentially shaped and conceptualized outside the centers of elite discourse […]" (cited in Goodale 2020, 51).

This perspective recognizes that the meaning of human rights, as a discourse and a practice that is open to negotiation and contestation, is shaped by struggles from actors involved in concrete action, mobilization, and activism, highlighting its intrinsic political character. Yet, it leaves the question about the concrete forms such politics take open to empirical examination (Giorgi 2019). I argue, therefore, that it is relevant to move from a discussion about what human rights *are* to what human rights *do* or *create* in specific contexts and practices of activism (Blouin-Genest, Doran, and Paquerot 2019, 15-16), as well as by *who*: the subjects of human rights (Celermajer and Lefebvre 2020).

I have elsewhere discussed in detail how a political – dissenting or conflicting – understanding of rights claiming is pertinent to understand contemporary engagements of human rights by environmental movements (Ocampo 2023a), which, in our perspective, are not to be reduced to a reactive demand for particular entitlements waiting to be recognized, institutionalized, or implemented – even if social actors may also seek particular institutional responses. In our view, a perspective that takes account of actors' practices – grounded in specific social, cultural, and political contexts – is a productive avenue for revealing what they create or may open as a possibility. It is a perspective that aims to restore a focus on social actors' agency while considering the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions they navigate.

Juridification of Environmental Conflict and Rights-Centered Legal Mobilizations

While the struggles over territories and "natural resources" in Latin America and much of the Global South date back to colonial times, it is at the end of the twentieth century and over the last decades that the intensification of extractivism has acquired new dimensions (Svampa 2019). Extractive industries

have developed on a par with "legal architectures"[57] that have reinforced existing frameworks and patterns of (neo)colonial depredation, facilitated and promoted under the development discourse (González Serrano, Montalván-Zambrano, and Viaene 2022). As it has been abundantly shown (Perreault, Bridge, and McCarthy 2015; Bebbington 2015), environmental conflicts in contexts of extractivism happen at different scales. As a particular form of appropriation of nature, as Dietz (2017) notes, the activities of extractive industries entail substantial socio-spatial, socio-ecological, and structural changes around existing authorities, institutions, and property regimes governing the use of, access to, and control over land and water, transforming cultural identities and livelihoods while reconfiguring relations between scales of power. This multiscalarity, when observed through the processes of juridification, is salient, as other legal orders – international agreements and conventions, national legal frameworks (constitutional, administrative), and subnational and territorial jurisdictions are implicated in the establishment and legitimation of these forms of depredation and dispossession, often spanning long periods of time.

In general terms, when "resource" conflicts are politicized, not only are notions around sovereignty and the rights to use and access land, territory, water, and property disputed, but also the evaluation of risk, forms of protection and conservation, and "life projects" see themselves contested (Sieder, Montoya, and Bravo-Espinosa 2022). More fundamentally, however, in addition to the unequal distribution of risks, burdens, and benefits, what is challenged by social actors and activist networks alike is the increasing erasure and, in some cases, denial – also through the use of force – of political space for participation in shaping decisions regarding the future of what is considered a "lived space" – a *territory* (Ocampo 2023a).[58] These activists also raise questions around recognition as to who should have standing and whose knowledge, perspectives, values, and experiences count in decision-making processes (Schlosberg 2007; Thériault 2015).

In contradictory ways, while states may recognize and uphold, to a certain degree, constitutional rights to participation, consultation, territorial rights

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[57] Montoya, Sieder, and Bravo-Espinosa (2022) refer to "legal architecture" as the multi-scalar ensemble of norms that facilitate private direct investment at the national or transnational level in the mining sectors, whose sources are international private law and transnational lex mercatoria. Examples of this ensemble of norms abound in the complex global legal system. The most representatives are the many bilateral and regional free trade, commercial, and investment agreements and the arbitration tribunals that have consolidated this legal architecture over the last three decades. (58-59).

[58] On this point, specifically, we refer to the notion of "territory" born particularly within the Indigenous communities and territorial feminisms of Latin America. Yet it has increasingly become a shared political discourse that crosscuts different struggles across the continent, not limited to socio-environmental movements, although predominant in these movements. Svampa (2019) calls this phenomenon the "eco-territorial" turn.

of ethnic communities, and jurisprudence on the rights to water and a healthy environment, the promotion of extractivist development often overrides these demands. Against this backdrop, efforts to defend territories, regulate their access and use, and protect water sources, mountains, and landscapes from the devastating impacts of extractive industries have derived into "multi-scalar processes of juridification," which, according to Sieder, Montoya, and Bravo-Espinosa (2022) is the "use and venularization of the different languages and figures of (human rights) law. These processes include judicialization (the use of litigation in Courts), legislative efforts (for example, formal negotiations to ban mining or regulate water uses), and the creation of new human rights instruments at the international level to attain 'due diligence' on behalf of transnational corporations and governments" (7, translation my own).

Nevertheless, among these contradictions and asymmetries of power, environmental activism and struggles for the defense of territory also evidence openings, critical positioning, reformulations, and new conceptualizations, values, and forms of territorial ordering that implicate place-based understandings of water, land, territory, sentient beings, and their agencies (Escobar 2008; see also Kohn 2015). These debates are often born at the heart of community struggles, their production and social reproduction practices, their knowledges, and moralities. They do not escape, however, the juridical and political arenas of struggle despite the legal system's intrinsic limitations.[59] To do so, they claim (existing) constitutional political rights to environmental participation and substantial rights to water and a healthy environment, increasingly looking for legal and political avenues to voice such claims. In the process, they also crucially express relational understandings of nature and place, acknowledging the embeddedness of human life in a larger web or interactions, across different scales of interaction (Escobar 2008; see also Kohn 2015).

Place and Relationality in Rights-Based Legal Mobilizations: The Case of Litigation for the Defense of Water and the Páramo of Santurbán

Water flows across landscapes, territories and connects economic, social, cultural, and political sectors. It is also a vital resource, central to human and non-human life (Bakker 2012). Political ecologies of water have defined it in relational terms as being intrinsically co-produced by social, cultural, political,

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[59] Critical Environmental Law scholars hold the view that environmental law – as a branch that is closer in many ways to the "materiality of the world" – could potentially be more responsive to these shifts of meaning. While law's function is to "fix" and "stabilize" meanings, there are different ways in which definitions, concepts, and norms can be de-stabilized. We see this in the debates brought forward by new currents such as "Earth Jurisprudence" and "the rights of nature" (See Grear 2017; Philippoulous-Mihalopoulos 2011; Kotzé 2017).

and biophysical dimensions. Water is, therefore, more than an isolated and techno-scientific hydrological phenomenon. It is better understood as a hydro-social cycle, where water flows[60] are shaped and produced by social uses, as well as material and symbolic appropriations, as well as their economic, political, and legal forms of definition, regulation, and control. Environmental conflicts over water, thus, often reveal the economic, social, and political conditions that determine its unequal distribution; its dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in relation to access, uses, cultural meanings; and appropriations, and the risks and enclosures that also transform its biotic composition (Merlinsky, Martín, and Tobías 2020).

In the case of Santurbán, water, as embedded within the larger socio-ecosystem of the páramo (montane Andean wetlands), is at the center of a dispute between conservation and extraction. The conflict begins with a "tension of territorialities" (Porto-Gonçalves 2001; Jimenez and Novoa 2014), when the territoriality of state regulation and acquired private property rights of corporations defining "strategic areas" for extraction clash with those of the inhabitants living in proximity or within such "areas."[61] In this case, the central actors in the dispute are urban dwellers concerned with the future and well-being of the páramo as a water source that provides a public good for the city and its inhabitants' daily endeavors – including its "development" in the most strict and hegemonic sense. Through the struggle, meanings around water and páramos have widened to encompass the different elements that make water flows possible as inscribed within a larger territory of which, the city, is also part. Resignified urban territorialities through a growing consciousness of interdependencies foreground urban dwellers rights-based claims to a legitimate participation in the conservation of páramo areas.

Páramos as Hydrosocial Territories and the Struggle to Define its Meaning and Uses

The Páramo de Santurbán is located in the departments of Santander and North Santander, in the northeast of Colombia, and covers an area of 142,000 hectares. Soto Norte, the southwestern sub-region of the páramo, is characterized by its historical small-scale, artisanal mining activity. As the legal and regulatory

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[60] Here "water flows" also implies different scales – the subsoil, terrestrial surface, or the atmosphere (Merlinsky, Martín, Tobías 2020).

[61] Understanding "development" as an episteme allows one to observe how it is underpinned by a "geopolitical imagination" that, according to Ojeda (2019), implies the constant epistemic work of reducing land and territory to (legal) categories such as "commodity," "property," "resource," or "area," reducing the complex material and symbolic ecologies that land and territory encompass (795).

frameworks on páramo ecosystems and their conservation developed alongside changing mining regimes (namely through the "Mining Code" Law 685 of 2001), páramo ecosystems began to be classified as "strategic" and "areas of special protection."[62] These regulatory changes have accelerated socio-economic and socio-cultural transformations in páramo "areas," principally for small-scale peasant farmers and miners as artisanal mining was eliminated as a legal category and has become an increasingly criminalized activity (Echavarría 2014). But also, increasing bureaucratic measures of environmental control impose higher costs on small-scale artisanal mining and also progressive restrictions on land uses for typically highland farming crops due to their environmental impacts (Barriga 2015). This change has favored the active incursion of large-scale transnational mining since the mid-1990s – across the country overall but also in páramo areas, despite extant legal dispositions excluding them from mining influence zones (Buitrago 2014; Galvis 2015). In the case of Santurbán, the Soto Norte region has become the epicenter of a longstanding and complex environmental conflict, which emerged in 2011.

In 2009, Greystar Resources (later called Eco Oro), a Canadian transnational mining company, applied for an environmental license to begin operations in order to exploit the páramo for open-pit gold mining. This worried the urban population since the area of influence of the mine would be located in close proximity to the intakes of the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Aqueduct (AMB), which sources its water from one of the rivers originating from the páramo. The perception was that this would create the risk of water shortage and contamination for the city's two million inhabitants, triggering the progressive configuration of a network of activist organizations to defend their right to water: the main aqueduct, city trade unions, local environmental organizations, student movements, national and international human rights and environmental organizations, as well as the city's private – commercial – sector.

While the focus begins with the risks perceived for water supply, as the actors problematize the issue, they create an important connection between

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[62] It is important to note here that páramo and highland areas in Colombia have a longer and more complex socio-spatial, socio-ecological, and political history, while regulatory frameworks for the conservation of water and highland ecosystems dates back to the 1950s. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we focus on the more contemporary developments that have determined and enhanced environmental conflicts around páramo areas. Generally, these conflicts not only pit highland communities against the state as the rightful authority to define the appropriate uses of water and páramo areas. Conflict is also expressed among social actors claiming a legitimate interest – from rural, urban, and Indigenous actors, small-scale farming peasants, small-scale artisanal miners, medium-to-large livestock breeders, or large-scale national and transnational corporations. Of course, it is important to note that these different actors do not occupy the same position in these struggles, as it is often the most powerful who largely influence conservation or extraction agendas (Galvis 2015; Duarte-Abadía et al. 2021).

water and the territory in which it is embedded – the páramo. In effect, the water that is channeled from the rivers originating in the páramo to the city was "taken for granted" by city-dwellers. Until then, the páramo was a distant place, inaccessible or unknown to many.[63] Through a process of inquiry and cross-sectoral alliance building with scientific and legal experts attuned to the cause of water, understandings of water flows were broadened for the city-based activist network. Connecting water as a public good and a "consumable resource" to an ecosystem and a "territory that produces water" implicated more complex and interrelated processes that situated the páramo within a water-territory-urban nexus. While the images of "pristine natures," which usually underlie conservation governance frameworks, mediated such reflections, a sense of shared responsibility for the protection of the páramo developed, where the urban dwellers, organized as a collective, redefined their identities in relation to the páramo as its defenders. The Santurbán Committee (*Comité por la defensa del agua y del Páramo de Santurban*, in Spanish) was born, linking the defense of water with the defense of the páramo. Understood as a hydro-social territory (Boelens et al. 2016), the activists engaged a series of actions to connect the water that city dwellers use daily from the tap with the páramo upstream (Parra-Romero and Gitahy 2017; Parra-Romero 2019). In 2011, between a multitude of marches and awareness-raising actions, popular and human rights education, and political and legal advocacy that claimed their right to water, the water and páramo defenders publicly demanded the government deny the environmental license that would allow Eco Oro to begin implementing its large-scale mining project.

By law, the mining project must be socialized with the concerned communities through Environmental Public Hearings. While constitutionally, there is an obligation for transnational corporations and the state to respect free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in the case of ethnic communities, for non-ethnic groups such as peasant farmer communities and urban dweller collectives, there is an institutional and legal void in terms of participation. This has limited the presence of these actors in environmental administrative procedures during the licensing process. Overall, citizen and community consultations are often reduced to socialization and information diffusion of already made decisions and habitually voluntary for corporations. In Santurbán, as the urban-based network observed these institutional shortcomings, they sought avenues of direct participation by requesting the Ministry of Environment to hold Environmental

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[63] As Buitrago (2014) observes, páramo "areas" have historically been associated with mystic images, related to far-off places, as well as images of the armed conflict, as armed actors have used highland areas as rear-guard spaces. This was not a distant reality for this specific páramo, given that it has been a strategic passage point for armed actors, including the military forces. Páramos have also traditionally been the object of scientific discourse and research.

Public Hearings in the city and politicized the issue through media and marches. Within these spaces, they demanded their right to water and participation in the decisions over the protection of "their" water and its source. In this sense, the Santurbán Committee managed to make these spaces moments of political expression, opening political space on the issue of páramo areas so that beyond the institutions concerned, the citizens of Bucaramanga could express their concerns and demands. After a massive march and the third Environmental Hearing in 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADS) and the National Authority for Environmental Licenses (ANLA) withdrew the corporation's licensing process. The metropolitan population perceived this decision as a great achievement of social mobilization, although it did not mean that the corporation would leave entirely.

A Tale of Bounded Territory: From the Enclosures of Extraction to the Enclosures of Conservation

In effect, this episode did not end with the success of the city-based network of actors. The politicization of the debate around páramos, on the one hand, and the pressure exerted by transnational companies on the government to define the exploitable areas, on the other, led the government at the time to propose the concept of delimitation as a territorial ordering mechanism.[64] This measure was to better define exploitable areas from protected areas and confer greater predictability, certainty, and legal security to the "strategic" mining projects underway. Moreover, until then, while extant legislation and environmental administrative procedures had begun the classification of páramo ecosystems as "areas of special protection" – many overlapping with declared National Natural Parks – páramo territories did not have any specific legal mechanism for their protection and conservation.[65] The Páramo of Santurbán would be the first to be demarcated by the Ministry of Environment.

The official process of delimitation involved a series of technical procedures based on scientific and technical studies provided by environmental territorial authorities and research centers. Consultation with the communities, it was later found, was limited to mining municipalities (namely the Soto Norte subregion) and the private sector.[66] Páramo peasant farmers and the organizations from the city-based network were largely excluded from the process despite repeated attempts to access information and their initiative to provide input. After much expectation, the Ministry of Environment issued Resolution 2090

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[64] Congreso de la República de Colombia, Law 1450 of 2011, Art. 202
[65] Constitutional Court of Colombia. Ruling T-361 of 2017. May 30. (M.P. Alberto Rojas Ríos).
[66] See Note 14.

in 2014, officially demarcating the Páramo of Santurbán. It strictly prohibited intensive agriculture and the exploitation of hydrocarbon fuels and minerals over the whole area – with a few exceptions, however, for mining titles acquired before 2010. This left many of Eco Oro's titles untouched. Moreover, while the mining municipalities of the Soto Norte subregion welcomed the Ministry's consideration of their main socio-economic activity, the strict conservation focus of the delimitation was detrimental to páramo peasant farmers. Suddenly, they had to transform their farming activities.[67]

At the level of the city-based network of activists, the delimitation presented a new dilemma: tracing a line dividing the mountain into distinct geographical spaces through the force of law did not guarantee that mining interests would not develop below its demarcation or in areas where titles were still in force. In that sense, the water source was still at risk (Méndez Villamizar, Mejía Jerez, and Acevedo Tarazona 2020). While activists initially defended the conservation measure as a viable solution to safeguarding the quality and quantity of water provision to the city, some questioned the measure and its consequences profoundly: "How is it possible to divide a páramo in this way? Inevitably, nature imposes itself on the law and exceeds it through its own flows and rhythms" (Private Interview). As this conjuncture deepened the controversy, given that the páramo's demarcation clearly favored mining interests over people's livelihoods, their rights to water, and their well-being, a re-framing of the problem was in order (Ocampo 2023b). Concerns over the páramo turned somewhat away from its surface, the watershed, and lagoon complex and turned to the adjacent ecosystems, the entire highland areas as a biodiverse, hydro-geological indivisible complex, leading them to argue for a more integral definition of páramo areas (ibid).

Additionally, activists argued that the delimitation process was flawed: not only did it flagrantly accommodate mining interests, but the Ministry had not involved a wide array of voices, concerns, and contributions from the diverse actors involved – especially from a number of socio-political and grassroots organizations. To contribute effectively to the definition and conservation of páramo areas, activists reframed their demands toward an effective right to participate in environmental administrative procedures, without which, they

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[67] Buitrago (2016) makes a detail overview of the results of the Ministry's delimitation highlighting how the Ministry of Environment deliberately dismissed the scientific recommendations and studies of state-sponsored research centers such as the Alexander von Humboldt Institute. This opened up further controversies given that on the one hand, many of the delimited areas did not correspond to the level of ecological transformation for which new uses were prescribed or modified, and on the other hand, no specific transition schemes were foreseen by the Resolution. The lack of public investment in such rural areas made the inhabitants of the páramo weary about their future socio-economic well-being.

argued, it was impossible to safeguard and guarantee people's right to water and a healthy environment.

Mobilizing State Law: Litigation in Defense of Water and the Páramo of Santurbán

With the impasse generated by a "flawed" procedure, the city-based activist network sought legal-political alternatives to contain, revise, and reformulate the delimitation, advocating that it truly be for the páramo's conservation. The socio-legal activism that developed alongside continued mobilization through popular education and pacific protests involved filing a *tutela action*[68] against the Ministry of Environment for failing to guarantee all actors' fundamental right to participation in an environmental decision with far-reaching implications. Notably, the *tutela action* was brought by members of the network of water and páramo defenders on behalf of the citizens of Bucaramanga.

Mobilizing to ensure greater participation in the definition of uses, access, and management of environmental goods is based on social actors' awareness of the effects of a certain type of "economic development" on their territories and their lives and the outright exclusion of their voices from those decisions. In this case, they not only "name, blame, and claim" the issues through rights-based legal action, but they also aim to open these spaces to directly influence the "rulemaking, monitoring, and enforcement" of environmental governance (Canfield 2022, 15-16; Morgan 2007). This is at the heart of the rights-based litigation against the Ministry of Environment's demarcation process, launched in collaboration with human rights lawyers' collectives in the city in 2015. Alongside opening the space for effective participation, this *tutela action* also aimed to position urban voices as a collective in relation to the páramo. The "end-consumer community" figure came to represent and accentuate the voice and place of those who claimed a legitimate interest in the páramo's future, embedding the city within a broader ensemble of ecological relations. It is, however, possible to question this urban-centered perspective and the entrenched urban-rural hierarchies that are obscured and deepened through the process, which I will shortly describe in the next subsection.

The tutela action against the delimitation process led to Ruling T-321 of 2017, through which the Constitutional Court re-evaluated Resolution 2090 of 2014. The Court rendered ineffective the delimitation process and ratified the

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[68] The *acción de tutela* is a writ of legal protection of fundamental rights. It is a complaint that any citizen can bring before any judge to seek immediate injunction against actions or omissions of any public authority that a citizen claims to have violated his/her/their fundamental constitutional rights (Colombian Political Constitution, Art. 86).

fundamental right to participation in environmental matters, specifically for the Páramo of Santurbán. The first highly important outcome was the establishment of more rigorous participation guidelines for the re-delimitation process to be held by the Ministry of Environment starting in 2018. A second relevant outcome is that the Court moved away from a strict conservation frame after considering the actors' arguments. Although a conservationist tone remains around these ecosystems, the Court acknowledged the important interrelations among the páramo's upper and lower areas and its adjacent ecosystems (i.e. the High Andes Forests), moving toward a more complex and integral conceptualization.

While the Court's ruling is a hallmark of environmental socio-legal activism and is heralded as a victory by city-based activists for delaying more intensive exploitation of the páramo, it is nonetheless a bitter-sweet result. Ratifying earlier decisions (i.e., Ruling C-036 of 2015) prohibiting mining from highland areas, on the one hand, led Eco Oro to finally relinquish its presence in Colombia. On the other hand, the mining municipalities of the Soto Norte subregion now encounter a stalemate on the definition of their historic socio-economic activities. Moreover, páramo peasant farmers continue in "limbo" regarding their farming activities, which are to be converted to more sustainable practices. However, no clarity has been expressed as to how that should happen. The participatory process will take time to be implemented, and other mining interests still lurk in the páramo. What the process reveals is, on the one hand, the difficult equilibrium to be found between guaranteeing the material and social conditions of people by being attentive to how they are positioned along class lines while considering high standards of environmental protection. On the other hand, it also reveals the limits of a conservation-centered frame, obscuring to a large extent the multiple lives, human and non-human, that make the páramos socio-ecosystems – and not simply ecosystems.

Who Counts and Who Decides? The Dilemma of Participation Between the Rural and the Urban

Alongside the rights to water and a healthy environment, the central claims of the city-based activist network centered around crafting a space of participation within environmental governance frameworks: the actors themselves wanted to take part in defining the appropriate boundaries of the páramo that could yield not only its integral protection but also the safeguard of the "precious resource" that is water. Participation has been central for environmental justice movements (procedural equity), but whose voices really count in this process?

The case of Santurbán is telling in this sense. While the city-based activist network mobilized massively, which helped the protection of páramo ecosystems emerge as a public issue at the national and international levels, its strict stance against "gold" polarized the debate among other equally concerned actors – particularly for small and medium-scale miners living in close proximity to the páramo. To a large extent, this hampered the search for avenues of collaboration and coalition-building in view of addressing the challenge imposed by large-scale mining. Equally, the debate excluded many páramo peasant farmers, despite the demarcation of the páramo having radical effects on their living conditions. In its Ruling, while the Court recognized these different complex dynamics; we may argue that by not addressing them beyond the instauration of a participatory mechanism, its scope and transformative power are limited, entrenching historical inequalities between rural and urban populations. It is important to note that the complex social dynamics in páramo areas are also mediated by Colombia's long-standing armed conflict and the memory of its consequences on people's lives and relations. While we are not able to delve into this further given the focus of this chapter, we call attention to further understanding environmental activism in post-conflict scenarios. In our perspective, this means that a "territorial" or place-based lens that truly understands the different realities that make up socio-ecosystems would allow legal abstractions and generalizations to – perhaps – imagine better mechanisms to address environmental conflicts. In the meantime, what was, in our perspective, an unavoidable gain was that through rights-based legal mobilization, activists were able to politicize what is often seen as "neutral," "technical" environmental procedures, therefore revealing the importance of directly taking part in monitoring, enforcement and other forms of rulemaking.

Blurring Categories, Creating Presence: On Place and Relationality

We can argue that the case studied showed that socio-legal mobilizations cannot be reduced to a mere demand for rights in environmental struggles. Instead, despite the "legal fetishism" that abounds within the Latin American – specifically in Colombia's – legal culture (Lemaitre Ripoll 2008) in place-based social movements, the defense of place/territory is not a defense of "property rights," but an aim to create the conditions of existence and the emergence of a physical/material and symbolic space, one that through the technologies of power may have been narrated and represented through state-centric, scientific, legal, and cartographic descriptions (such as the case of the Páramo of Santurbán), but which is appropriated, valued, and re-defined in multiple – even conflicting – ways. Alternatively, the understandings of place are broadened, expanded,

contested, and complexified.[69] In the process, the formation of new collective identities questions historical absences. As social actors demand to "have equal say" in decision-making processes, both rights-claiming and rights-based legal mobilizations allow groups to politicize seemingly neutral procedures to a certain degree, building the capacity to directly influence rulemaking processes, thus also recasting passive subjectivities of victimhood toward the recognition of people's agency and expanding in this way legal and political space (Fraser 2009).

Though the centrality of the human – the "Anthropos" – as the legal subject remains, these processes demonstrate a developing sense of relationality among bodies, places, and affects – human bodies, bodies of water, mountains/páramos, i.e., such as is reflected in the conflation of the páramo and its water with life itself. Elements of this case depict the greater awareness of the interdependence between the city and its mountains, between peoples and territories. As Ojeda (2023) writes, this awareness refers to a growing consciousness of the "inseparability of body, land, and territory" (366). Drawing from knowledges and practices that foreground the socio-ecological connection to the places/ territories that peoples – rural, ethnic, urban – inhabit or depend on, a space that is opened to challenge anthropocentric, state-centered visions and legal definitions over territory as appropriable – vacuum, sacrificial – space, and over nature as a resource that can be objectified, enclosed, and exploited. Instead, through these struggles, land, territory, and water are progressively, iteratively conceived, experienced, and produced as part of a system, an assemblage of reciprocal relations and obligations re-enacted through daily practices (Escobar 2008; Oslender 2016), an assemblage that can inspire, trigger and act as a basis for socio-legal mobilizations.

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that socio-legal mobilization and rights-based struggles over territory and participation in these contexts take place in and are entangled with modern and neoliberal forms of territoriality and governance situated in historical and social processes traversed by often uneven power relations. Progressive forms of engagement with rights-based strategies can sometimes simultaneously produce the absence of other actors (human – women, peasant, Indigenous – and non-human), knowledge, and territorialities, just as the conflict itself can reinforce colonial forms of conservation or create new (legal) enclosures for environmental protection[70]. This demands a dynamic

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[69] Gupta and Ferguson (1997) stress that beyond an autonomous and ideal "local," place is made, re-made, appropriated, and contested in complex and multi-scalar "glocal" social and spatial power relations. Moreover, legal geography contends that law and space are co-constitutive (Delaney 2010).
[70] The case of Santurbán is quite telling in this respect as a very successful legal mobilization in the form of strategic litigation from the urban community generated a territorial stalemate and obscured páramo peasant and artisanal mining communities' territorialities.

and iterative understanding of the defense of place/territory by legal means as
struggles for the construction of meaning, of presence-absence, that is contested
and contingent.

Conclusion: From Institutionalization to Constant "Insurrection"

To conclude, it is still relevant to acknowledge that the risk of law – in this
case, human rights and environmental law – always involves stabilizing,
fixing, and capturing meanings and concepts to coordinate, order, and regulate
society, spaces, and people. At the heart of this concern is what Stammers
(2009, 2015) calls the paradox of institutionalization, that is, "the intractable
problem of institutional *power to* so easily morphing into forms of *power
over*" (2015, 74), about the ambivalent resource that legal tools and rights-
centered discourses and strategies can represent for emancipatory movements.
Recourse to institutionalized environmental and human rights legal regimes,
although designed to challenge and constrain forms of repressive power and
ecological degradation, may instead shape the nature and extent of movement
mobilization, reducing a broader struggle to its legal expression or creating a
reliance on established definitions and norms, thus reproducing forms of "power
over" through its implicit commitment to legal modernity (Baxi 2012). In this
perspective, the context of the Anthropocene-Capitalocene calls for a radical
epistemological and ontological pluralization, *in theory and in practice*, with the
capacity to decenter the hegemonic position of the "Anthropos" and integrate the
multiple encounters, entanglements and relations that further breach the modern
culture-nature divide and the boundaries of the nation-state[71] (Kotzé 2017;
Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos and Brooks 2017).

There is much work to do. In relation to rights-based legal mobilizations
by environmental movements, what some cases show so far is that the most
transformative endeavors are not solely focused on normative gains – despite
remaining central to advancing progressive agendas – but on the "insurrectional"
character of practice, that is, the constant uses, conversations, debates, and
contentions that happen as collective action takes shape. The latter is understood
as situated, historically contingent and context-bound, where social actors can
"(re-)invent" and "(re-)define" existing concepts based on grounded experiences,
knowledges, and practices, potentially also integrating other bodies and multiple
encounters (i.e., the use of bio-culturality to translate the relationships between
riverine peoples with the river as part of the configuration of a larger hydro-

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[71] As solutions to address global phenomena, such as climate change, will demand transboundary
responses and solidarities.

social territory into legal systems). From a post- or anti-foundational perspective on rights-centered mobilizations, Balibar (2013) argues for "insurrection" as the endless struggle to democratize existing institutions to prevent their reversal into monopoly power, yet the dialogical tension between the practices of contestation – insurrection – and institutionalization remains productive if we admit the possibility for a constant collective creation and recreation.[72] Ultimately, however, it is about creating processes and opening spaces that allow for genuine power-sharing, asserting the place of a voice/voice(s)[73] that has/have otherwise been excluded (Grewal 2017).

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[72] This idea is foregrounded on a dissenting understanding of democracy and human rights (See Blouin-Genest, Doran, and Paquerot 2019).
[73] Including from non-humans.

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Living in the Agricultural Frontier: Land, (Re)Production, and Capital Relations of Soy Farming in Bolivia during Climate Change

Marie Theresa Jasser

In 1982, Don Cirilo[74] migrated from the Bolivian Andes to the rural municipality of San Julián in the eastern Bolivian lowlands at age fourteen. Together with his brother, they relocated to a small settlement based around a church, a school, and a community-union center, surrounded by dense chiquitano dry forest. The settlement – called a *núcleo* – was a day's walk away from the next road that connected the rural areas with the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. With the use of machetes and fire, they cleared up patch by patch a total of fifty hectares, which the family had been assigned in a government-led settlement project. During the first years, they produced subsistence crops and beans for consumption in Santa Cruz as well as for export to Brazil. Today, Don Cirilo produces soy, sunflower seeds, and millet for export on those same fifty hectares. The endowment has allowed him to sustain his family, afford education for his children, and for his wife to buy a market stall in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

Don Camilo migrated at age twelve together with his uncle to the same settlement project. Today, the family also produces soy and other cash crops, with the second and even the third generation involved in the soy farming business. Over the past forty years, they have bought land from their neighbors and now rent or own 150 hectares as well as several heavy tractors, harvesters, and other industrial agricultural machinery. Besides their own agricultural production, they rent the machinery out to neighboring farmers, providing a secondary income stream.

Both cases are representative of the peasant farmers who migrated from the rural Andes to the lowlands as part of a structural adjustment program promoting colonization through planned settlements (World Bank 1998; Pacheco 2006). The land endowments have enabled both of these former peasant farmer families to acquire certain levels of generational wealth – albeit in different scopes and areas. Despite the difference in the size of farmlands they own and work on, both farmers are considered small to medium producers in Bolivia. They are also both firmly incorporated into global production and value chains; they dedicate their land and effort to soy farming by employing heavy machinery, GMO seeds, and agrochemicals to keep up with the industrial soy complex. This makes them highly dependent on international markets for selling their product and buying

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[74] All names are pseudonyms, as agreed with the participants.

their resources. This dependency becomes increasingly clear in the face of global crises – especially regarding climate change.

The direct impacts of the climate crisis on farming and on everyday life are palpable. In the Bolivian lowlands, extreme weather events like high temperatures, storms, droughts, or floods have become commonplace over the past decade. These phenomena have been linked to rapid deforestation caused by wildfires and land clearing in the region (Devisscher, Boyd, and Malhi 2016; Vargas-Cuentas and Roman-Gonzales 2021; Maillard et al. 2022). Harvests are diminished or lost in uncontrolled fires and floods. Roads become impassable, hindering the transport of people, machines, fertilizer, pesticides, and grain. Both farmers point out that good harvests have become rare and that many of their neighbors have sold or rented their land in San Julián to larger farming operations to acquire new land in more distant locations, pushing the agricultural frontier further to the north and east of the country. The negative impacts of the climate crisis are highly unequal, as loss of crops can be devastating for small farmers but a calculated risk for large operations.

Map 1: Limits of the Chiquitano Dry Forest Ecoregion in the Bolivian Lowlands with the Location of the Municipalities San Julián, Cuatro Cañadas, and San Antonio de Lomerío
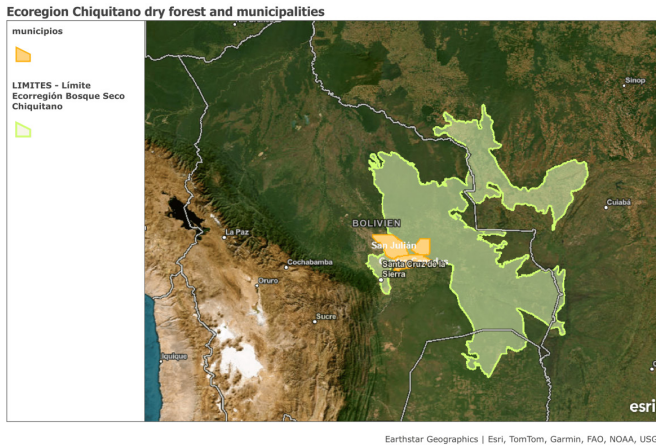
Source: ESRI Earthstar Geographics (2023a)

These inequalities are mediated – among other factors – through access to and use of land and capital. In this chapter, I therefore examine how intersectional inequalities are inscribed into territories and territorialities through different

forms of access to land and agricultural production systems. I focus on changes in labor relations, reproduction of life, and nature relations to disentangle the underlying processes and structures of inequality. I delineate the process of land use and deforestation based on satellite images of the region spanning several decades. This allows me to connect the analysis with its historical background and detail the colonization projects to show their impact today. By examining the effects of past and current land use and regulation in the rural municipality San Julián, I show that shifts in agricultural production mediate multiple inequalities that are exacerbated by the climate crisis. I find that the underlying settler logic and the financialized production model contribute to expanding the Bolivian agricultural frontier and deforestation. This, in turn, contributes to deepening the unequal and detrimental effects of the climate crisis. While agrarian extractivism in its industrial mode of production seems monolithic at first, this chapter seeks to develop a more complex notion by examining the inequalities within the Bolivian agro-industrial soy complex in the Chiquitanía region.

The Chiquitanía region is a socio-ecoregion in the Bolivian lowlands. It is defined by the chiquitano dry forest and the Indigenous population: the Chiquitano people who understand the forest as the *Casa Grande*, the great home of the Chiquitanos.[75] It is located in the transitional zone connecting the Gran Chaco in the south and the Amazon in the north (Devisscher, Boyd, and Malhi 2016). In this broader region, I focus on the rural municipality San Julián, 150 km northwest of the departmental capital Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Map 1). The municipality is flanked by the Guapay River to the west and the San Julián River to the east and is characterized by its fertile soil.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first section, I give a brief overview of my analytical and theoretical approach, methods, and the material; in the core section, I analyze the process of colonization and the subsequent changes in land tenure and productive structures in Chiquitanía, as well as the inequalities both brought about; and in the concluding section, I reflect on the necessity both to develop a complex understanding of agricultural frontier extractivism in the climate crisis and to employ an intersectional and feminist approach.

Colonial Land Regimes in Extractivist Frontiers

Land and territory are key concepts to understanding the climate crisis in Latin America and elsewhere. Across the continent, a vivid debate on how to grasp the

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[75] Pre-colonization, the region was home to multiple Indigenous peoples who were subjected to linguistic and ethnic homogenization under Jesuit colonization in the seventeenth century as one people – the Chiquitanos.

production of space influences scholars and activists alike (Daigle and Ramírez 2019; Vela-Almeida et al. 2020; Haesbaert 2013, 2021). As Shattuck et al. (2023) state:

> There is no question on Earth as powerful as land: who owns it; how it is used; and whether it is treated as a commodity, as a living relative, as an ally in the climate fight, an extractive resource, as a home, or as a territory. Accelerating climate change and extractivism must change the way we think about the politics of land – and what is going to be politically and practically important in the decades ahead. (490)

The understanding of land tenure and stewardship, as well as land use change, are fundamental to understanding the unequal effects of the climate crisis, as well as possible strategies and resistances throughout it. To grasp the specific configuration of land and territory in Bolivia, I draw on theoretical debates of plurinationalism, territoriality, and agrarian extractivism.

Plurinational statehood and the respective territories and territorialities that it produces are built upon over 500 years of colonial territorial legacy as well as on decolonial struggles – producing particular intersections of identities and places. One of Bolivia's most renowned intellectuals, René Zavaleta Mercado (2009), theorizes the postcolonial Bolivian state as a motley social formation (*formación social abigarrada*), i.e., the parallel existence of multiple forms of production, temporalities, and systems of authority that are subjugated under the colonial-modern state aspiration but are not (fully) integrated into the colonial-modern project. This understanding centers coloniality as the defining aspect of state formation in Bolivia. Regarding territorialities, motley social formations translate to multiple and unarticulated forms of understanding, inhabiting, and using land or territory. Elsewhere, we have termed these partially articulated and overlapping relations to land as motley territories to describe appropriations of land in which coloniality is as much a part of the socio-spatial relation as are pre- and postcolonial territorialities (Jasser, Radhuber, and Inturias 2021). Departing from Zavaletas concept of motley societies, I examine the nexus of land access, labor relations, reproduction of life, nature relations, and the intersectional inequalities they buttress in an agrarian extractivist frontier context.

Extractivism describes an economic model based on the exploitation of natural resources that are exported with minimal or no processing. Debates on extractivism, in general, and agrarian extractivism, in particular, are well established and build on key contributions from and on Latin America (Gudynas 2009; Acosta 2013; Svampa 2019). With the notable intensification of agrarian extractivism and the expansion of the agricultural frontier, a deeper understanding of the processes of expansion, resistance, and the dynamics

within agrarian extractivist models is necessary. McKay, Alonso-Fradejas, and Ezquerro-Cañete (2021) propose an analysis of the extractivist features of what they identify as corporate-led, external-input plantation agriculture (CEPA) and the advance of commodification and financialization. Going beyond just looking at appropriation and extraction of raw materials, they turn to the impacts of this economic model in rural areas, aiming to unpack the extractivist relationship with human and non-human nature. They consider the erosion of farmer autonomy, dispossession of the rural poor, and the expropriation of nature. Focusing on how this specific agrarian extractivist model is sustained beyond production, they turn to analyze state subsidies and the unpaid reproductive labor of women, children, or the elderly (McKay, Alonso-Fradejas, and Ezquerro-Cañete 2021). Feminist approaches to agrarian extractivism, as proposed by Ojeda (2021), also center on social reproduction: "the social and ecological structures, relations, and institutions that sustain life at the individual, communitarian, local, and planetary level" (87), especially in everyday life. This ranges, Ojeda continues, "from the mere reproduction of bodies to the maintenance of the social order" (ibid.). This perspective is crucial to understanding the intersectional inequalities and their impact on peasant communities in their everyday life.

In Bolivia, specifically, there is a lack of research into the CEPA that makes up the soy complex in Santa Cruz. There is also little research on the planned colonization projects and how they have been impacted by the shift to agrarian extractivism. Notable exceptions are Castañón (2014, 2017) on the transformation of peasant communities through the introduction of mechanized soy farming and the role of multinational enterprises in implementing monocrops in Chiquitanía. Orsag and Guzmán (2021) offer a historical analysis of the expansion of the agricultural frontier in Bolivia and Brazil. Further, McKay and Colque (2016, 2021) analyze the shift from peasant farming to capital-intensive monocrops as a form of productive exclusion, i.e., incorporating only land into the soy complex while excluding communities and workers through highly mechanized processes.

Agrarian extractivist dynamics are the current dominant economic model in the motley make-up of the Bolivian Chiquitanía and are at least in part responsible for the already notable impacts of climate change outlined above (Devisscher, Boyd, and Malhi 2016). CEPA heavily impacts land use and tenure *and* imposes a uniformized form of production that is highly financialized and dependent on international supply and value chains – leaving little to no room for other societies and territorialities. The contradictions of pursuing neo-extractivist economies that transform, displace, and extinguish not just other economies but forms of living and relations to nature in a plurinational setting have been analyzed regarding mineral extraction and territory, highlighting the colonial core of the state (Andreucci and Radhuber 2017; Anthias 2018; Svampa 2019). The

motley formations approach centers the colonial nature of states like Bolivia but recognizes societies that are not fully integrated into the colonial-modern project. While the integration into agrarian extractivism appears to be ubiquitous, it is worthwhile to interrogate the processes of integration into the colonial-modern project in a more detailed manner. In the following section, I present the data and methods applied in this chapter to analyze the implementation of the dominant agrarian extractivist model and its characteristics.

Data and Methods

I trace here the expansion of the agricultural frontier through interventions of state and international development bodies and highlight how shifts in rural production and organization in the 1980s impact forms of land use today. To analyze this shift, I draw on multiple sources: document analysis of laws and supreme decrees, government reports, and documents of social movement organizations. I also rely on data collected in a research period from May 2022 to May 2023, drawing on three primary resources for analysis: (1) original documents from the state-led colonization project in San Julián, (2) maps and satellite images, and (3) interviews (2022-2023), as well as participant observation during multiple visits to San Julián.

The primary documents I analyze for this chapter reveal different forms of social organization for land and territory in the 1980s. The materials include international development plans like the *Informe de la Misión Económica de los Estados Unidos a Bolivia* (1943) and project agreements of the World Bank Eastern Lowlands: Natural Resource Management and Agricultural Production Project (1990). Further, I analyze material meant for local development spanning from 1982 to 2006 that includes guides for new settlers, municipal development plans, and analyses of their development efforts. These documents detail descriptions of the settlement project's goals, recruitment strategies in remote rural highland communities, proposed forms of peasant union organization, and demographic changes over the years.

I further conduct an analysis of a series of maps and satellite images from the U.S. Geological Survey, using Landsat 5 TM and Landsat 8 OLI, as well as ESRI in ArcGIS. Through those satellite images, I give a visual overview of the multiple territorialities of the municipality San Julián. The images show deforestation as well as the expansion of agricultural land use that can be traced back to specific settlement projects or the recognition of Indigenous territories in Bolivia.

I draw on a set of twenty interviews with small and medium farmers, representatives of the agribusiness sector, and NGO employees in regard to notions of land/territory, and social organization.

This chapter is the outcome of my ongoing research in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. I am a European feminist political scientist working and living in Bolivia. Thus, witnessing the impacts of the 2019 forest fires in Chiquitanía and subsequent coup d'état in Bolivia have compelled me to try to understand land and territory as one of the deciding factors of mobilization both for the Bolivian far right as well as for Indigenous and peasant movements in expressly decolonial struggles. The focus of this chapter on land-based inequalities in the climate crisis results from the necessity to comprehend social and productive structures within agrarian extractivism in Chiquitanía in their complexity and in the context of recurring environmental disasters.

The Effects of Climate Change in Unequal Motley Land Regimes

In the lowland department Santa Cruz, the agricultural frontier has visibly expanded since the 1980s. Between 2001 and 2021, Bolivia lost 6.4 million hectares of forest cover, putting it among the top ten countries for forest cover loss worldwide (World Resources Institute 2024; NASA Earth Observatory 2022). The conversion of forest to agricultural land on such a large scale already affects precipitation and causes other disastrous weather events, making farming and living in the region more difficult. Farmer settlements were established by government-led projects in the 1980s, but deforestation is now driven by the increasing expansion of CEPA soy production. In 2022, a total surface of 1,100,800 hectares was used for soy plantations in Santa Cruz (ANAPO 2023). In this section, I will show the expansion of the agricultural frontier through an analysis of satellite images and interview data, as well as government reports and documentary material from the colonization process itself.

Frontier Development: Putting "Idle" Land to Work

The colonial project of integrating the Bolivian eastern lowlands into different territorial and state projects dates back to Jesuit missions in the sixteenth century. The colonial fantasy of "pristine" land waiting to be colonized persists until today, concealing the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Christoffersen 2018). More recent efforts to colonize Chiquitanía aim to put land that was understood as "idle" into production and establish another pole of economic development in the east (Castañón 2014). Colonization efforts of the Bolivian east in the twentieth century are marked by three state-led projects:

(1) The Bohan Plan and subsequent March to the East in the 1940s.

(2) The agrarian reform following the national revolution in 1952.

(3) The relocation of former miners and their families following the neoliberal reform and closing of state-owned mining companies in 1985.

From 1941 onwards, the so-called Bohan Plan, a U.S.-Bolivian cooperation conceived in the wake of World War II, was implemented, displacing the local Indigenous population. The project's aim was to promote agricultural production through land endowments and financial loans as well as to connect the eastern lowlands to the rest of the country through transport infrastructure (Misión Económica de los Estados Unidos 1943). This endeavor also required a demographic change. In the so-called March to the East (*Marcha al Oriente*), peasant laborers were recruited to migrate from the Andean highlands to the lowlands. Its overall implementation moved slowly, but some of the recommendations stated in the Bohan Plan were expedited in the Agrarian Reform following the national revolution in 1952 (Castañón 2014).

The core of the agrarian reform – the redistribution of *latifundia* – did not succeed in the Bolivian lowlands after the revolution (Assies 2009). However, the department Santa Cruz de la Sierra and especially Chiquitanía became the center of the government effort to diversify its mineral-dependent national economy (McKay and Colque 2016). This endeavor, as Zavaleta (2009) summarizes: "led the MNR's[76] economic ideology towards a geographical, territorialist, and agrarianist conception of development" (164),[77] centering the idea of a state-led agrarian industry (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018). The proposed aim was to achieve self-sufficiency in food supply by converting the region into Bolivia's granary – a goal that persists until today, albeit its grain is now destined for export (ANAPO 2023).

The 1980s marked the end of military dictatorships (1982) as well as a shift from import substitution efforts towards neoliberal structural adjustment programs together with a return to international cooperation. In this framework, a government- and World Bank-led settlement project promoted frontier-development efforts to populate the Bolivian East and integrate the region into the national economy (Pacheco 2006). During neoliberal structural adjustment programs in the 1990s, production in Chiquitanía was intentionally shifted from diversified subsistence agriculture for import substitution towards cash-crop production for export (World Bank 1998). In the late 1990s, production consisted almost exclusively of soy and other commodity export crops. This shift has profoundly changed the agrarian production structure in Chiquitanía (Castañón 2014) and marks the start of the rapid advance of deforestation.

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[76] The party *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) led the national revolution in 1952.

[77] All translations from Spanish by the author.

The satellite images below show the municipality San Julián over the span of four decades, in 1986, 1996, 2006, 2016, and 2022.

Image 1: LandSat TM 5 1986, (Landsat TM5 image courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey, retrieved 2023)
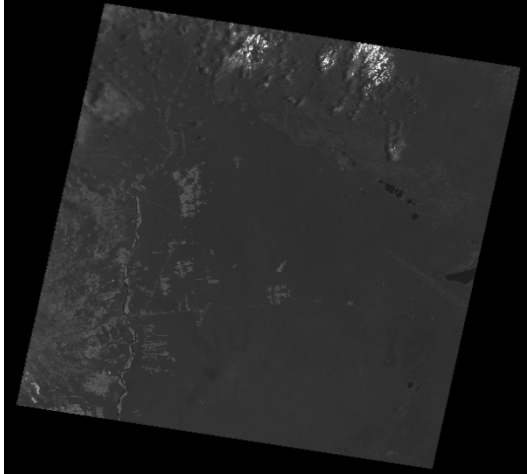

Image 2: LandSat TM5 1996, (Landsat TM5 image courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey, retrieved 2023)
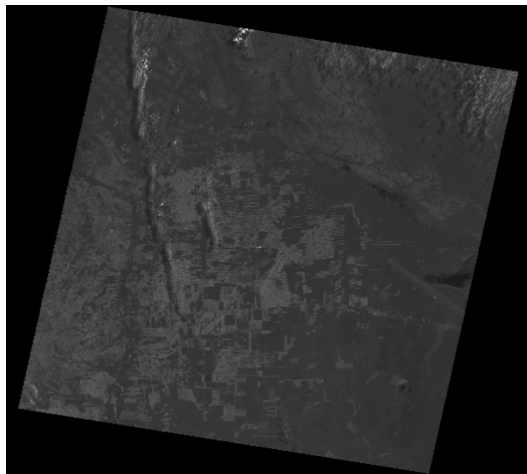
   Image 1 from 1986 shows some settlements in the chiquitano dry forest, mostly west of the Guapay River. In the top left corner, the first núcleos are part of the new settlement frontier east of the Guapay. They appear as small, pinwheel shaped concentric structures in the mostly intact dry forest cover. South of the concentric núcleos, some settlements develop along roads in a fishbone pattern. Ten years later, in 1996 (Image 2), the núcleos have extended, but 68 percent of the municipality is still reported to be a *monte alto* – high and dense forest. In 1993, a total of 16,250 hectares were to produce corn, rice, and beans (Comité de devolución del diagnóstico de San Julián 1993, 8-9). The most notable deforestation between 1986 and 1996 occurred south of the planned núcleos in larger, rectangular plots of land (Image 2). While advancing considerably, forest areas remained between agricultural plots, with the municipality still reporting a total forest cover of 50 percent, and the extension of reported agricultural production totaled 19,879 hectares (Gobierno Municipal de San Julián 1997). This decade marks the shift from small-scale agriculture and settlements to large-scale soy farming, incorporating ever greater plots of land into production, as the following images show.

Image 3: LandSat TM5 2006, (Landsat TM5 image courtesy of the US Geological Survey, retrieved 2023)
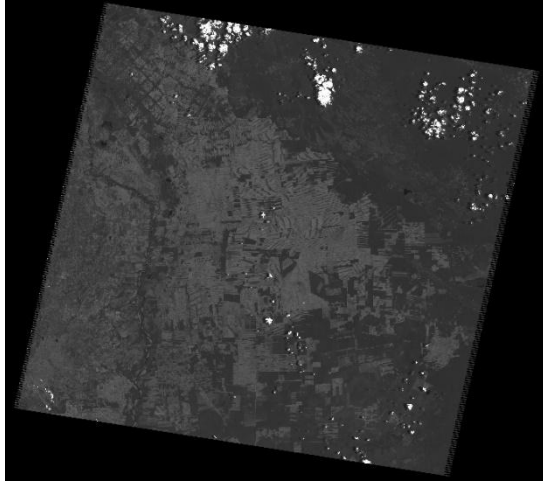

Image 4: LandSat OLI 8 2016, (Landsat OLI 8 image courtesy of the US Geological Survey, retrieved 2023
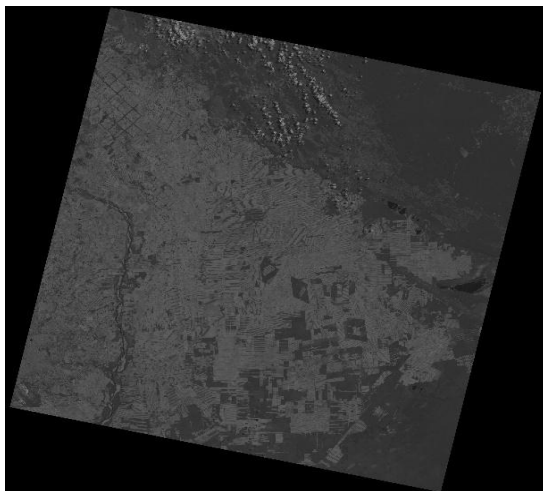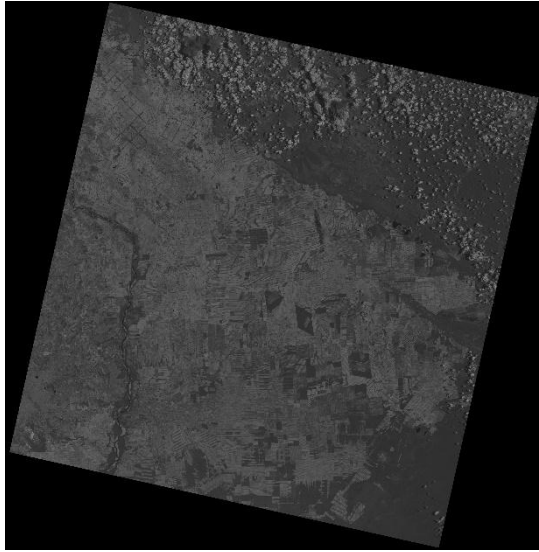
Image. 5: LandSat OLI 8 2022, (Landsat OLI 8 image courtesy of the US Geological Survey, retrieved 2023)

From 1996 to 2006, the conversion of forest to farmland proceeds. The municipality reported that 50 percent of its surface is still covered by forest but that species suitable for timber exploitation were depleted. In 2001, the cultivated area grew considerably to 251,883 hectares. The dominant crops were corn and soy (Gobierno Municipal de San Julián 2001). The municipal document from the Gobierno Municipal de San Julián (2001) also highlights that by that time, most land was privately owned (85.4 percent) and mentions for the first time different property forms: small landholdings that belong to highland settlers; medium-sized landholdings under Mennonite, Japanese, and Brazilian ownership; and agricultural enterprises, "which exploit the land with additional capital and use modern technical means of production" (5). The municipality's strategic development plan mentions three main goals for 2006: intensive agriculture, agro-industry, and the export of soy and other beans (Gobierno Municipal de San Julián 2001). In 2005, the use of Roundup Ready (i.e., glyphosate resistant genetically modified soy) was allowed in Bolivia (Decreto Supremo 28225 2005). This marked a consolidation of large-scale and resource-intensive soy farming in Chiquitanía.

In 2009, the Bolivian State was refounded as plurinational, with a new constitution that recognized multiple forms of production and territorialities. However, the implementation of plurinational ideals has been contested.

This becomes increasingly clear in agrarian extractivist contexts. While land distribution and agrarian reform were unifying claims for the peasant and Indigenous movements that carried out the constitutional project, land trafficking and financialized agriculture have increased since the foundation of the Plurinational State. Images 4 and 5 show that in 2016 and 2022 most forest patches between agricultural land have gone and by 2022, a total of 152,000 hectares were used for soy production in San Julián (ANAPO 2023). The municipality is now fully integrated into the agricultural frontier.

The forest area in the top right corner marks the limits of the Indigenous territory Lomerío of the Monkoxɨ people, given a collective landholding title in 1996. The territory of Lomerío is – as the name suggests – hilly, with large rock formations and covered with dense forest. It is thus not suitable for intensive and mechanized farming. Despite these topographical differences, the territorial governance of the area also allows for the preservation of large forest areas. While resisting appropriation, land valorization, and integration into capitalist accumulation, immense pressure is put on non-integrated land (cf. Kaltmeier 2020). In the case of San Julián and Lomerío, this becomes notable through the extended use of fire for deforestation followed by the territory's slow conversion into soy plantations or pastureland (Jasser, Radhuber, and Inturias 2021). However, within an agricultural frontier that includes peasant farmers with endowed land that cannot be sold, multiple mechanisms for appropriation are at play, as I will show in the following section.

Nature, Land, Labor, And (Re)Production within the Agricultural Frontier

In San Julián, the extractivist CEPA model is the dominant form of land use today. The introduction of heavy machinery, GMO seeds, phytotoxins like glyphosate, and fertilizers have fundamentally transformed the modes of production and the social relations in San Julián. In this section, I examine relations to land, nature, forms of production and labor, and the reproduction of life, disentangling the underlying processes and structures of inequality in San Julián.

The Chiquitanía region where San Julián is located presents particularly motley forms of land tenure and territory. Plurinational states like Bolivia recognize motley, overlapping social formations as plural economies and territorialities which translate into different forms of legal landowner- or stewardship in their constitutions. These diverse territorialities can be the foundation for multiple modes of living in terms of labor, relations to nature, and reproduction of life. The post-revolution land reform and subsequent laws provided highland peasants with land that they could own and work on, and which could not be bought by international capital (Law INRA 1996). Titles to Indigenous territories

are collectively held by territorial organizations representing the communities (Organización Territorial de Base, OTB) or as Indigenous-peasant districts (Law 031, Art. 28, Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización 2010) when they constitute a minority within a municipality. The territorialities and land tenure in Chiquitanía and San Julián are not homogeneous. While the Indigenous territory of Lomerío still marks a limit to the agricultural frontier, small farmers and an Indigenous Peasant District of the Guaraní nation are integrated into the frontier. This shows that land tenure alone does not safeguard diverse economies and forms of living when the forms of production are integrated into global value chains and extractive economy (Alonso-Fradejas, Ezquerro-Cañete, and McKay 2022).

Map 2: Southern Provincial Limits of the Province Ñuflo de Chávez with the Municipalities San Julián, Cuatro Cañadas, and San Antonio de Lomerío, Showing the Locations of the Respective Municipal Capitals, as well as the Indigenous District 16 de Marzo
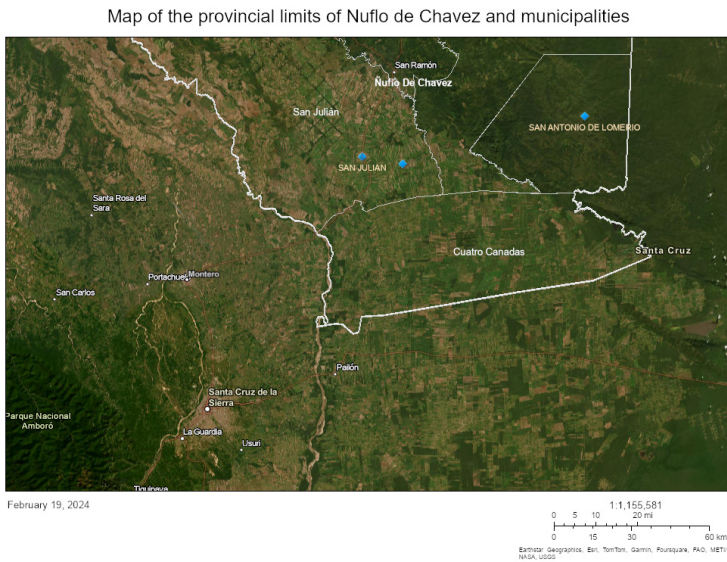
Source: ESRI Earthstar Geographics 2023b

In San Julián, small producers make up the majority of farmers but only control 28 percent of the land (Castañón 2014). Peasant farmers with up to 50 hectares can hardly compete with large-scale agrarian enterprises. The high capital investment necessary for CEPA makes farming inaccessible to many

families, compelling them to follow one of three strategies: first, running farms on debt owed directly to multinational agrarian corporations and occasionally hiring heavy machinery and services to sow, fertilize, and harvest; second, renting their land to larger farming operations and seeking wage labor elsewhere (McKay and Colque 2016); or third, selling or renting their plots in San Julián to acquire land further into the agricultural frontier.

The financialization of agriculture and the dependency on external inputs has left farmers less and less room to determine the production process (Chadwick 2019). The volatility of prices for GMO seeds, toxins, and fertilizers as well as the unstable prices of soy make production extremely risky for small producers. This renders former peasant farmers highly dependent on global value chains, as they require a steady supply of phytotoxins, fertilizers, and other chemicals for pest control in the soy monocultures. In San Julián, multinational distributors of seeds and toxins offer direct lines of credit to farmers, often with machinery or the land as a guarantee. These multinational corporations also store and buy the produce once it is harvested, thus controlling large parts of the value chain. Given the mechanization of soy farming and the amount of capital required to operate industrialized agriculture, many peasants opt to rent their land to larger operations, an option taken by farmers who can no longer afford credit or who cannot put their land up as a guarantee due to a collective land title or endowment. For example, renting their land is the strategy chosen by the Indigenous campesino Guaraní district 16 de Marzo that is located in the municipality of San Julián and surrounded by large farming operations. As McKay and Colque (2016) summarize: "value-chain relations have enabled agribusiness to maintain access to land without necessarily having tenure rights" (585). While some farmers, like Don Camilo, were able to keep up with the high investment (Interview Camilo, San Julián 2022), many small and medium farmers have expressed worries about the future of their farming operations throughout the interviews.

The forms of living and (re)production for peasant communities have fundamentally changed with the implementation of CEPA and the notable impacts of climate change. The forms of work and ways of living in and making a community translate into impacts on health. This is exacerbated by the effects of climate change, revealing a crisis of care and reproduction. Droughts, floods, and fires have especially direct detrimental effects on health. Fires cause respiratory problems and conjunctivitis, and floods lead to a rise in dengue infections and other diseases as the mosquito population increases. Detrimental effects on health impact vulnerable members of rural areas the most, as they have less protection and little access to healthcare, while care of the sick and elderly is mostly carried out by women (Ojeda 2023). Besides healthcare and reproduction, as Castañón (2014) documents, the food consumed by small-scale farmers has shifted with

the change to soy farming. As the share of subsistence agriculture has gone down, families have become more dependent on buying food instead of producing it. This dependency was made abundantly clear during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, as food supplies became scarce amid hundreds of thousands of hectares of soy. Furthermore, the initially homogeneous groups in the planned núcleos and more heterogeneous groups in unplanned settlements no longer exist as such, with families moving away or changing to wage labor. While the communities were designed to mirror the ones people had left behind in the early stages of colonization, itinerant and internal migrations have changed the social makeup of the municipality.

This process continues as the risk of soy production is further exacerbated by low productivity due to soil erosion and the loss of crops through prolonged droughts, frost, and floods. In 2022, 32,250 hectares of crops were lost during the summer soy harvest in Santa Cruz (ANAPO 2023). While nature is mostly understood as a resource for income, many farmers did express affection and attachment to the land they work on (Interview Julio, San Julián 2021). However, both industrialized and subsistence farming are becoming increasingly difficult or even unsustainable for small-scale farmers in the area due to the climate crisis. All farmers interviewed for this study emphasized that extreme weather events have made conventional farming less and less profitable. Therefore, soy farmers in San Julián are campaigning for the government approval of drought-resistant GMO soy variants that would allow them to maintain profitable production levels for some time (Interview Juan, San Julián 2021). Meanwhile, these extreme weather events are directly linked to climate change and – importantly – to the rapid deforestation that propagates the same CEPA model across the Bolivian lowlands (Devisscher, Boyd, and Malhi 2016; Vargas-Cuentas and Roman-Gonzales 2021; Maillard et al. 2022).

Conclusion

Drawing back on the notion that "there is no question on Earth as powerful as land," Shattuck et al. (2023) state that "accelerating climate change and extractivism must change the way we think about the politics of land – and what is going to be politically and practically important in the decades ahead" (490). The advancing agricultural frontier and the dispossession of small farmers through increasing financial commitments to soy farming are not sustainable in the long term – especially with the impacts of climate change already upon the region. The same applies in the long term to the social reproduction and care of these communities. In order to comprehend forms of resistance both to climate

change and to the extending agricultural frontier, it is necessary to develop a complex understanding of the motley societies, the bases on which they operate – i.e., the specific forms of production and land tenure as well as relations to nature and social organization – and the ways in which they have or have not been integrated into modern-capitalist projects. While conventional extractivism of minerals and oil is a well-studied field, agrarian extractivism – and specifically the dynamics within extractivist industries in plurinational states – requires more research, as well as a more intersectional and feminist approach, which goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

Following Zavaleta (2009) and Alonso-Fradejas, Ezquerro-Cañete, and McKay (2021), I have shown the motley territories and forms of (re)production within the extractivist agricultural frontier. Therefore, I have traced the spatial integration of territories into a modern-colonial state and productive project. Taking the example of the municipality San Julián in the Bolivian Chiquitanía, I have traced the shift from small-scale and subsistence agriculture to large-scale mechanized soy production that is corporate-led and depends on external input of chemicals and seeds. This shift is no longer just territorial in nature but also displaces peasants through exclusion. Within this model, the impacts of the climate crisis, like floods and droughts, affect small-scale and peasant farmers disproportionately because the loss of crops has become more frequent while they rely on debt to finance their operations. This high risk for small-scale farmers benefits larger operations, as they are able to rent plots of land that small-scale farmers can no longer afford to operate. This pushes peasant farmers into wage labor or onto cheaper land, changing the forms of (re)production and the make-up of the communities. Despite the risks for small farmers, none of the interviewees considered changing to other crops or applying different forms of farming but continued looking for technical solutions like new GMO variants or more effective phytotoxins. While access to land is still crucial, access to capital now defines the ability to produce and partake in the extractive farming operations, concentrating the earnings in the hands of a small number of agricultural enterprises and displacing other economies and communities. However, extractivist logics also displace farmers who are already part of its production model. Cash crop production still expands and has even accelerated since the foundation of the Plurinational State. Simultaneously, production becomes increasingly difficult due to extreme weather events and soil erosion, compelling already established farmers to seek land in other regions, thus pushing the agricultural frontier and revealing the profound crises for production, reproduction, and life within this space.

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Corporate Strategies on "Sustainable" Lithium Extractivism:
The Emergence of a Lithium Consensus in the Salar de Atacama[78]

Nina Schlosser

Muchas veces he sostenido que la juventud tiene una doble misión: actuar y prepararse para actuar.
- Salvador Allende[79]

No hay independencia ni hay revolución sin el socialismo y sin la solidaridad internacional, sin la práctica de la solidaridad internacional. ¡Apoyarse en ella y apoyar la solidaridad internacional; recibirla y darla!
- Fidel Castro[80]

Fossil automobility constitutes a significant driver of the climate crisis. Against this backdrop, the European Parliament (EP 2023) decided in October 2022 that from 2035, only the sale of "emission-free" cars would be allowed. This more climate-friendly alternative would nevertheless harm the environment since battery electric automobiles are up to six times more resource-intensive than a car with a combustion engine (IEA 2021, 5). This is due to their lithium-ion batteries, which consist of metals such as cobalt, graphite, manganese, nickel, and lithium, which have not been necessary for the automotive industry before, let alone in such high quantities. According to the International Energy Agency (8), lithium shows the highest demand increase of all minerals or metals and will grow by over forty times by 2040 (followed by graphite, cobalt, and nickel by around twenty to twenty-five times), mainly driven by electric vehicles. Already for 2030, the European Commission (EC 2020a, 2) declares that "at least 30 million zero-emission vehicles will be in operation on European roads" and thus would need eighteen times more of the light metal that is for the most part imported from Chile, where approximately 78 percent of lithium originates (EC 2020b, 20),or, to be more precise, from the Salar de Atacama, where the largest

[79] Many times, I have maintained that youth has a double mission: to act and to prepare to act.
[80] There is no independence nor revolution without socialism and international solidarity, without the practice of international solidarity. Rely on and support international solidarity; receive it and give it!

lithium reserves known in the world today are located (USGS 2023). And it is right there where the "green costs" (Riofrancos 2019) of ca(r)pitalist countries can be detected (Schlosser 2020). This is due to the fact, that the production of lithium carbonate for lithium-ion batteries is extremely water-intensive, while the Salar the Atacama is the driest desert worldwide. Moreover, vast areas of its surface are meanwhile covered with huge evaporation basins amounting to tens of thousands of hectares – installed along and partially on Indigenous territories. For centuries, more-than-human beings and the Indigenous Lickanantay[81] have been living in and with the Salar that they defended – until recently.

Chile's governmental organization to promote economic growth (CORFO) concluded new contracts with the two lithium producers operating there: first, with the U.S. American lithium superpower Albemarle in 2016, and second, two years later, with the Chilean company SQM. In the years before and still directly after the conclusion of the contracts, an increase and intensification of conflicts, especially at the local level, in Atacama was observed (Jerez, Garcés, and Torres 2021). Meanwhile, representatives of both corporations move through the Salar without any active resistance, quite the opposite: they seem to be welcome, as they are considered a "good employer and neighbor" (SQM 2021, 251, translation NSc) – and even a friend (Olarte-Sánchez, Preiser, and Schlosser 2022). This seems rather contradictory, however, considering that SQM, for instance, was still being sued by (Indigenous) people in 2019.

In light of this, I ask why and how the once active local resistance against lithium exploitation in Atacama transformed and try to comprehend to what extent – if at all – a "lithium consensus" has emerged.

To answer this question, I proceed as follows: first, I retrace the beginning and then the institutionalized expansion of lithium extractivism in Chile with a geographical focus on the Salar de Atacama, giving special attention to Chile's largest lithium enterprise SQM. Second, I delineate certain socio-cultural consequences of lithium extractivism in this arid region. Thus, I shed light on the century-old self-determined mode of living of the Indigenous Lickanantay and identify observable changes in the patterns of production and consumption, their relationships with each other, and (Mother) Nature. Third, I examine the resulting tensions and conflicts between and within the different actors' groups mentioned

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[81] The Lickanantay belong to the legally recognized group of Indigenous peoples in Chile. Five centuries ago, they received the name Atacameños from the Conquista. Officially, the terms are used simultaneously today. However, due to colonial history, some Indigenous people reject this name. Others, in turn, prefer it, in fact, to distinguish themselves from the Lickanantay which – if you ask them – seem to have unlearned their century-old knowledges. Based on several conversations with the (Indigenous) people in the Salar about which attribution they identify, I chose for this contribution the term Lickanantay. I only deviated from this for one person in Toconao who explicitly told me about his cultural identity.

above and the strategies with which SQM intervenes to constitute a "lithium consensus" at the local scale. Finally, I condense contradictions and continuities of lithium extractivism based on the "National Lithium Strategy" (Gobierno de Chile 2023), which a small fraction of subalterns in Atacama question critically.

Origin and Expansion of Lithium Extractivism in the Salar de Atacama

Even though the electrification of automobility has been gaining momentum recently – which provoked the expansion of extractivist activities in 2016 and again in 2018 in the Salar de Atacama – the development of Chile's lithium industry dates back to 1962. At that time, the U.S. American mining company Anaconda discovered high concentrations of lithium dissolved in the brines of the Atacama salt flat while in search of further water resources that were required for the exploitation of the copper mine Chuquicamata –among the world's largest open pit copper mines today and one of Chile's sacrifice zones. In 1974, a geological survey carried out by the *Instituto de Investigaciones Geológicas* (Institute of Geological Investigations) confirmed first the find and second its immense economic potential.

Before this, namely between 1966 and 1977, CORFO had already constituted rights to 59,820 lithium mining properties (Jerez, Garcés, and Torres 2021, 5) but relinquished 27,052 of them in the subsequent years, leaving 32,768 such properties (Aylwin, Didier, and Mora 2021, 31) of five hectares each (Salazar 2015, 148). While the Salar spans a surface of approximately 3,050 square kilometers, SQM possesses – to this very day and contractually protected – the majority of mining concessions (1,237,800 hectares) as well as water rights (344 liters per second) (Olmos 2019, 361).

SQM itself started as a subsidiary of *Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile S.A.*, which in turn had been created in 1968 as a Joint Venture Mining Company between private individuals and the Chilean State (*Compañía Salitrera Anglo-Lautaro* [Anglo-Lautaro Saltpeter Company] 62.5 percent and CORFO 37.5 percent). The actual objective was to reorganize the saltpeter industry, which provided Chile with foreign exchange and guaranteed a constant capital inflow (Cardoso and Faletto 1976). Until World War I (1914-18), Chile was the world's largest saltpeter exporter. The nitrate was used to conserve foods, fertilize crops, and produce munitions. However, after two Germans, Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch, developed a process to artificially produce saltpeter in 1916, together with the Great Depression (1929-1939), the Chilean nitrate industry scaled down bit by bit, becoming gratuitous by the end of World War II (1933-1945).

In 1971, one year after Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected Marxist president in the world took office, he nationalized the copper industry

by Decree Law No. 17,450 – against U.S. imperial interests. During the reign of his party *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity), Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile was also nationalized. Consequently, 99.9 percent of the company's shares were held by the Chilean State (Salazar 2015, 133), which thereby had the monopoly on the exploitation and commercialization of saltpeter (Aylwin, Didier, and Mora. 2021, 45) – and thus lithium. The intention was to revitalize this industrial sector. Back then, nobody thought about exploiting lithium (Salazar 2015, 133) – until the coup d'état on September 11, 1973. The civil-military junta of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) that followed then established crucial parts of the current legal lithium framework. In 1976, as it was originally intended as a component for hydrogen bombs, lithium was declared of "nuclear interest" in the organic law of the Chilean Nuclear Energy Commission and only three years later as a non-concessional, strategic resource of national interest (Decree Law No. 2,886). Since then and until today, property rights on lithium are reserved for the state only. Thus, it is the state that grants the concessions, in fact, with statutory compliance of the Constitutional Organic Law on Mining Concessions No. 18,097 (1982), which regulates the types of mining concessions for exploration and exploitation and solely protects the owner. This was the idea of José Piñera – Minister of Mining during the military dictatorship (1981-1983), principal author of the still applicable Mining Code of 1983 (Law No. 12,248), Chicago Boy, and brother of the former right-wing conservative president Sebastián Piñera. Thus, José Piñera contributed to institutionalizing free access and judicial security to private investors, such as Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile. Since that time, no fundamental reform of the institutional lithium framework has been undertaken nor law has been passed, and concessions on land and water rights are still distributed in the same way.

Seeing that both the Mining Code and the Constitution from the year 1980 grant the right to exploit lithium through first state-owned companies, second administrative concessions, and third special Lithium Operation Contracts issued by the Ministry of Mining (OLCA 2019, 7); this institutional triad maintains the extractivist fundament of the "Chile model" – that at first was brutally implemented during the civil-military dictatorship (1973–1990) and nowadays is reproduced through indeed more subtle but still effective mechanisms. Yet, under Augusto Pinochet, the state, i.e., the CORFO, gave Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile the right to exploit the Salar. Soon after, the company became re-privatized. The entire process started in 1983, the same year when the Mining Code was passed, and lasted until 1987, overseen by Julio Ponce Lerou – at that time, director of CORFO, president of Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile (Mönckeberg 2015, 227), and son-in-law of Augusto Pinochet.

Already by 1986, CORFO had signed a lease agreement for 30 years with the chemical producer that ended in 2016. At some point during these three decades, Ponce Lerou not only entered the circles of the political elite but also connected with the *grupos económicos* (economic groups) and became one of Chile's richest men (Forbes 2023). The class affiliation as a result of nepotism, corruption (Mönckeberg 2015; Salazar 2015; Cofré 2019), the exploitation of Nature, and connections to the dictatorship, as well as at the expense of the majority of the population still cling to SQM today.

However, it was not until 1996 that the company – under the new commercial name Soquimich – actually started processing concentrated and purified solutions from the Salar de Atacama into lithium carbonate 250 kilometers away in the chemical production plant Salar del Carmen (also region Antofagasta), with an initial capacity of 15,000 tons per year (Aylwin, Didier, and Mora 2021, 32). At that time, lithium was used for manufactured glass and lubricants rather than for lithium-ion batteries in electric cars, which now accounts for most of its demand. Notwithstanding, already at that time, the sector had been growing steadily, even substantially, namely from USD 39.6 million in 1996 to USD 220.2 million in 2008 and finally to USD300 million in 2013, an almost 500 percent increase (Salazar 2015, 141). But between 1994 and 2017, SQM – again renamed – also invested more than US$ 1.8 billion in the Salar de Atacama (SQM 2022a). And in 2021, SQM had already produced 119.8 thousand metric tons of lithium and derivates (SQM 2021, 136). However, 92 percent of the sales were made abroad, in a total of 110 countries (ibid., 125). For instance, 17 percent of SQM's lithium was exported to Europe and 45 percent to "emerging markets" (ibid., 126) under which SQM includes Asian countries, including but not limited to China, Japan, and South Korea – the main battery-producing nations. In 2022, the company worked "at maximum capacity with 180,000 tons of lithium carbonate" (SQM 2022b, 4) but "will increase [its] capacity to 210,000 tons by 2023" (ibid.). This corresponds approximately to one-fifth of global lithium production.

The rise in the output of lithium carbonate requires augmenting the input of water though. But in the world's driest desert, water is a precious good or rather rare "commodity" since it is almost completely privatized in Chile. SQM, however, has had governmental permission to extract 1,500 liters of brine and 240 liters of water per second (Poveda Bonilla 2020, 67), every day since 2018 and still until 2030. Until then and to produce "*litio verde*" (green lithium) (SQM 2021, 133), SQM plans first to reduce brine extraction in the Salar by 50 percent (SQM 2022c) and second the consumption of fresh water during the processing of lithium carbonate in the Salar del Carmen by 27 percent (SQM 2021, 166). While the enterprise distinguishes brine from water, in fact according to the Water Code, local and Indigenous people in Atacama perceive brine as water.

And water does not only constitute the basic requirement of their economic activities (Olmos 2019) and thus formerly self-determined modes of producing and living. It also has a spiritual meaning as the subsequent paragraph shows.

Socio-cultural Consequences of Lithium Extractivism

For centuries more-than-human beings and Indigenous people have lived in and with the Salar. *Ab initio* and due to the high altitude, the climatic conditions have been extremely challenging. Nevertheless, humans, by way of example, were able to lead a self-determined mode of living based on agriculture and pastoral transhumance, and these activities have determined the cultural identity of (some) local and Indigenous people to date (Matus Ponce 2019; Jerez, Garcés, and Torres 2021). More precisely, they cultivate crops like quinoa and *choclo* (corn), as well as garlic, alfalfa, and fruits such as *membrillo* (quince) or *pera pascua* (domestic pear). Alfalfa, which also serves as a medicine for abdominal pain, is used for feeding animals like alpacas, llamas, sheep, or donkeys. Mules help with the heavy fieldwork. Wool, especially from alpacas, in turn is used to knit warm clothes for the cold season, and the animals' meat. like that from llamas and sheep, is either consumed or used as an exchange good. Based on that, until a few years ago, much less money was required, reports a Chilean woman from the *Coyo* community, near San Pedro de Atacama (Interview 1). Irrespective or perhaps because of the challenges of everyday life, people lived a more solidary mode of living than at the present stage, continues the Chilena. They helped each other through the harsh winters. They shared food and whatever was needed. They looked out for each other. For Nature, too, and Mother Nature. According to the cosmovisional understanding, Pachamama gives life. Seeing that, its elements – Fire, Water, Earth, Air – have a spiritual meaning. A Lickanantay woman illustrates Water as a "hydrocosmological" good (Boelens 2013). The Ckunsa teacher (the language of the Lickanantay, hardly spoken today) says about *puri* (Ckunsa, water), "it is a life, it has life, it is a being, it moves, it changes its form, it has a family" (Interview 2).

Not only water is changing, but also ways of thinking, experiencing, and feeling change, as well as the modes of production and consumption. On the one hand, because (Indigenous) people can no longer live a self-determined mode of living due to the shrinking water table and the inexistence of a public water supply. Otherwise, they no longer want to or rather have to live the folkways they are used to for centuries, even millennia. First, the Lickanantay receive immense sums of money annually from SQM as a payment of compensation for exploiting and commodifying the Salar as the section "Corporate Strategies" reveals. Now, they buy goods in the nearest city (Calama, 100 km away) that they used to

grow for themselves before in *la Comuna de San Pedro de Atacama*. In addition, Indigenous people especially benefit also from other material advantages that supersede solidary patterns of production and living. Second, more and more people draw a salary as lithium miners and thereby can afford the aspirational material way of life but without drudgery. An Atacameño, who lives on agriculture and winegrowing (financed by SQM), from Toconao, a community where SQM's office is located, observes that the young men do not want to work in the field anymore. Instead of working as peasants and doing many hours of hard work in the fields every day, many prefer being employed at SQM, with comparatively light duty – as lithium miners relate – working in 7x7 shifts. This means working for seven days straight and then resting for seven days. Even though lithium extractivism is primarily capital intensive, not labor intensive, SQM employs a total of 5,671 people in Chile (in addition 410 outside of the country) (SQM 2021, 73). They also work long hours and have comparatively little paid leave. Only since April 2023 has the working week lasted forty hours officially (before it was 45 hours). And the statuary holiday remains consistently low with fifteen days a year (Dirección del Trabajo 2018). But being employed by a globally operating company seems more attractive, "progressive," and thus preferable to herding animals. Beyond that, they receive a regular income albeit exact figures on workers' wages remain unknown. An SQM miner says that the employer does not pay as much as it could. Considering that the company "achieved the highest revenues in SQM's history, reaching USD 10.711 billion [in 2022]" (SQM 2022b, 4), the worker's statement probably cannot be dismissed. However, compared to others in Atacama, "SQM's people" are, to a greater or lesser extent, well-off. They own relatively large, detached houses, built with "modern" construction materials and huge sport utility vehicles (SUVs) on the doorstep, that serve as a status symbol in Atacama. Before, the houses were built with adobe, a material consisting of clay and straw that protects from the cold as well as heat, in some seasons two daily extremes in Atacama. Even the flocks of sheep that used to be driven to pasture by the shepherd on foot are now accompanied by an off-road vehicle, even if it is only 300 meters, observes a critical Chilena (Interview 3). These aspired and, meanwhile, realizable ways of life, which have been promised since the introduction of neoliberalism in the 1980s and known from television and social media these days, have their material basis in lithium extractivism which was still actively contested a few years ago. By dint of a net income amounting to USD 3,906.3 million, SQM (2022b, 6) does not only pay salaries and wages but also invests in a lithium consensus-building strategy that seems to work out even as the section "Corporate Strategies" reveals. The current apparent calm predated manifest conflicts though.

(Absent) Resistance

With the onset of the lithium boom in the 2010s, especially driven by electric automobility in China, the U.S., and, in the meantime, the EU, the consequential expansion of extractivist frontiers in the Salar provoked tensions and – at the beginning – visible eco-territorial conflicts, both between and within local and Indigenous groups. Even though a Lickanantay woman employed by the municipality claims there has never been any resistance to lithium mining, other residents argue the opposite.

Before the new contract between CORFO and SQM, one might have observedconflictual society formations that – not uncommonly – occur during the process to constitute a "commodity consensus," as Maristella Svampa (2019) highlights. The Argentinean sociologist draws the conflict lines in extractivist economies between social movements, local/Indigenous groups versus governments, and (trans-)national mining companies. These dividing lines move along categories such as ethnicity, class, gender, and age. But the core of the conflicts in Atacama was not only about land, territories, and resources or better natural common goods as in many other Latin American cases and beyond. It was also about participation and money. A project manager of the German Society of International Cooperation (Interview 4) even limits it to only water and money. These two resources – irrespective of their incompleteness – emblematically illustrate the antagonistic interests of the opposing actors' groups: Those competing for money are first and foremost in favor of the (re)production of the extractivist status quo and constitution of a lithium consensus; while those who struggle for water are generally against lithium extractivism criticize it as water extractivism and compromise the consensus-building process. However, this dichotomy would be oversimplified.

After the conclusion of the contract in 2018 – between the state and SQM but to the exclusion of the affected communities – the mentioned antagonistic interests could have been identified as a single, mainly united alliance, which got separated as a consequence. Just five years ago, local people and the Lickanantay still fought together for water, not capital. They publicly questioned the over-exploitation of the Salar, the massive use of water (Jerez, Garcés, and Torres 2021; Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2021; Liu and Agusdinata 2021; Soto and Newell 2022; Olarte-Sánchez, Preiser, and Schlosser 2022), and even detected criminal offenses. They described unauthorized places in the Salar where SQM has illegally extracted water (Interview 3) and have already monitored a decreasing water table. Therefore, the opponents of lithium extractivism called on SQM to stop the extraction of brine, at least until there was more clarity about the consequences for the fragile ecosystem. After all, they observed changes in

the flora and fauna. There are "fewer insects" (Interview 5), the populations of flamingos are declining, and the lagoons are running dry. For these reasons, they blamed SQM for "ecocide" (Garcés and Alvarez 2020, 195). But their claims remained disregarded. Hence, they sued SQM – and lost the case. However, the roadblocks to the entrance of the mining company in the Salar and hunger strikes made an impact (Jerez, Garcés, and Torres 2021). And back then, a relatively high degree of organization eventually helped against the intrusion of another potential exploiter. When the Canadian company Wealth Minerals tried to settle in the lithium business in the Salar, it got kept back by way of action (ibid.).

On the contrary, SQM's presence and (extractivist) activities seem to be commonly accepted or at least condoned for the time being. One question that arises at this juncture – that would have to be dealt with in another contribution – is how SQM could achieve this societal acceptance and thus remain in the Salar and alongside the communities while Wealth Minerals could not even enter. One possible explanation might provide an analysis of the actor's formations and underlying strategies. Since the start of payments to the Lickanantay, in 2018, as the next section exemplifies, the axis of conflict twisted and separated the quondam counter-hegemonic pact. To maintain the separation but avoid further resistance in the future, the new corporate strategy exhibits a strong focus on the local sphere and a hitherto marginalized social actor that is proving to be a crucial ally: Indigenous people.

Corporate Strategies

A content analysis of sustainability reports from the last years reveals that SQM has changed its thematic focus. Conversations with local and Indigenous people in Atacama vindicate this finding. Just a few years ago, corporate strategies were mainly aimed at economic development, progress, and modernization, especially in the municipality of San Pedro de Atacama. Such sheer fiction or Eurocentric and capitalist understandings of a good life are still anchored in a considerable part of SQM's current strategic plan. However, it also manifests a cultural constituent that appears as being far more efficacious than only material benefits – which are indeed still essential.

Based on the analysis of the latest sustainability report (SQM 2021), corporate documents, and the company website, I identified four main components in SQM's consensus strategy: first, the implementation of infrastructure; second, direct payments to the Indigenous people; third, further material benefits in the form of so-called development programs; and the last, cooperations with (parts of) the Lickanantay.

Following on from the last component, which has a hinge function, SQM has formed a working group with willing or rather eligible Indigenous people. As the "fruit of a policy of dialogue, rapprochement, and collaboration with [its] neighbors and within a framework of mutual respect and recognition of its historical value" (SQM 2022d), the former opponents cooperate and renegotiate their business relationship. At the monthly meetings, not open to the public or non-Indigenous residents, the entitled Lickanantay – mainly male, middle-aged or older, and *ayllu* members (for an explanation of ayllu, please see below) – report what the particular Indigenous community needs and what they expect. SQM, then, states what it is prepared to give. The results of these negotiations are recorded in mutual agreements that only the two parties have knowledge of. The documents are neither public nor does anyone provide information about the contractual terms. This leads to uncertainties and envy among the communities, as a representative of the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources in Germany reports. Eventually, one community might have negotiated better terms than another. Meanwhile, SQM has concluded agreements with every single commune, apart from Peine: the Indigenous community geographically the furthest south in the Salar (the closest to Albemarle's site), which has refused to negotiate with the company to date. However, Chairman Gonzalo Guerrero Yamamoto revealed in a conversation that – yet unofficial – negotiations have begun in the spring of 2023. Guerrero himself visited the community in February of the same year, accompanied by one of his employees who is in charge of community relations, a Lickanantay woman and Peine resident. The chairman stated that working with the Indigenous communities, especially since last year, has been of particular importance to the company. In fact, the enterprise intensified its work and commitment to the Indigenous communities several years ago.

At the latest, shortly before the contract negotiations with CORFO, the governmental organization wanted to see SQM's social license issued by the Indigenous people. It would prove that they accept SQM's business and thus its extractivist practices and operating procedures in the Salar. Such a license can be considered the result of a continuous negotiation and trust-building process in which the chemical company is not only encouraged to do the right thing but also considered as doing the right thing. And the fact that SQM concentrates on Indigenous people who must consent to lithium extraction is because the Salar constitutes parts of their territories. Inasmuch as Chile ratified the ILO Convention 169 during Michelle Bachelet's mandate in 2008, SQM (like all other companies) must observe and obtain the *free, prior, and informed consent* of the Indigenous people if the enterprise intends to explore and exploit their territories. In the commune of San Pedro Indigenous people account for around 52 percent

of the population (approximately 5,500 Indigenous people; 11,000 people in total) (SQM 2022b, 151). According to SQM's hydrogeologist, however, none of the eighteen communities would be affected by lithium mining since they live far enough away from the nucleus where millions of liters of water-containing brine are extracted every day. Nucleus is the technical term for the part of the salt flat where the brine is pumped up from a depth of approximately eighty meters. And in fact, if one turns off the main road and drives into the middle of the Salar, it takes about ten minutes by car before the huge facilities even appear. It takes then another ten minutes until its whole extent becomes clear. It is tantamount to a lithium city amid the salt flat. But every person who wants to enter the premises must show identification, documenting thus who enters and leaves the facilities and when. This is strictly controlled. Anyone who is not employed needs prior authorization, which is rarely granted. I was very lucky that I was given this access and that I could even spend three days with some SQM representatives on a tour through the Salar de Atacama and the Salar del Carmen – and thus was able to get an impression of these facilities, among others. There, one evaporation basin, in which the blue to green brine is stored for over a year, is lined up against the other – the largest measures one kilometer long and about 300 meters wide. There are also office buildings, a canteen for the workers, a gas station, parking lots, and many kilometers of roads on which compliance with the road traffic regulations applies.

To get into a conversation with the Indigenous communities, SQM supplied them with infrastructure. The enterprise either installs it by itself or, at the very least, finances it – directly or indirectly. The former has been the case with not only roads, educational and cultural institutions, or soccer fields but also a pharmacy, dental truck, and even a planned hospital. In doing so, SQM responds to the demands of people whose health is often poor as health care in Chile is – as many other basic services – predominantly privatized and thus so pricey as to be prohibitive for the majority society. Therefore, many are un(der)insured. Besides, health care is mainly nonexistent or inadequate due to the striking shortage of public funding. Until lithium mining, there were no dentists at all. Now, a Lickanantay woman treats the patients in the dental truck. This was a condition that SQM imposed, reports the Director of External Affairs (Interview 6).

SQM also augmented the number of sustainable development projects, diversified their direction following the Indigenous interests, and in doing so, focused on four lines of action as can be seen from its website: education and culture, social and productive development, historical heritage, and healthier life. Based on months of (participant) observations in the Atacama, the first three seem to be especially important to the Lickanantay, which is why this section revolves

around them. In light of this, educational projects such as the "+ Lenguaje extra help program" aim to strengthen children's literacy skills and the "mathematics assistant program" to practice numeracy skills (SQM 2022e). Many (Indigenous) children from the first through sixth grades either cannot read, do not read well, or do not fully comprehend read texts. However, their education would also require an adequate learning environment. The newly constructed elementary school in Toconao, for instance, remains closed for the time being. "There is no water," explains a resident who makes a living from mining himself and whose child must take the bus to San Pedro to attend school there, 34 kilometers away.

While there is no water at the school in Toconao, a sustainable economic development program sponsored by SQM shows that there must be some water resources. After all, they grow wine there. To be more precise, "Ayllu" wine in the *Bosque Viejo* (old forest) and as part of the project "*Atacama Tierra Fértil*" (Atacama Fertile Land), realized in 2013. This was the idea of SQM itself because "they wanted to do more than just giving money," said SQM's Director of External Affairs (Interview 6). For the daily necessary irrigation of the grape vines (from France), the Indigenous winemakers use the water coming down from the Cordillera of the Andes, in fact, to avoid losing their few water concessions. Accordingly, they are only allowed to use water once a week. An interlocutor in Toconao reported that some people have sold a few of their own concessions to SQM. A few years ago, there was more water in the "oasis" as the commune is called. The ex-president of the Ayllu cooperative and former union leader at SQM defends winegrowing as organic farming and a chance to conserve their century-old agri*cultural* traditions. According to numerous conversations and scrutiny in this regard, though, Atacameños have never grown wine there before. Regardless of this and although the elderly still do the hard work in the field while – separated from each other – the younger Lickanantay take care of the business matters in the office space. To stay with the example, this group of Indigenous people feel they are taken seriously, perhaps for the first time. In contrast to the absent centralist State, at least SQM is finally paying attention to what they say, which they have been asking for indeed for years. Against this backdrop, the standing director (Interview 6) calls them "outspoken people" and "silent majority" and emphasizes the importance of listening to them several times during an interview.

However, the enterprise does not only present itself as a good listener but meets another Indigenous requirement in the form of the exemplary sustainable development projects delineated above. SQM discharges what the female president of the Indigenous community in María Elena further north in the Salar calls its social responsibility, materialized as (direct) monetary payments. In 2019, the total value of SQM's investment in the communities amounted to USD

4.9 million (SQM 2022f). This sum does not include contributions provided under the CORFO agreement. In fact, USD 13,171,294, equal to 1.7 percent of the sales in the same period. In addition, SQM must deliver another "14 million US dollars to promote sustainable development" (ibid.) in the Indigenous communities of San Pedro de Atacama. However, it is not entirely clear where the money is invested. The *Consejo de Pueblos Atacame*ño (Council of Atacameño Pueblos) in San Pedro de Atacama, which receives the annual multi-million dollar amounts to distribute equally over all eighteen affected communities, neither needs to document the payments nor give any information. It does this based on ILO 169 – which it strictly adheres to.

Having said this, only the Indigenous people that are duly registered with the *Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena* (CONADI, the National Corporation for Indigenous Development) receive payments or are eligible for services at all. Accordingly, this would be just about 28 percent of the Lickanantay. Within the past five years, owing to SQM's payments, this group could thus save money, and some have even accumulated a fortune, I was told, both probably for the first time in their life. People in Atacama – excluded from the payments – call this rather small group meanwhile "Lukanantay" (Olarte-Sánchez, Preiser, and Schlosser 2022, 92) to express their disdain. This epithet derives from the Chilean 1000-peso bill (converted approximately 0.94 Euro; 1.02 US dollar, February 26, 2024) called a "Luka" in the vernacular. With this, they attribute the Lukanantay as being money-grubbing.

Before 2018, many Indigenous people in the region were still considered "poor" (by capitalist standards) due to a lack of economic opportunities. Besides SQM, tourism – dominated by Brazil, France, and Germany – is an important source of income today. Thirty years ago, there was no tourism, reports the governing mayor (Interview 7). He, too, is Lickanantay. Although nobody discloses their own wealth, the former Ayllu president from Toconao is said to own several properties, including in Miami. He seems to have fulfilled "the American way of life" (Landherr and Graf 2019, 490). However, he is not the only Lukanantay who has entered a higher social stratum due to Chile's extractivist system. Nevertheless, only those who belong to an ayllu (Quechua, family, extended family, village community) – a cooperatively organized indigenous village community within a local or indigenous community – receives anything at all, including authorization to play a part in the negotiation processes. An ayllu can be considered a political unit in the Indigenous societies of the Andes and is characterized by a hierarchical order. The *lonco,* as the leader (generally an elderly male), always has the final say on all decisions. For example, in the case of new entrants, many, mainly younger, Lickanantay do not even try to join an ayllu because they know from hearsay and experience that it is almost impossible

to receive the lonco's permission. This is probably because the addition of new members would also mean that services and payments of SQM would need to be shared. The new members could also pose questions, demand information, claim participation, and thus challenge the dominant structures, which would cause tensions and conflicts anew. In this light, the statement of the manager (Interview 6) proves true: "our projects divide communities." This conclusion, however, does not result in major adjustments to the corporate strategy. In point of fact, this provides the mandatory basis for a lithium consensus.

Conclusion

The text sheds light on the current process to constitute a lithium consensus in Chile's Salar de Atacama. The spatiotemporal focus, contracts, and other binding agreements such as the ILO Convention 169 narrowed the group of players under examination to the lithium company SQM and the Indigenous population. The analysis illustrated that the group of Indigenous people affected by lithium extractivism is meanwhile subdivided – by ethnicity, class, gender, and/or age – into Lickanantay and Lukanantay. With the rather small group of Indigenous profiteers, SQM seems to have formed a lithium alliance wherein Lickanantay – and much less non-Indigenous people – have no access. This exclusion and associated social inequality visualized tensions and conflicts within the once basically unified bloc that resisted SQM until the new contract with CORFO in 2018. Years, even just months before, SQM and the communities still struggled with each other, *inter alia,* for land or rather territories, lithium or water, the expansion of lithium extractivism, its breakpoint, or at the least with local participation, and for the benefits of the affected communities as the section "(Absent) Resistance" shows. In the meantime, the axis of conflict shifted, provoked the changed actors' constellation, and eventually altered the field of conflict on which SQM can move unresisted for the time being. Communities and even families are divided. Seeing that, the current strategic plan – consisting of four components, namely infrastructural measures, direct payments, sustainable development programs, and cooperation with the Lukanantay – has developed potently. Since their demands on compliance with ILO Convention 169, the participation in the negotiation process, and material benefits have been respected, SQM seems to have received the social license to operate from the Lukanantay – but at the expense of the majority of the Indigenous population, local people, and Nature. While it is hardly possible to estimate what damage lithium extractivism – be it "green" or "sustainable" as SQM states or not – does to the Salar, the potential cultural loss can already be adumbrated. In Chile's

perhaps next (eco-cultural) sacrifice zone, Pachamama faces near-drowning. The incipient incoming tide of capital has already partially inundated former values, alternative worldviews, and solidary patterns of production and consumption. The observable transculturation in the Indigenous communities in the form of wage labor, driving SUVs, and consuming industrially produced goods, by way of example, turns out to be a central mechanism in constituting the lithium consensus. For many of them, this material way of life appears more "modern" and "progressive" and pledges a better life. In light of this, Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen (2021) would probably recognize the emergence and expansion of the "imperial mode of living" in Atacama.

However, this Eurocentrically mantled promise has not been fulfilled for all for 500 years. Besides, in dialogue with Alberto Acosta (2013), it is not about a better life but about a *buen vivir* (good life) –in harmony with others and Nature. This contribution indicates that this can neither be realized within the hegemonic extractivist structures nor with the asymmetric balance of power, which reproduce each other in a dialectical relationship. For a quantum change, radical solidarity-based strategies would need to address both: First, the redistribution of means of production, their collective control, and democratic decision-making processes. These are essential. Everyone who is affected by the decisions should be involved in these processes. For this, second, the socialization of SQM and other capitalist (extractive) companies as well as the decommodification of the Salar de Atacama are necessary. History teaches that due to the dominant imbalance of power, a nationalization of industries would fall short. But already fifty years ago, Salvador Allende proposed to produce only that which was needed to satisfy the masses. His socialist vision could function as a solidary guiding principle still today. And the mentioned dual measure might contribute to change power relations and dominant structures at the same time and thereby initiate a system change in Atacama. This would, therefore, require dismantling and restructuring destructive industries. Vital sectors, in turn, are to be developed and expanded to ensure that everybody has the chance for the satisfaction of needs and open access to good health, critical decolonial education, dignified housing, safe retirement provision, healthy nutrition, clean water, and socially just and climate-friendly public transport – in the Chilean North just like in the other parts of the country. However, to guarantee a good life for all – for which Indigenous groups, peasants, workers, trade unions, social movements, leftist and/or organic intellectuals, critical (activist) scientists, to name but a few, have been fighting for centuries in Chile and elsewhere, the entire capitalist system must be turned upside down, as Karl Marx would probably suggest. A radical rupture might be needed – perhaps by means of a general strike, which resistant subalterns have repeatedly staged throughout Chile's history.

Even though critical people do not offer manifest resistance at present in Atacama, it does not mean that they do not organize themselves at all. In the private sphere and small groups of people, they do inform themselves – with information other than that from the corporation – and try to separate facts from incomplete or incorrect information to thus understand what is happening and how. And it might be merely a matter of time before they mobilize again and thus challenge the historical lithium bloc. Their "invisibility" is suggestive of an emerging lithium consensus. However, a consensus is always being renegotiated – at the latest in 2030 when SQM's extractivist contract expires.

Gabriel Boric's administration has announced renegotiations with Chile's largest lithium company. This recent proclamation from the state, which was – since the brutal overthrow of the Allende government and according to the critical part of the *pueblo* – a "subsidiary state" suggests a change in the mode of regulation. With the announcement of Chile's "National Lithium Strategy" in April 2023, the formerly – at least in Atacama – absent state re-entered the field of conflict. It proclaims that "the state will apply a long-term vision throughout the production cycle, from exploration to value addition, as well as clear regulations to ensure sustainability and reinvestment in the country's development" (Gobierno de Chile 2023). At first view, the new governmental strategy is reminiscent of Allende's vision of social equality and national sovereignty. Boric, too, intends to nationalize lithium and above all build a National Lithium Company. Based on that, the former leader of Chile's strong student movement hopes to "increase the country's wealth through state-led effort" but also plans to "involve the private sector in the entire production process" (ibid.). Therein lies a major difference. Similarly, Allende nationalized copper – as delineated in the section "Origin and Expansion of Lithium Extractivism in the Salar de Atacama" – in fact, against U.S. imperialist interests and without any compensation to the companies that controlled the sector till then. On the contrary, the current government strategy envisages that "private companies will contribute capital, technological innovation, and networks in the market." Yet, the government officially announced the building of a corporation with SQM. This short-sighted view is just as little radical as lithium extractivism sustainable, albeit the new lithium strategy envisages "environmental sustainability." Moreover, it aims for lithium mining "in harmony with local communities." But as can be seen from the strategy paper, the government also plans "new projects in other salt flats in Chile." Another salt flat is the Salar de Maricunga, farther south. The expansion of green extractivist frontiers on a further fragile ecosystem where the Indigenous community Coya is located is inconsistent with social equality, ecological justice, and a *buen vivir* (good living) in harmony with (Mother) Nature which would continue to be exploited – not only by private (trans-)national companies but also

by the state. This might legitimize and thereby deepen the extractivist system as was the case with neo-extractivisms (Acosta 2013; Gudynas 2019; Svampa 2019; Brand, Dietz, and Lang 2016) – now under a green sign, which would not prevent the reproduction of power structures based on "green colonialism" (Zografos 2022): (eco-)racism, discrimination, classism, patriarchy, and ageism, amongst others.

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Construction of Inequalities: Discourses of Disruption

The Mediated Construction of the October 2018 Migrant Caravan: Media-Related Practices and the Building of a Migration Movement [82]

Antonio Romero

In October 2018, a social phenomenon from Northern Central America captured worldwide attention. More than 12,000 migrants, mainly from Honduras, and to a lesser extent from El Salvador and Guatemala, walked through Mexico in an attempt to cross the border to reach the United States (Varela Huerta 2020, 659). Migrants joining the movement to escape from violence, poverty, and climate-related hardship in the region soon started calling the phenomenon a migrant caravan or "éxodo centroamericano" – Central American exodus – (Garibo García, and Call 2020, 72).

Mobile communications and legacy media stories such as news articles and TV and radio broadcasts were crucial in spreading the news about the spontaneous migration movement. Recent scholarly works have highlighted the critical part that media platforms played in the growth of the migrant caravan (Rizzo Lara 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra and Mariscal Nava 2020; Velasco Ortiz and Hernández López 2021). In this chapter, I argue that both networked social media and legacy media played a key role in building the October 2018 Central American migrant caravan not only as a widely discussed topic but, more importantly, as a social phenomenon in its own right, a socially constructed reality in whose formation media-oriented processes played a pivotal role. Due to multiple inequalities like unemployment, social exclusion, violence, food insecurity, or climate-related hardship that forced people to leave the region, media-related practices became pathways through which *caravaneras* and *caravaneros* organized and joined a spontaneous migration movement. At the same time, different actors performed multiple media-related practices focusing on the caravan for their own political agenda, as I will examine in further sections.

This chapter is based on the review of recent literature about the topic and the analysis of data on social media use, governmental communications, and legacy media stories about the caravan from the countries that were mostly involved in the caravan's transit: Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. The chapter is divided into four main sections. To build my argument, in the first section I will provide an overview of the media-related events and processes that contributed to the construction of the migration

movement both as a social phenomenon and as a topic of public discussion. I will employ the concept of "media-related practices" to analyze several events that led to the growth of the migrant caravan in northern Central America. The second section analyzes the migrants' use of digital communications and social media platforms to participate in and coordinate the movement. The third section focuses on the role of legacy media stories in the growth of the migrant caravan groups and the public imaginaries built about it. The fourth section explores the role that political actors and social media users played in drawing international attention to the caravan, turning it into a globally recognized media event.

Media-Related Practices and the Construction of the Migrant Caravan as a Social Phenomenon

Information was circulating around San Pedro Sula, Honduras: by hearsay, among neighbours, family, and friends, through social media posts and groups. People were organizing a group to walk the hazardous route through northern Central America and Mexico to reach the southern border of the United States. The message was clear: all interested persons were to gather at the San Pedro Sula bus station on October 12, 2018 (Varela Huerta and McLean 2019, 167–68), and in the morning, they would start walking north.

The rumour about the spontaneous announcement spread quickly through mobile communications and digital platforms within migrant networks. According to a situation described by journalist Joshua Partlow (2018), for example, this was the case for Edith, who saw a post in a Facebook group calling to join the migrant caravan and spread the information. Edith packed her things and in less than three hours she was ready to leave. Edith had recently opened a small shop to sell tortillas; however, she was intimidated by a local gang who demanded a significant sum of money if she wanted to continue her business (Partlow 2018).

The October 2018 Central American migrant caravan marked a transformative event, a 'grammatical shift" – in the words of sociologist Varela Huerta (2020, 662) – for migration dynamics in the region, and many other attempts to migrate in caravans followed in the next years. Initially comprised of no more than 200 individuals, the caravan swelled to approximately 2,000 participants upon reaching the Department of Ocotepeque at the border between Honduras and Guatemala (Paris Pombo and Montes 2020, 21) and, as it was marching north, grew to a movement of more than 12,000 persons (Varela Huerta 2020, 659), walking at different paces and taking a whole variety of routes to cross the southern border of the United States.

Legacy media reporting about the ongoing movement through television and radio reports or news headlines also had a role in the origin and growth of the migrant caravan. Live reports from Honduran mass media motivated many viewers and listeners to join the movement, as walking together among a big group would protect them on a dangerous route. Ernst and Kinosian (2018), for example, reported about the case of a fifty-seven-year-old man named Gustavo who was informed about the caravan through a report by the Honduran TV channel HCH. "When I saw the news report, I said: 'This is my opportunity,'" affirmed Gustavo, "It grabbed my attention that we could pass easily. It impressed a lot of people" (Ernst and Kinosian 2018).

Soon, legacy media outlets from the region started producing news stories about the migrant caravan. On social media platforms like Twitter[83], users engaged in intense discussions, forming polarized crowds that either expressed support and favourable sentiments towards the migration movement or negative comments that condemned the ongoing events (Walker and Frimpong Boamah 2020). International media outlets also began live reporting on the caravan's various routes.

The origin and growth of the caravan and the role that media platforms had in it, shows us how deeply imbricated media technologies are in diverse aspects of social life interactions today. As Couldry and Hepp ask in *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (2017) – a book that serves as inspiration for this chapter's title – since "our 'reality' as human beings who must live together is constructed through social processes, what are the consequences for that reality if the social itself is already 'mediated,'" or in other words, "shaped and formed through media?" (1). Mainly with the advent of mobile technologies and digital platforms, social activities involving a mediated interaction have become complex and numerous (Bakardjieva 2020, 2939). In the context of migration dynamics, this argument underscores the need to consider not just the public portrayal and discussion of migration in mass media and on social platforms but also the impact of mediated processes and interactions on shaping migration practices and experiences themselves (Witteborn 2014, 75).

The theoretical concept of "media-related practice" (Couldry 2004; Hobart 2010) is helpful to understand how mediated processes and technologies are profoundly imbricated with broader social events and interactions. This approach

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[83] Following Twitter's change in proprietorship, Elon Musk announced in July 2023 the rebranding of the social media platform as "X" (Mac and Hsu 2023). As of that date, there is still no consensus on how the social network should be refered to, being common "X/Twitter" or "X, formerly known as Twitter." Due to the fact that this research focuses on an event that occurred in 2018 and its discussion on the network site under the communicative and technological affordances of that moment —a point in time that, from a media studies perspective, is also historical —, throughout the chapter I will refer to the social media platform as Twitter.

is anchored in practice theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of "bodily routines of behaviour, mental routines of understanding and knowledge and the use of objects" (Reckwitz 2005, 258). In the context of media studies, the concept of media practice allows to understand how both action and social order are articulated and negotiated through communicative routines. Nick Couldry (2004), the author who coined the concept, states that the idea behind this theoretical model is straightforward: "it treats media as the open set of practices relating to or oriented around media" by asking a fundamental question: "What, quite simply, are people *doing* about media across a whole range of situations and contexts?" (117, 119).

Lünenborg and Raetzch emphasize (2017, 24-25) that the media practice model extends beyond focusing solely on media texts or institutions, challenging the notion of "the media" as rigid entities, technologies, or platforms, and instead considers the quotidian practices surrounding media. In a world of growing mediated processes, this perspective allows us to understand how, in several social contexts and interactions, the very "*elements and building-blocks*" through which "a sense of the social is constructed become *themselves* based in technologically based processes of mediation" (Couldry and Hepp 2017, 7). Let us think, for example, about the broad and increasing number of social dynamics on whose making and ordering media technologies have an impact: communicating with friends and family, finding directions, managing schedules, reading, listening to music, watching films, and browsing the internet, among many others.

However, it is crucial to recognize that not all media-related practices that shape our social understanding are universally accessible or beneficial, especially for misrepresented or vulnerable collectives like migrants – it is important to take into account that media-related practices are entangled with broader social inequalities. In a manner of speaking, what we *do* with media always implies certain dynamics and relations of power and the possibilities to *do* with media technologies are profoundly embedded with intersectional inequalities of gender, class or race, and with the access to media resources and the imbalances that could derive from digital interactions. In other words, the ability to engage in certain media-related practices varies, being more accessible to some individuals and groups than to others.

At the same time, the enactment of media-related practices is explicitly and frequently linked to social and economic inequalities and the need to *do* something about these disparities. Sometimes it is even a matter of life preservation, as it is with migrants who need to use media technologies to escape from their homelands due to the multiple social and economic hardships they face. In this respect, in the next section, I briefly discuss the context and dynamics of forced

migration in northern Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala) and some of the media-related practices that led to the formation of the groups among the migrant caravan in late 2018.

Media-Related Practices among Migrants and the Creation of the Caravan

There is an ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Central American countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where, most of the time, migration is involuntary and motivated by mixed external factors that work as pressures and threats to individuals and groups (Escobar Sarti 2008, 18). Whether, poverty and social exclusion, unemployment, gang violence, drug trafficking, domestic violence, food insecurity, or environmental deterioration caused mainly by transnational extractivist projects, the motives to migrate are plenty (Casillas 2020; Henao Castrillón and Hincapié García 2019; Paris Pombo 2017), often intertwining in a complex web of exclusion and brutality. Many displaced people from northern Central America travel through Mexico in an attempt to enter the United States, with 200,000 to 430,000 border crossing attempts taking place every year (Varela Huerta 2017, 2).

However, the migration route to the United States is one of the most dangerous in the world. Migrants, often traveling in small groups along isolated routes, frequently fall victim to discrimination, theft, extortion, kidnapping, sexual violence, human trafficking, and enforced disappearance (Henao Castrillón and Hincapié García 2019, 238). These violent acts are structural, with organized crime or drug trafficking organizations often implicated (CIDH 2013, 51). At the same time, corrupt state actors, including police, military personnel, and migration agents, frequently collaborate with organized crime, profiting from the control of irregular migration (Paris Pombo 2017, 147). For these reasons, traveling as part of a collective entity such as the migrant caravan can be safer for migrants, giving their walk visibility.

Initially, migrant caravans served as a political demonstration, a collective call for justice and a denunciation of the myriad human rights violations encountered along the journey (Paris Pombo 2017, 202). Such circumstances inspired a group of mothers searching for their lost sons and relatives along the migration route to establish the Committee of Family Members of Disappeared Migrants (COFAMIPRO, by its Spanish acronym) in Honduras in 1999 (Rivera Hernández 2017, 114). Mothers and relatives in COFAMIPRO started organizing the caravan of Central American mothers to locate disappeared migrants. At the same time, they requested tacit actions from regional governments, visited migrant shelters, and spoke publicly about their demands and concerns (Paris Pombo and Montes 2020, 19).

Simultaneously, after the public outrage caused by the violent massacre of seventy-two migrants in Tamaulipas, Mexico in 2010 (CIDH 2013, 72), activists started organizing "*Viacrucis Migrante*" (Migrant Stations of the Cross) during Catholic Holy Week, a predecessor of the migrant caravan of 2018. With strong political and religious components, "Viacrucis Migrante" sought to make visible the problem of disappeared migrants whose whereabouts remain unknown, comparing the suffering of migrants with that of Jesus Christ (Garibo García and Call 2020, 64). As "Viacrucis Migrante" evolved into a larger collective movement, participants joined not only to protest the dire conditions faced by migrants but also to travel more safely, accompanied by human rights defenders and under the watchful eye of the mass media (Paris Pombo and Montes 2020, 19). In this regard, the "Viacrucis" caravan that departed from Tapachula, Mexico, in late March 2018 with around 1,500 people (Marchand 2021, 142) received more attention from the public and media outlets in the region due to the alarming comments and menacing threats that then U.S. President Donald Trump was tweeting about the movement (Semple 2018). This event underscores a significant shift in regional migration dynamics that unfolded later that year.

Within migrant caravans, a complex web of migration knowledge emerged, connecting individuals intending to journey along the route with activists, human rights defenders, and journalists. These connecting interactions were often facilitated through phone calls, SMS messages, and social media chats. Over time, media-related practices towards the organization of caravans contributed to building a complex network of shared migrant knowledge, including itinerary recommendations, contacts who could offer help, information about available transportation and shelter on the road, etc., reinforcing the collective migration practices prevalent in the region.

The role of specific actors was crucial within this conglomerate of media-related processes that formed the October 2018 migrant caravan. Such is the case of Bartolo Fuentes, a Honduran journalist and migrant rights activist. Fuentes was deeply aware of the migratory conditions in the region and had previously accompanied some migrant groups to the United States, including the "Viacrucis Migrante" caravan that traveled in March and April 2018 (Partlow 2018). Migrants trusted Fuentes, and many people consulted him about his experience with previous caravans and the best practices while traveling north, including through WhatsApp chats and groups. In a public conference recorded by the Guatemalan digital media site *Plaza Pública*, Fuentes explained:

> On social networks, they started talking, 'let's go, let's get organized,' and all that. And some contacted me. They told me, 'And you [Mr. Fuentes], who was in that caravan in March, please tell us, what is it like?' right? 'Well, I can tell what I saw

as a journalist and explain a little about the rights of migrants and the risks, which are many' […].

However, several groups were organized on WhatsApp especially, but they posted on Facebook and posted on those, 'Hey, you sell it, and I buy it' [Facebook buy and sell groups] and all that; publications are there, right? […] How many people are those who gathered? At least they added me to a chat group from Tegucigalpa, and they were fifty-eight people. And they had another group from other places that I did not know, but those who agreed to leave San Pedro Sula together were 160 people.(Fuentes in Plaza Pública 2018)[84]

In response to the multiple inquiries that Fuentes received from people seeking to migrate to the United States at the time, he also published a message to his public Facebook profile on September 26, 2018, recommending group migration as a safer alternative to mitigate the various risks involved. According to journalist Alberto Pradilla (2019), Fuentes' publication was shared more than eighty times and received 136 likes (37-38).

These events occurred weeks before the caravan began walking through Honduras in October 2018, serving as key media-related practices that contributed to the gradual development of the movement. However, it is important to highlight that Fuentes asserts that he did not organize the October 2018 migrant caravan – as some legacy media stories later claimed; instead, he solely provided orientation and assistance to an already existing migrant network (Pradilla 2019, 41).

Information continued circulating among people interested in joining the caravan, mainly through WhatsApp chats and Facebook groups. A survey about public opinion in Latin America conducted by Latinobarómetro (n.d.) provides evidence that WhatsApp and Facebook were the most-used social media platforms during 2018 in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, taking into account that most people in the caravan came from these countries. This pattern is the same for previous years (2016 and 2017) and subsequent ones (2020). In all three countries YouTube is the third-most used social media platform, albeit to a much lesser extent (See Figure 1).

Still, it is also important to observe that the percentage of participants in the survey who did not use a social media platform in the three countries during 2018 was significant: El Salvador (12.5 percent), Honduras (19.1 percent), and Guatemala (22.5 percent). This aspect emphasizes that while media-related practices involving these platforms may have been key to organizing the October 2018 migrant caravan, it does not mean that all structural processes and

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[84] The original quote by Bartolo Fuentes is in Spanish. Translation to English is mine.

interactions necessarily took place through those networks. However, it is also important to note that the number of respondents who did not use social media platforms was considerably lower when compared to 2016 and 2017. In 2020, these numbers decreased further in these three countries, making it evident how social media use is rapidly growing in the region.

Figure 1: Most Used Social Media Platforms on Northern Central America, 2016 to 2020
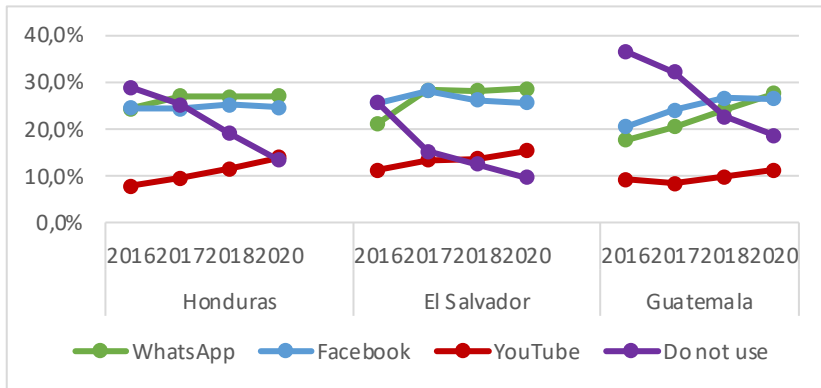
Source: Own elaboration based on Latinobarómetro (n.d.)

Mobile communications and social media platforms were helpful for people joining the migrant caravan to decide on meeting points and routes (Frank-Vitale and Núñez Chaim 2020, 48). There was a high level of organizational complexity. Some WhatsApp groups, for example, were divided by cities and departments, with the place and date indicated in the chat name (Pradilla 2019, 43). Members also recommended articles and necessary luggage for the journey (Juárez 2018) or provided information on the location of border checkpoints and risky areas. Within these groups, migrants also stayed in touch with relatives and close people to notify them of their status and whereabouts (Verza and Alemán 2019). As the organization of the migrant caravan was taking place among migrant networks, other media-related events – this time involving mass media stories and representations – also played a pivotal role.

The Role of Legacy Media in Building a Migration Movement

Despite the increasing complexity and volume of media-related practices, legacy media still maintains a certain position of power over other media

representations and practices, mainly due to its extensive reach and entrenched status as the quintessential form of "the media." Couldry (2008) highlights how legacy media discourse is "embedded in everyday practice" and can potentially be "self-reproducing simply by being taken for granted as 'natural'" (78). In that sense, among those practices that legitimize legacy media discourse, the author distinguishes "naming," the potential to identify and label what counts as relevant in the world and social interactions; "framing," the action of defining whatever is significant in the world; and "ordering," the hierarchical understanding of "media" versions of the world over others (Couldry 2008, 83). Naming, framing, and ordering practices of legacy media stories and representations had a crucial impact on the development of events that led to the growth of the migrant caravan that moved northwards through Central America in October 2018.

Once people started gathering at San Pedro Sula station following the call to migrate in groups, different legacy media stories in Honduras devoted space to write and talk about the caravan, naming and framing it as important breaking news. Among those media stories, the HCH broadcasted a live report on the caravan the day before its departure (Ahmed, Rogers, and Ernst 2018). It is relevant to mention that the caravan was formed in a heightened political context in which many people had demonstrated against the government of the then-president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, due to its lack of attention to migration issues, insecurity, and poverty (Benincasa and Cortés 2021, 821). Hernandéz was declared winner in late 2017 following a controversial election that the Organization of the American States called to repeat (Kinosian 2017).

During a live broadcast, HCH reporters interviewed several people who had already arrived at the meeting point of the caravan at San Pedro Sula bus station, mainly asking participants about their motives to leave the country and how they planned to complete the journey (HCH Televisión Digital 2018b). The TV channel also spread the misleading information that Bartolo Fuentes was one of the caravan's organizers (see for example, HCH Televisión Digital 2018c).

According to Fuentes, some media stories by HCH aimed to politically discredit the caravan as a migration movement (Pradilla 2019, 48-49). However, it had the opposite effect: given HCH's extensive viewership in Honduras, numerous individuals learned about the caravan through these reports and were compelled to join (Ahmed, Rogers, and Ernst 2018). In a certain way, by naming and framing the migrant caravan as a media-relevant event, legacy media discourse contributed to its construction as a social phenomenon, as a concrete material event taking form and becoming real. In an interview given to an HCH reporter after the caravan left from its departure point, Fuentes provides evidence to this argument:

I can tell you… I am myself surprised, because some friends told me: "Help us, guiding us and everything." "And how many are you?" They were like three WhatsApp groups, and together they were about 160 people. "Well," I said, "it's fine." But this has not been seen. I think that HCH had something to do with this as well, right? [laughs]. Because after that broadcast we received, oh [exclaims surprised], countless calls and since yesterday, after the HCH broadcast, until now, that number doubled… there were six hundred in the afternoon. Right now, there are more than… almost 1,300 persons that go here. (Fuentes in HCH Televisión Digital 2018a)[85]

Other legacy media platforms started producing their own stories about the migrant caravan, contributing to the snowball effect. Many people watched a report on TV or heard about the caravan in a radio broadcast and decided to join the group. The caravan's numbers swelled as it journeyed through various routes and towns over the days. Media platforms not only in Honduras but also in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States circulated reports and stories about the migration movement, and the discussion on social networks also grew. These media-related events "enabled news of the caravan to be transmitted simultaneously to hundreds of people surmounting horizontal, bidirectional and interactive borders in time and space" (Cappelli 2020, 13). Legacy media alone was not the sole catalyst of the caravan's growth , but it played a crucial role.

The symbolic and naturalized power of legacy media discourse for naming, framing, and ordering social phenomena as media-relevant events does not end there, as it can also circulate specific imaginaries around those same phenomena. In this regard, legacy media contributed enormously to the broad conception of the migrant caravan as a massive, unified movement: long-distance pictures of the caravan as a colossal and sometimes threatening group dominated the iconic spectrum, a typical pattern in legacy media content where the "treatment of migrants as a group causes the omission of their individual identities" (Bolanos and Kenix 2021, 2). Such portrayals in social media fostered a perception of the caravan as a monolithic group moving in unison along a singular path. However, the idea of a unified caravan is misleading, as the individuals inside the group walked at different paces (Camus Bergareche, Vega Villaseñor, and Hernández Mejía 2020, 64), with people traveling alone moving much faster and families with children walking slower. Moreover, the caravan's routes varied significantly: most people decided to walk to Tijuana in north-western Mexico, while others marched to different crossing points along the United States-Mexico border (Torre Cantalapiedra and Mariscal Nava 2020, 9).

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[85] The original quote by Bartolo Fuentes is in Spanish. Translation to English is mine.

The fragmentation of the caravan became evident once the majority had crossed the border between Guatemala and Mexico. While walking through Mexican territory, journalist Alberto Pradilla reported how the caravan "just maintained its name for the global public that knows about it due to media and Trump's tweets" while, in reality, "they [were] tens of groups scattered in different zones in Mexico" (Pradilla 2019, 203). Furthermore, new migration groups began forming in various places in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico after the news of the caravan that departed from San Pedro Sula had spread in the region (Frank-Vitale and Núñez Chaim 2020, 41). Consequently, by late 2018, several distinct caravans were simultaneously heading toward the United States.

Building on the idea of the caravan as a vast unified group, legacy media stories further contributed to the notion of the caravan as a "flow" or "wave," akin to a "natural force" that could not be "stopped, governed only by the forces of gravity," as Pallister-Wilkins observed (2019). This portrayal represents a typical pattern in legacy media stories about migration, where it is frequently framed "as if it were a form of pollution or natural disaster" (Palau-Sampio 2019, 94). Such narratives can strongly influence public sentiment, leading to widespread negative feelings, opinions, and perceptions of migrants.

In our increasingly mediatized society, legacy media still holds a certain position of naturalized power as the medium through which we observe and understand the world. At the same time, as mobile technologies and digital platforms are gaining reach, networked media and social media also importantly participate in the media-related semantic processes that build imaginaries and conceptions of social phenomena. Moreover, legacy media discourse and representations circulating in social media commonly feed each other through a continuous exchange that builds and names events as media relevant. Similarly, social media users actively engage in framing, naming, and ordering of media-related practices, thus co-creating the collective understanding of social phenomena such as the migrant caravan.

Social Media and the Migrant Caravan as a Worldwide Media-Relevant Event

By mid-October 2018, the migrant caravan had become a subject of heated public discussions in Central and North America. Due to the intervention of diverse influential actors in networked media, the event soon became news headlines around the world. It is important to emphasize that the possibilities to participate in public discussion and circulate information on social media are unequally distributed, as some users are much more influential than others, and their discursive power can extend beyond those same social media interactions. Moreover, this broader discursive reach often correlates with the societal power

held by individuals, such as politicians, celebrities, or other public figures with significant social media presence.

On October 16, 2018, just four days into the migrant caravan's journey from San Pedro Sula, then-U.S. President Donald Trump published a tweet in which he threatened the Honduran government to withdraw economic aid if they did not stop the caravan and sent migrants back to their hometowns (Cappelli 2020, 28-29). According to data collected by the Trump Tweet Archive (Brown 2022), a digital project that preserves Trump's tweets for research and historical purposes, Trump's first tweet about the caravan got around 30,000 retweets and 117,000 likes. Over the following weeks, as the migrants continued walking toward the United States border, Trump published several tweets about the topic.

As one of the most followed accounts on Twitter at that time, whose influence went beyond the Twittersphere as mainstream media continuously quoted his words in its stories, Trump was a key actor who brought the issue into public discussion in the Americas and beyond by constantly *commenting* – an action that I am framing as a media-related practice (Couldry 2012, 54) – about the ongoing event in the social media platform. Trump was well known for his strategic use of Twitter to place his agenda and create conflicts in society during his presidential term (Gutiérrez Vidrio 2020, 68). With the U.S. midterm elections approaching on November 6, 2018, Trump drew attention to the migrant caravan and continuously wrote about a crisis on the border (Jaramillo-Dent and Pérez-Rodríguez 2021, 123) to mobilize his supporters. At the same time, Trump suggested in his tweets that "criminals" were traveling in the caravan groups (Velasco Ortiz and Hernández López 2021, 111), inciting feelings of hate, anxiety, and fear among many U.S. Americans.

We can understand Trump's tweets as media-related practices that were widely hegemonic and influential in drawing international media attention to the migrant caravan. Therefore, it is no coincidence that after Trump's first tweet about the event on October 16, 2018, social media users from different parts of the world started discussing the topic on Twitter, mainly through the hashtag #CaravanaMigrante, which emerged as a worldwide trending topic on Twitter at that time. This hashtag reached its peak of activity on October 20, 2018, as the caravan crossed the border between Guatemala and Mexico and maintained a high level of activity until the end of the month (See Figure 2), according to data provided by the Twitter API and collected through Media Cloud (n.d.), an open source platform for media analysis.

Figure 2. #CaravanaMigrante tweeting activity. Time period (October 12, 2018 – November 12, 2018)[86]
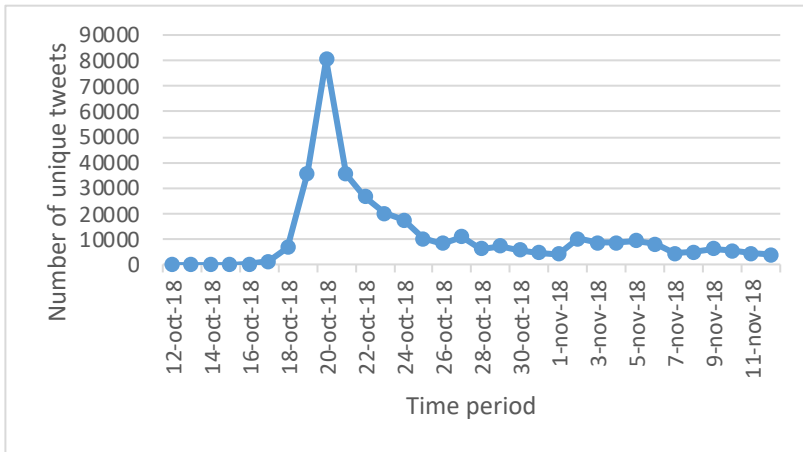
Source: Author's elaboration based on data collected through Media Cloud (n.d.)

    When the caravan group that had departed from San Pedro Sula reached the border between Guatemala and Mexico on October 19, 2018, it included around 7,000 people who then continued into Mexican territory (Martínez Hernández Mejía 2019, 184–85). In Mexico, a constantly growing number of people joined the caravan. Moreover, international legacy media outlets were already extensively covering the caravan's progress, often through live broadcasts (Alonso Meneses 2021, 111). At this point, the number of journalists, cameras, and activists following the journey of the migrants was so high that they constituted "a parallel caravan" (Velasco Ortiz and Hernández López 2021, 110), traveling alongside the group, intensely contributing to the meaning-making and symbolic processes that made the migrant caravan an event that caught attention worldwide.

    Donald Trump was not the sole political figure to address the migrant caravan on social media. Similarly, then-Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto

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[86] It is important to mention that the figure represents the number of unique tweets using #CaravanaMigrante from October 12 to November 12 2018 as of May 2023. The platform has repeatedly removed accounts or tweets that violated their Terms of Service and Twitter Rules, and many users have erased their profiles or tweets as well. Erased data is not available on the platform after removal, so it is very probable that the actual number of tweets during that period was higher. At the same time, the number of unique tweets does not consider the number of retweets or likes, factors that are also important for the wide circulation of tweets and the emergence of trending topics in the platform.

tweeted about the topic on his public profile and uploaded public video messages on YouTube that were also transmitted on TV and radio. In his first video, uploaded on October 20, 2018, Peña Nieto warned migrants not to enter Mexican territory (Presidencia Enrique Peña Nieto 2018a). In a second video, published on October 26, 2018, as migrants continued moving to the southern United States border, Peña Nieto introduced the program "Estás en Tu Casa" (You are at Home) where he promised migrants temporary jobs and the regularization of their migration status, as long as they stayed in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas and registered through the offices of the National Institute of Migration (Presidencia Enrique Peña Nieto 2018b). This plan was largely refused by migrants (Garibo García and Call 2020, 83) and it did not stop the caravan groups' march to the United States-Mexico border.

Press releases also played an important role in the growing media discussion about the migrant caravan, with communications produced and circulated by embassies, ministries, governments, and civic organizations in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States (Durand Arp-Nisen 2019, 1040; Rizzo Lara 2021, 3901; Pradilla 2019, 61). Many of these press releases were also posted on social media accounts by the responsible parties and quoted later by legacy media stories and reports. This vast diversity of official communications strengthened the status of the migrant caravan as a topic of public discussion and a social reality that was taking form through transit.

At the same time, multiple users in the region and all around the globe engaged in vigorous debates about the migrant caravan on various social media platforms. Following the media-related logic of *commenting* and *presencing* (Couldry 2012, 49–54) the development of an ongoing event, users published posts about the caravan on their profiles, shared news, and uploaded and circulated images, videos, or memes about the situation. The discourse surrounding the migrant caravan was polarized, oscillating between solidarity and empathy for the migrants or expressions of fear, hate, and discrimination against the groups. It is also important to highlight that, in a kind of *connective action* (Bennett and Segerberg 2012) allowed by network technologies that extended beyond the social media scenario, different users organized the collection of food and clothing to take to the shelters where migrants were staying while traveling. Meanwhile, social media platforms were employed by users to organize demonstrations against the migrants, especially once many of the groups composing the caravans arrived in the city of Tijuana at the United States-Mexico border (Hernández López and Porraz Gómez 2020, 15). Given these circumstances, we can see how social media platforms are intricately woven into contemporary public discourse. Social media platforms have the capacity to become a kind of "political actor"

(Walker and Frimpong Boamah 2020, 2) in developing social events that become media-relevant.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed three different media-related aspects that contributed to the making of the October 2018 Central American migrant caravan as a social phenomenon and as a topic of public discussion: migrants' use of media to organize and join a spontaneous migration movement, escaping from violence, social exclusion, poverty, and climate-related hardship that forced them to migrate; the role that legacy media practices played in the growth of the caravan and their discursive potential to create conceptual frameworks and imaginaries about it; and, finally, the part that social media platforms performed in transforming the migrant caravan into a topic that caught public attention worldwide, also highlighting the enormous influence that users in networked media with broad discursive power have to direct the discussion around the topic.

Taking into consideration that "the basic building-blocks of social life are potentially themselves now shaped by 'media'" (Couldry and Hepp 2017, 2), there is a growing need to include the study of media technologies usage in contemporary social theory and into the analysis of phenomena like migration. I have discussed that, at the same time, social phenomena are not univocal and media-relevant events alone; instead, significant media-related practices and processes that involve multiple actors and artifacts also give them meaning.

I would not go so far as to say that the media-related practices discussed in this chapter were the sole drivers behind the emergence and expansion of the late 2018 migrant caravan, but their significant influence is undeniable. I conclude that the making of a phenomenon like the October 2018 migrant caravan – for its character as a transnational, dynamic, and capacity-building phenomenon – makes evident how deeply entangled media technologies are with social life and everyday practices. The migrant caravan exemplifies the defining role that these technologies play in the creation of social and material realities like migration movements.

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Caste, Gender, and Environmental Injustices in India's Urban Peripheries: Intersectional Inequalities, Decolonial Praxis

Eren Devrim

[…] they think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt. (Anand 2014, 78)

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mudwalled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grasscutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, […] the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes, and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides. The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive stink. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an 'uncongenial' place to live in. (ibid. 1)

Although written back in 1935 in pre-independence India, Anand's depiction of waste pickers in colonial times is not far away from their on-the-ground reality at present. Written at that time as a critique of the status quo in British India, shaped by caste – or *Jāti*, the more vernacular term – as the predominant social structure, it can be nowadays regarded as a "script," representative for millions of waste pickers in the global peripheries that exist within neoliberal cities. It aptly captures the quotidian experiences of these workers in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and many other Indian cities, but could also be perceptible in many other cities of the Global South.[87]

With the term "waste," I refer to a "material by-product of human activity for which an economic use has not yet been found" (Harriss-White 2020, 239), linked to modernization with a widely negative connotation. Based on this, "waste pickers" refers in this chapter to the millions of informal workers who daily collect materials that were disposed by others, such as food, plastic, paper, metal, and clothing. These items can also be summed up as "solid waste." They collect them from different sites, including streets, illegal dumping grounds, households

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[87] By the term "Global South," I refer to all countries that are classified by the World Bank as low- and middle-income, mainly former colonized nations, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2013). I utilize "Global South" as the terms proposed by the United Nations (developing nations, less developed regions, etc.) seem inappropriate and imply a very Eurocentric notion.

and commercial centers, primarily in low-income and middle-income countries, but also to a smaller extent in post-industrial countries (Samson 2015; WIEGO 2021). Arguably, waste picking is a dialectical phenomenon. It is indispensable for rapid urbanization and a tremendous contribution to a safer and cleaner environment, yet it is met with invisibility, disgust, and prejudices in society, ignoring the fact that it is this very same society that produces this waste.

Taking a glimpse on a global level, waste has undoubtedly emerged as a huge and pressing issue in the past decades. It is often associated with modern economies and is considered a genuine danger to ecosystems and human well-being. Solid waste, including plastic waste, is one of the major factors that contribute to climate change and poses risks to human health, attributable to air and water pollution, noise, accidents, etc. (Morais et al. 2022). Waste pickers across the globe play an important role in reducing this peril and hence fight pollution as they recover and recycle "valuable materials from waste streams and reduce the large amount of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) ending up in landfills and open dumpsites where open burning often takes place" (ibid., 2). It may not be surprising that they are characterized as vulnerable groups in many regards. Although these workers are key in preventing plastic pollution, they live in precarity and suffer from abject poverty as their work is hardly valued (Dias 2016; Morais et al. 2022). Although they were hailed as "essential workers" with the onset of the pandemic, little has changed. Waste pickers continue to earn a meager income and suffer from long working hours, inhumane working conditions, and the constant fear for their existence. Within the value chain, they occupy a very low position as they need to bargain with buyers, making them dependent and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (WIEGO 2021). Due to the unsanitary labor conditions, they also face egregious social stigma (Mirza 2019).

As part of the vast informal economy, which has increased globally through neoliberal policies in the past decades, waste pickers are not organized in traditional and recognized trade unions by the state and hence excluded from access to social welfare and health care, which are benefits reserved for formal employment (Kabeer 2008). As these workers are in direct contact with solid waste, they are more likely to be exposed to diseases (cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia, respiratory diseases, jaundice), infections (skin, eye, and blood infections, as well as intestinal infections such as dysentery), zoonoses, accidents (bone disorders, poisoning, chemical burns and injuries resulting from accidents at dumping grounds), mental health issues as well as malnutrition (Coelho et al. 2016; Sara, Bayazid, and Quayyum 2022). Given the context of exploitation and vulnerability, it needs to be highlighted that there is a discernible congruence between waste picking as profession and the group involved in this kind of labor. Many of them are women, children, migrants, people from ethnic minorities

or indigenous communities, or oppressed castes (Hayami, Dikshit, and Mishra 2006; Mascarenhas, Grattet, and Mege 2021; Mohai and Saha 2007; Wittmer 2020). In most of the cases, these social categories overlap and consequently require an intersectional analysis.

As the largest democracy in the world, India is home to approximately 18 percent of the world population and accounts for roughly 12 percent of the global municipal solid waste generation (MOSPI 2022b). With the rise of the urban middle class and consumerism, waste accumulation is expected to increase rapidly until 2030. Against the backdrop of India's partly non-existent or ill-managed solid waste management facilities, these trends have been observed with concern (Harriss-White 2020). Torrid criticism has been expressed pertaining to well-intended environmental campaigns of the central government, such as the ambitious "Clean India Mission" (Swachh Bharat Abhinayan), launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi back in 2014. Critics argue its issues include a desultory implementation on a local level, false claims, and a misuse of funds, but most especially a continuation of caste-based stigmas (Finnigan 2019). For Indian waste pickers little has changed with such campaigns. Estimations about the number of waste pickers vary greatly, some assuming that India has up to four million waste pickers (Global Alliance of Waste Pickers 2014; Priya and Gupta 2020). This would roughly make India home to 20 percent of the global waste picker community (Bourdreau 2022), although the actual numbers might be much higher. There are more than 1300 massive landfills in India where waste pickers are searching daily for sellable items (MOSPI 2022a). According to various reports, the two biggest cities of the country, Mumbai and Delhi, have together at least 400 000 waste pickers (Global Alliance of Waste Pickers 2014). Taking all this into account, the question remains: Who are these workers, who are also known as *rag-pickers*, *safai karamcharis* (Hindi), and *kachra vechak* (Marathi)? Is there anything they have in common?

As recent research (Doron and Jeffrey 2018a, 2018b; Dubey 2016; Mandal 2010) and my extensive fieldwork in urban India between 2022-2023 has shown, the field of waste is encapsulated in caste hierarchies and untouchability, and to a lesser extent by indigeneity (Mirza 2019). Consequently, most waste pickers are *Dalits*[88] or belong to Abrahamic religious minorities (e.g., Catholics, Muslims).

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[88] The etymology of the term "Dalits" is traced to the Sanskrit word "dal," which can be translated as "broken." It refers to the oppressed sections that are outside of the Hindu social order and varna/caste system, formerly known as "outcastes" and "untouchables." It was first used in the context of anti-caste movements in the nineteenth century by social reformer Mahatma Jotirao Phule (1826-1890) and later became popular in the Marathi language and beyond Maharashtra. Other terms for these groups are "harijans" (the children of "God") or "bahujan'"(the many), the latter mostly preferred in the context of Dalit Buddhism. The term "Scheduled Caste" is the official term used in the constitution of India and helps to get reservation as part of the state's positive discrimination policies (Chakravarti 2018; Teltumbde 2017).

These minority groups are also considered practically Dalits but are de jure categorized as "Other Backward Classes"[89] rather than "Scheduled Castes" as casteism is theoretically non-existent in Christianity and Islam (Fazal 2019; Soundararajan 2022). Then again, practice and theory vary greatly, as even the practice of untouchability was abolished as per the constitution in 1950, but it is still an undeniable reality. In this chapter, I will examine the field of waste (picking) in India in two ways. In its broad contours, I will first analyze waste picking from an intersectional angle, unfolding layers of comprehending social exclusion by categories such as caste, gender, class, religion, age, etc. Second, I will expand the analysis by applying an eco-centric perspective, as these gendered and racialized bodies cannot be regarded as independent and separable from the environments they inhabit. With the rising feminization of waste work (Dias and Ogando 2015), an intersectional framework encourages a more critical perspective as feminist epistemologies in India are still dominated by elitist Brahmanical feminism, also known as *savarna feminism*.[90] The latter fails to recognize the experiences of exclusion that these marginalized groups undergo. In this context, I will delve into forms of decolonial praxis by highlighting daily practices of resistance that subvert the status quo creatively. In summary, the central questions are: How do social categories such as caste, gender, class, age, and religion intersect with ecological environments and help to (re-)produce social inequalities? Which forms of everyday resistance are required to challenge the current situation?

Following these questions, this research project has employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and field notes for soliciting data. Photography served as a tool to get a better visual sense of the residents' surroundings and practices. This work tends to follow the idea of traditional ethnographic fieldwork as "social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do" (Wacquant 2003, 5). I conducted fifty-four semi-structured interviews with waste pickers (thirty-three), NGOs and social activists (eighteen), and waste pickers' children (three). In the following sections, the focus will be on two

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[89] Other Backward Classes (OBC) is the official term in the constitution of India for lower castes, formerly known as "shudras," that constitute the lowest hierarchy within the Hindu caste system. Many Dalits who converted to Abrahamic religions such as Islam or Christianity, are classified as OBC. According to the constitution of India, there is no caste system within both these religions, so that social mobility into the higher category OBC must have been achieved. There is a pending petition in the Indian Supreme Court which requests a revision of this category to provide Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims the "Scheduled Castes" status.

[90] 'Savarna' is derived from Sanskrit and can be translated as "those with varna," referring to feminist movements led by upper caste womxn.

out of the thirty-three interviews that have been conducted with waste pickers. There are different reasons for this decision. First, these two can be regarded as representative of the different communities I have interviewed in Mumbai and Delhi. There were patterns that reoccurred in the interview collection and are essential to understanding the on-the-ground realities of the waste pickers. These patterns and realities were the most visible in both these interviews. One of the most important factors in the selection was caste identity along with religious affiliation. The interviewee in Mumbai is a Hindu Dalit, while the one in Delhi is a Muslim Dalit. Interestingly, both revealed this information at the very beginning of the interviews, followed by their reasons for becoming a waste picker, including natural disasters that destroyed their livelihoods, landlessness in villages, and abject poverty. Both were women and single parents, either divorcees or widows. In many interviews, the workers revealed that divorce was the only option to flee domestic violence, which has become more accepted over the past decades in their communities. The widows formed a smaller group in the set of interviews. In most cases, their husbands died due to work accidents or natural disasters like floods or had severe illnesses due to the harmful working conditions. Rural to urban migration was, in all cases, a natural by-product that happened either at a very young age or after marriage. Moving to cities like Mumbai and Delhi was seen as the only opportunity to survive and escape the brutal echelon of society. Age played a crucial role in both biographies too. One could observe two trajectories in all the interviews, either starting waste picking in the context of child labor from the age of six to support the family or as a young woman with children after moving to the city. For these women, waste picking continues into their 60s and 70s as no social security benefits, including pensions, exist for informal workers in India. Following this, health issues are an inevitable part of waste picking and were another major part of the interviews.

To understand the daily experiences of waste pickers in India's urban peripheries, which are shaped by fragmentation, contradictions, and violence, this work opts for a Bourdieusian approach, focusing on habitus research and the so-called "life course." This approach offers more nuanced perspectives as subaltern structures, including their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies, are at odds with major sociological concepts such as modernity, development, or the state, which in turn remain too vague to capture the markedly different realities of subalterns. The interviews with waste workers focused on three aspects: a) biographical background (upbringing, biographical information about their (grand-)parents' generation marital life and children, education); b) work and life as waste picker (reasons for working as a waste picker, working and living conditions, health situation and Covid19); and c) hopes for the future on a local and national level.

Hasina's and Sushila's[91] Plight – Same Same but Different? Female Dalit Testimonies in Times of Rising Authoritarianism and Neoliberalism

March 2023. It was a hot day in Delhi – the world's third most populated metropolitan area (Demographia 2022) – or to be more precise, in the office of a Christian NGO[92] in Bhalswa. Many Delhiites who live in upper-class areas like Hauz Khas, Greater Kailash, or Jor Bagh may have never even heard of this place. Whenever I added "Jahangirpuri" as a location to provide orientation, I was either met with utter amazement or a shocked expression. It is a reality that leaves many flummoxed and that privileged sections of society want to ignore. To put it simply, this place in North Delhi has become synonymous with undesirable internal migration of people from low-caste backgrounds from Indian states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Bihar. The residents are mainly Muslims, and those who speak Bengali are often accused of being Bangladeshi rather than Indian, a pejorative attribution and verbal insult that has consequences in times of rising religious nationalism. On my first day in Bhalswa, when I tried to get a first glimpse into the field, I had brief conversations with many women who told me that the area is popularly known as "Bengali Basti" (Bengali settlement). Furthermore, local authorities do not care about the inhumane living conditions there as most residents are disenfranchised and cannot serve as votes for political parties.

According to media reports, the Jahangirpuri-Bhalswa area has morphed into a prominent example for rising communitarian tensions between Muslims and Hindus (Basak 2022), the infamous practice of "anti-encroachment" – a political euphemism by the municipality for forced eviction in this slum area, which was ironically born out of the very same practice people used to re-settle under Sanjay Gandhi's "Urban Renewal Plan" in the 1970s (Roychowdhury 2022) – and above all for being home to many waste pickers (Chetanalaya 2013). At least 20 percent of the estimated population of 500,000 people are waste pickers and their children: out of them, 70 percent are Muslim and the rest are mainly Hindu. Some of the most pressing problems in this slum re-settlement area are "unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, poor health and sanitation, domestic violence, child labor, female feticide, alcoholism, drug abuse etc." (ibid.). Bhalswa is one of the three major dumping grounds in Delhi, the other two are the Ghazipur landfill and the Okhla landfill, where access is more restricted compared to the waste disposal site in Bhalswa.

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[91] The names of the interview partners were changed to preserve their safety.
[92] Name of the NGO omitted for safety reasons.

A grey-haired elderly woman in a multicolored *salwar kameez*[93] and a flowered, black-colored *dupatta*[94] that loosely covered her head entered the tiny NGO office. The room buzzed with activity as vocational training classes and meetings for self-help groups took place. The office was decorated with many photos from various excursions with women from Bhalswa, a medium-sized poster of Jesus, and the preamble of the constitution of India. The elderly lady, Hasina, slowly took a seat on one of the blue plastic chairs. Her body was sagging; she took a deep breath. Her eyes looked exhausted, and she seemed to have experienced much grief and sorrow. Her shy smile, however, was contagious. She came to tell me about her life as a waste picker. News of my ethnographic fieldwork on female waste pickers spread rapidly. Many women wanted to share their plight with me, a non-Indian who also happened to be a (secular) Muslim with intermediate Hindi. For the first time, Hasina said, someone was interested in their stories. Stories in a slum that has been surrounded by the seven-kilometer-long and approximately sixty-meter-high landfill for almost thirty years.

Hasina's story who was now in her late 60s is symptomatic of the situation of many women of different ages who live in the area. Her journey as a young woman started in Saharsa, a city near the eastern bank of the Kosi River in Bihar, the state with the highest level of multidimensional poverty in India (NITI Aayog 2021). Her parents were landless agricultural workers in a village called Dibra, belonging to the "Kunjra"caste, a Sunni Muslim community in North India, also known as "Sabji Farosh." Classified as "Other Backward Classes," they can also be seen as "Pasmanda Muslims," a political label and movement that fights for the recognition of low-caste Muslims as "Scheduled Caste." As the constitution of India does not accept them as Scheduled Castes, these groups are socio-economically left behind as they cannot benefit from positive discrimination reserved for Dalits from Indian religions. Hasina lost her husband during the floods in Bihar in the 1980s and was forced to leave with her two boys and six girls, as they had no income. She moved to Delhi where she first worked in a steel factory and later collected coal to resell it. With the advent of neoliberal policies in India in 1991, also known as LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization), a quick decline of the factory-based Fordist system took place (Joshi 2003). Workers like Hasina were affected and became more imperiled by the uncertainties of securing the livelihood of their families and the ever-deepening dominance of the free market. Hasina then moved to Bhalswa with her family. Before it became a massive landfill, the area in the north of Delhi was "home to a lush wetland ecosystem around its historical horseshoe lake" (Better Bhalswa 2021). The area has the epithet "dairy," which refers to its past

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[93] Traditional combination dress from South Asia.
[94] A shawl-like scarf worn by women in South Asia.

as farmyards that focused on cattle and is still visible in many corners of the slum. Soon, Hasina became a waste picker. She started working first as a sweeper at railway stations and later collected waste at the Bhalswa landfill to resell it, usually from six A.M. to nine P.M., and earned some paise, roughly around 100 Rupees per today. She worked there for more than two decades until her children asked her to stop as her body had become weaker and she started to suffer from various diseases, including pneumonia, swellings in the arms, constant nausea, and frequent vomiting blood. Her wish for the future remains that Bhalswa becomes clean and safe one day: the landfill shuts down, decent housing, and clean and free water for all, as it is now heavily polluted and a threat to residents' health.

The other women I interviewed in Bhalswa shared similar stories. Most of them were Dalit Muslims, landless migrants from poorer Indian states who came to Delhi due to environmental disasters such as floods or droughts. For all these people, a better future for their (grand-)children was their biggest aspiration as they did not want the future generations to do the same "undignified" labor. This underlines an important topic in the waste pickers' community – the constant fear of reproducing an intergenerational familial habitus and, especially, being exposed to epistemic injustice. Many women were indeed frustrated about the status quo of their socio-political environments that silenced them. They had no organizational experience nor did they know about their constitutional rights, as most of them never went to school and were thus illiterate. The small NGO helped them to form self-help groups, manage their finances, and get involved in some activities. Maria[95], who oversees the office, is continuously helping the women with many different issues, e.g., access to welfare schemes and visits to hospitals. But being seventy-two years old, she will retire soon, and it is unclear who will continue the massive work she has been doing for more than fifteen years.

> Who does work as waste picker? – Dalits always worked as waste pickers, there is no Brahmin, no Maratha working as waste pickers. (Sushila S., Interview with Community Worker, Mumbai, November 28, 2022) [96]

Three months earlier, approximately 1330 km away from Bhalswa, I was in a suburb called "Chembur" in Mumbai. This suburb in the world's fifth most populated metropolitan area rose to prominence as a major refuge site not only due to the influx of people from Sindh and Punjab after the partition of British-India in 1948 but also for being a major Dalit neighborhood (Thatra 2022).

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[95] Name was changed to preserve her security.
[96] Name was changed to preserve her security.

Separated from the refugee camp, it soon became known as a key site for Dalit activism and politics as the "hierarchical social geography, […] relegated Dalits to the fringes of the city, on low-quality lands, and in segregated neighborhoods" (ibid. 67). As Thatra points out, Chembur's history and development is intrinsically enmeshed in caste identities and practices that have reproduced the deeply rooted dichotomy of purity/pollution and, in turn, constructs the very core of Hindu mythology and the caste system (Teltumbde 2010; Thatra 2022). She explains that at the beginning of the twentieth century, "the BMC [Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation] decided to transport the city's waste to its outskirts and reclaim the marshy land in this locality" (Thatra 2022, 67). With this decision, an influx of Dalit migrants started to settle "in the vicinity of their work" (ibid.), i.e., waste picking in the dumping ground. Today, there are many ongoing housing projects and other modernization efforts, but Chembur remains famous for both the notorious Deonar dumping ground with a size of 327 acres, in operation since 1927, and a life-threatening level of air pollution. Chembur's urban planning is not only a clear reminder of the hierarchization of society along caste-based lines but also proves the entanglement of pre-colonial socio-cultures (caste) and colonial regimes in maintaining power hierarchies and reproducing exclusionary practices that continue to exist today under more sophisticated modes of neoliberal development. Approximately 9,000 metric tons of unsegregated waste makes its way to Deonar every day (Sharma and Chandel 2017). This has far-reaching consequences for the waste pickers there and the communities living near the landfill, who suffer from poor health, fire, and contaminated water and soil, as well as obnoxious smells. As a study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences [Mumbai] shows, there is a high incidence of tuberculosis and malnutrition among the slum dwellers, whose life expectancy is reduced to approximately forty years compared to the urban average of seventy-four (Raychaudhuri 2022). Given this high scale of toxicity, mixed with injury and a stigma of disgust, one needs to ask how those affected and vulnerable communities deal with this difficult synergy of health hazards and subaltern citizenship.

It was my first interview during my fieldwork with a former waste picker in the glowing heat after months of heavy monsoon rain. My interview partner was Sushila (name changed), a former waste picker and now community worker at *Mahila Mukti Sanstha* (MMS, Women's Liberation Organization),[97] one of the few NGOs in Mumbai that has focused on improving the working and living conditions of waste pickers for more than fifty years. During my interviews in Mumbai, I was accompanied by Kranti,[98] a Dalit feminist activist, social worker

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[97] Name was changed to preserve the security of the NGO.
[98] Name was changed out of safety reasons.

at MMS, and dear friend, who helped me translate from Marathi into English – as many workers speak little, if any, Hindi at all. Now in her mid-50s, Sushila's experience as a waste picker resembles the stories of many other women here in Mumbai, especially at MMS.

Her journey is closely linked to a natural disaster in rural Maharashtra back in 1972, the "Maharashtrian Drought." Many rural areas were heavily affected, and families like Sushila's had no choice but to move to cities like Mumbai as internal migrants as it helped them to secure their livelihoods. In 1972, Sushila and her family left their hometown Aurangabad, a city in a hilly upland region on the Kaum River in central Maharashtra. Her parents were landless Dalit farmers who had no income, their livestock dying during those tough times. By the age of ten, Sushila started to work as a waste picker in Mumbai, when her mother, a waste picker herself, took her along for work. She never went to school and got married at the age of fourteen. Sushila is now a divorcee and has a son who is currently completing his Master's degree. She remembers the meager income she earned and the unsafe working conditions she was exposed to in those years. Skin diseases and the first symptoms of respiratory illness developed soon after starting the work.

In 1998, she got introduced to MMS by community workers and learned about the benefits of joining self-help groups. The community workers, who were Dalits themselves, went to the communities to do surveys of female waste pickers and engage residents in discussions on caste and gender. Sushila soon got leadership training and delved into topics such as composting, sustainable gardening, and women's empowerment. She became a community leader herself. Due to her own experience, Sushila is a fierce critic of child marriage – a key topic MMS hopes to eliminate in the community – and has dedicated herself to this fight by stopping cases in her community with success. In 1998, MMS introduced a federation of 200 self-help groups of waste picker women, now operating in seven dry-waste selection centers with the municipality's permission. Sushila was elected president of the federation in 2005. She leads many of the self-help group meetings and visits the communities regularly to understand the waste pickers' concerns. She has also become the spokesperson to address issues pertaining to waste pickers at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Cooperation.

Sushila referred to many moments throughout the years since she joined the NGO and became a confidant for many women from the waste pickers' community in her interview. One collective achievement was the cooperation with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai (TISS). There are two biogas plants that are operated by the federation of MMS and recycle kitchen waste in the canteens and dining halls on campus at TISS. The gas produced in both plants is used for cooking food in the canteens at the institute. Sushila

regularly monitors the work at the canteens. She has emerged as a trailblazer in her community and a leading figure, representing the waste pickers' community on a national and international level. She even joined a UN environmental program in Kenya. Another of her accomplishments of which she was very proud was visiting Copenhagen in 2009. Remembering her first air travel, she told me how she had used to observe planes from the dumping ground in Chembur, and she was proud to have finally managed to attend a conference despite not knowing a single word of English. So far, she has represented the waste pickers at conferences in six countries.

During the interview, I realized that Sushila was an accurate social observer, who did not shy away from vociferously criticizing social ills and questioning the lingering legacy of subjugation from a female Dalit perspective. First and foremost, she saliently criticized the very episteme of waste as a caste-based profession and said that waste picking is shaped by "disgust" and "malice towards Dalits" who continue to experience gross caste violence. As Teltumbde (2010) has pointed out, these crimes can be regarded in recent times as acts of vengeance against Dalit assertion, enabled by a judiciary system that either shows tacit acceptance or enforces laws more leniently when the victims come from marginalized communities. Sushila said that in the cities, the rigors of caste are not as overtly present as in villages but still argues that they remain visible in people's everyday behavior. Moreover, she strongly criticized the municipality's shortcomings in providing relief during the pandemic. Food rations and equipment for waste pickers were only provided by NGOs. Although hailed as "essential workers" during the peak of the pandemic, this symbolic recognition hardly materialized into any benefits for waste pickers.

Sushila intends to continue to advocate for waste segregation as it is helpful for the workers and important for the environment. She sees composting as an important way of paying back to nature and believes that there must be more awareness to fight pollution. Moreover, she argues that the municipality must incorporate waste pickers in their solid waste management and provide them all with pensions as waste workers suffer from old-age poverty. It would help to recognize waste workers' lives as holding a value beyond serving as a merely exploitable labor force, especially in times of socio-economic volatility during global crises that have a perspicuous impact on a local level. Finally, she believes that the key to change is education. Speaking for many waste workers, she understands that "[…] due to caste, we came to this work. There is no other option because there is no education."

From this episode, one gets a glimpse not only into the realities of waste pickers in India's two biggest cities but also into the differences in their perceptions of inequalities, as well as their approaches in challenging the status

quo. As I will show in the following section, the other thirty-one interviews I conducted with female waste workers also reveal a variety of responses to social inequality.

Understanding Intersectional Inequalities: Waste Colonialism, Environmental Casteism, and Patriarchy

The interviews with waste pickers in Mumbai and Delhi brought up a myriad of issues. To decipher social inequality in an emerging economy like India, an analysis solely based on economic indicators not only is insufficient but also would reproduce Eurocentric patterns, a Western imposition of knowledge on former colonized nations, and a homogenization of their societies, unable to grasp the local intricacies. It would be a naïve fallacy to assume that the unfailingly palpable structures and practices of social exclusion in India are rooted in a lack of "merit." Following Rehbein (2020), "a multidimensional and historical approach has to be adopted" (13) to address social inequality, focusing on pre-colonial social structures. Socio-cultures refer to the "coexistence of multiple orders of society, which originated in different historical times" that influence "the present and [remain] visible to a certain degree" and manage to blend "transformed and persisting elements with new elements" (13). This neatly applies to my analysis, with caste as a dominant Hindu social order that hitherto penetrates Indian societies as well as the practices of other religious communities within the postcolonial nation state. To understand realities on the ground for waste pickers, an intersectional framework is required that incorporates, among others, subaltern historiography and feminist genealogy.

Caste cannot be understood without taking other social categories such as gender, class, or religion into account. For instance, the historical practice of *devadasi*, the systematic prostitution of Dalit women and girls in temples, shows the interconnectedness of caste hierarchies, religion, and gendered oppression, or to be more precise, Brahmanical patriarchy (Chakravarti 2018). Sexual violence against Dalit women is still a suffocating reality for many and has developed into the practice of gang-rape (Teltumbde 2010), with upper caste perpetrators enjoying solidarity as the recent cases in Hathras, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Badaun have shown. Likewise, the religiously legitimated practice of excluding Dalits from access to knowledge is epistemic injustice par excellence and certainly not a relic of the past. Although reservation policies were introduced with the constitution to ensure educational equity for Dalits, the realities are sobering. The suicides of students like Rohith Vermula or Darshan Solanki keep us aware that caste discrimination continues in higher education too. As these brief examples show, socio-cultures are an indispensable part of daily life in modern-day India,

but interestingly the rhetoric and expressions of caste changed under colonialism, developmentalism, and neoliberalism. However, Hindu mythology, precisely the Manusmriti, which legitimizes the division of society, still encapsulates the denial of upward mobility and the systematic discrimination of Dalits. Utilizing this theological justification so overtly would clearly expose its incommensurability with democracy. Hence, other ways of articulation are preferred. Using a breadth of capitalist and colonial influences, the persisting dehumanization of and human rights violation against Dalits is nowadays concealed with current discourses on socio-economic "development" and the "backwardness" of Dalits and other marginalized communities.

In the interviews, the entanglement of social categories was very palpable. These women are literally the "Dalits of the Dalits" (Mandal 2010, 124), affected at least by a triple oppression (caste, gender, class), which must also be extended to include the categories of "age" and "religion" that are equally important in this interplay of marginalization. Trapped in a precarious existence of impoverishment, devaluation of labor, domestic violence, health issues, experiences of displacement, invisibility in the public realm, and a lack of gendered safety, the interviews highlighted the ongoing dehumanization of Dalit women after more than seventy-five years of independence. In short, Dalit women are the epitome of social inequality, being overtly affected by a double colonization – pertaining to the position of India in the world system and their social status within the postcolonial nation-state. Not only are they met with deliberate ignorance by upper caste women who dominate feminist discourses in the public and academia, producing a deep chasm by paying less attention to the struggles of Dalit women for mere survival, but these untenable conditions are also exacerbated by Brahmanical patriarchy and to a lesser extent by patriarchal convictions among Dalit men (Shepherd 2019) that goes hand in hand with unutterable physical, psychological, and symbolic violence (Shepherd 2019; Soundararajan 2022; Teltumbde 2010).

I argue at this point that an intersectional approach toward the analysis of the interdependency of social categories that create and help to reproduce social exclusion and privilege is incomplete without including an "ecological lens." Focusing on the waste pickers community, it is crucial to shed light on the unequal distribution of rights and resources, especially land and water, and healthcare. Following Mignolo and Walsh (2018), my work aims to move away from the "fictional ontology of nature" (159) that has favored the separation of nature from humans for too long. This Eurocentric epistemology has served as a linchpin for capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, and patriarchy to thrive on the violation of human bodies and exploitation of environments inhabited by marginalized communities (ibid.).

To capture the magnitude of environmental inequalities, this research project works with a variety of concepts. Looking at the enormous spatial dimension of waste in landfills like Bhalswa or Deonar, the apathy of the bureaucratic apparatus and vast parts of society, and the hazardous conditions on-site, the concept of "waste colonialism" helps to explore this particular space. While colonialism refers to "a system of domination that grants settler access to land for settler goals" (Liboiron 2018), waste colonialism adds another layer to this. It refers to the "entitlement to use land as a sink" (ibid.), where countries of the Global North or conglomerates take advantage of their power to dispose of their waste in the Global South. I would, however, not restrict it solely to actors in the Global North. The examples show that authorities in a post-colonial nation like India follow the footsteps of the European colonizers by disposing of municipal waste in these urban peripheries and neither offer any relief efforts to the surrounding communities nor formalize waste pickers to provide them with social security benefits. Similarly, Indian companies, as well as consumer society, also contribute to the phenomenon of waste colonialism. Furthermore, the segregation and displacement of the poor to peripheries is emblematic of the callous acceptance of the slow death of entire generations, no matter old or young. It is the political indifference of the bureaucratic regimes and civil society that enables this human and environmental disaster. To them, the poor are simply a hindrance to neoliberal modernization and spoil the immaculate image of financial and cultural metropolises. Waste colonialism is a cycle where the colonial patterns are hidden. First, it starts with the idea that a certain level of pollution is acceptable through legislation. Second, it continues with the damage done through the extraction of "natural sources" to create plastic, followed by the very idea from the Global North that waste management must be invented and other countries pressured to establish this model (Liboiron 2018).

Waste is disposed of close to informal settlements in urban peripheries. These populations that are either suffering from these poisoned environments or earning their income by practices such as waste picking are those being blamed for climate change or diseases, ergo stigmatized. As Guru (2012) points out in the context of Dalits, "the social morphology of the villages was replicated even in most of the urban cities of India" where elites continue to "not distinguish untouchables from physical dirt" (90), although they heavily rely on their labor. Sharma (2017), by analyzing the work of Brahmin activist Bhindeshwar Pathak as "eco-casteism," analyzes how Pathak's agency, which he sees as symptomatic for many Brahmin environmentalists, is framed in "an anti-Dalit and dominant Brahmanical discourse" (200). Pathak does not mention the Dalit identity of the manual scavengers he works with at all and rather believes that through their liberation they would become "Brahmins" with their minds "filled with

emotions" and their bodies "shivering" (199). When asked how waste pickers continued to work during the initial months of the pandemic, some women told me that when they picked up the garbage from non-Dalit colonies in the areas close by, they often faced expressions of disgust and avoidance by the residents. They often overheard conversations by dominant castes about how waste pickers would spread the virus because they are dirty by nature.

Likewise, the concept of "environmental suffering," as introduced by Auyero and Swistun (2009), is applicable to the multitude of waste pickers' stories in Indian slums. It defines suffering not as "an individual experience […] but […] experiences of affliction that are actively created and distributed by the social order itself" (17). Displacement, death through pollution and diseases, pandemic-related inequalities, etc., witnessed in the informal settlements in Delhi and Mumbai, are practically bodily manifestations of environmental suffering, engendered by the dominant social order. It is the "simple fact that the poor do not breathe the same air, drink the same water, or play on the same soil as the nonpoor do" (18). In the case of Dalit communities, it is also useful to work with the idea of "environmental casteism," which has been initially but quite vaguely introduced in comparative literature (Kumar and Mishra 2022). By "environmental casteism," I refer to caste as the decisive factor in enabling and shaping environmental injustices, in short, the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on Dalits and lower castes. Discourses on environmental justice were first developed by Afro-American communities in the 1980s, also known as "environmental racism," which rightly addressed "racism inherent in the unfair distribution of environmental goods and risks" (Ituen and Tatu Hey 2021, 4). Bullard (1993) defines environmental racism as "any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (23). Racism as a North American and European concept, however, does not fit into the Indian context. Recent discourses of environmental justice by scholars about South Asia remain largely caste blind. There is hardly any reference to caste in the unpacking of histories and geographies of exclusion, not even in the literature on the "environmentalism of the poor" in India itself. This is due to the fact that environmentalism in India is shaped and dominated by upper-caste discourses and thoughts (Sharma 2017).

To counter the current situation, it is necessary to explicitly name the roots of these inequalities and examine the nexus between caste, gender, class, age, religion, and ecological injustices, using more holistic concepts. Some of the aforementioned ideas provide a first possibility to do so. Dalit women as bodily manifestations of multiple inequalities must be analyzed in relation to their environments as the urban space plays an important role in Dalits' environmental

visions, being often associated with caste freedom, but nevertheless remains a "pharmakon" (Dhawan 2014), being medicine and poison at the same time.

"Can Waste Pickers Speak?": Decolonial Praxis and the Power of Dalit Pedagogies

From this episode, the key question remains: How can Dalit women challenge the socio-economic, political, and ecological discriminations they encounter in their daily lives? From the interviews, it emerged that although both women have the same professional background and are part of collectives that serve as affirmative spaces; there are nevertheless differences in their perceptions and actions. Sushila grew up conscious of being a Dalit and clearly identified herself as such during the interview. She knows that as a Dalit woman she inhabits multiple spaces of belonging but is excluded simultaneously from other spaces. It was precisely this awareness from a very young age and personal experiences that galvanized her into action. Even when she achieved upward mobility through her position as a community worker, she was not dazzled by her new status and rather helped to plant the seeds for a better future for her community.

Whereas Sushila wants to put more effort into perfecting her craft, the situation for Hasina is much more difficult. Being a Muslim low-caste woman, she is exposed to multiple forms of discrimination: first, as a Muslim in a country that has struggled with radical Hindutva forces and their gruesome violence for a long time;[99] second, as a lower-caste person within the Muslim community, the situation is even more complex. For a long time, Muslims in India were perceived as a monolithic community, but recently, members of low castes, known as *Ajlaws,* have been very active. They have vociferously addressed the violence they encounter by upper caste Muslims, known as *Ashrafs*. However, there is much to be done. Ashrafs are under pressure to maintain their power as the Pasmanda movement would include approximately 80 percent of the Muslims in India. Third, this movement originates from Northern India, and given the country's cultural plurality, it is difficult to assume whether they are entitled to speak for all low-caste Muslims as their situation varies in other states. Organizing activism among low-caste Muslims in India remains difficult as they have the lowest literacy rates on the national level.[100] Hence, it remains challenging to reach out to them as access to information is still not a public commodity. From a

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[99] During an interview in Delhi with a female Pasmanda Muslim leader (Pasmanda is the Persian equivalent to Dalit that can be literally translated as "marginalized"), I was told that the victims of lynchings by majoritarian forces are either Pasmanda Muslims or Hindu Dalits.

[100] As per the report by the Committee on the Establishment of Educational Institutions for Educationally Backward Minorities from 2017, commissioned by the Ministry of Minority Affairs in India, the literacy rate among Muslims is 68.53 percent against the national average of 72.98 percent

gendered perspective, being a low-caste Muslim woman correlates with poverty, illiteracy, and patriarchy, hindering her activity and visibility in the public sphere. In summary, major factors hinder the consciousness of Muslim Dalits, mingled with a pinch of shame to reveal their caste identities. During the interview, Hasina was very open about her caste background by mentioning her full name, which immediately reveals one's status. Many other women, especially young women who migrated to cities like Delhi recently, were hesitant or even mentioned upper caste family names such as Khan or Pathan to veil their castes. Then again, others were more aware of their castes but did not know whether they were Sunni or Shia Muslims.

On a collective level, there was also a major difference between the NGOs and the waste pickers in Delhi and Mumbai. In the NGO in Mumbai, the board members were all upper-caste women but were aware of the plight of female waste pickers. They had become early allies in the fight against social ills and gave their members autonomy within the self-help groups and as community workers. The board members have a more representative position and primarily support the self-help groups in opening a bank account, whereas decision-making within the self-help groups, leadership sessions, or presentations of the waste pickers nationally and internationally are mostly done by the members. The community leaders have emerged as harbingers of hope as they also share their knowledge with the next generations of waste pickers, enabling a flabbergasting shift from leadership with a single charismatic figure towards an approach in which everyday people can take ownership of activism and find their voices and skills as they work to fight marginalization.

These self-help groups, strong albeit small, give waste pickers a space to articulate their pain and anger, a powerful way for subaltern voices to reconstruct liberation narratives. Being themselves from the same community, the community workers bring to the fore the confluence of memory and purpose joined to strengthen the rights of other waste pickers. For those women who joined the regular meetings, just being able to say what happened "out loud" helped them to begin their journey of healing. For other women in these groups, finding solidarity with others who have experienced similar issues was a crucial step to alleviate the bulk of anxiety and frustration. This was then supplemented by Dalit social workers and feminist activists like Kranti, who was the first in her family to fight for education and now educates other women in her community as she knows firsthand the triple vileness of capitalism, casteism, and patriarchy. Women like her are also able to bridge the lacuna between theory and praxis and are true trailblazers in leading social movements.

All of this was missing in the work of the NGO in Delhi. Members did not share the same level of solidarity as the Dalit waste pickers; the organization

lacked community workers who represented Dalit social identities; and it relied on the massive work that Maria was passionately supporting on her shoulders. Furthermore, the NGO's future is more uncertain, given Maria's retirement and new political regulations under the BJP that strictly control donations to Christian and Islamic NGOs in India, as well as Christian-affiliated foreign donations to Dalit NGOs. The BJP argues that it fears "forced conversions" under the guise of humanitarian work. This makes the work of activists like Maria very difficult. In Bhalswa, there is also more competition from new NGOs, which make great promises but are short-lived as many projects are temporally limited. This leaves many women with few options as they tend to select self-help groups according to economic benefits but do not want a membership for more than a year.

Following Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), I argue that both the work done by pedagogues from marginalized communities toward the empowerment of women and the creation of awareness among the oppressed are a form of quotidian and powerful resistance. It is for the critical pedagogical practices to engender change in the long run. Epistemic injustice and the systematic denial of knowledge prove to be major burdens in the fight against inequalities. With rising awareness about their rights and resources but also about the power mechanisms of social exclusion that keep female waste workers oppressed, sustainable change is possible. These educators must also give more attention to environmental injustices as people are indeed aware that they live in inhumane conditions but do not exactly know how to act against it. During the interviews, I decided to ask very basic questions to provide the waste pickers space as bearers of knowledge. They could easily explain the obvious social wrongs but always wondered about the political inertia and the deliberate reluctance of authorities to eliminate the inhumane conditions. A critical Dalit pedagogy that puts their struggles at the core of its work is a first step towards genuine liberation.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has provided a couple of insights. First, waste picking is not simply a profession done by the "poor." A more in-depth analysis of their social backgrounds is required. It is particularly important to address the "Dalitness" of this field, the relegation of this kind of work to Dalits, where untouchability is enmeshed with other forms of marginalization, such as gendered, religious, or class oppression. To understand this vicious cycle, an intersectional analysis with a focus on subaltern testimonies and historiography is needed.

Second, an ecological lens is imperative to understand the environmental injustices in Dalit communities. Delhi and Mumbai are always mentioned as

risky places when it comes to the Air Quality Index,[101] but a deeper analysis of the reasons and the unequal impact of pollution and climate change on marginalized and impoverished urban communities is crucial. Marginalized communities in India's urban peripheries do accept this deadly subordination to a certain extent, not because they are not aware of the toxic hazards but because they constantly need to survive amid the uncertain vicissitudes of rising authoritarianism and the volatility of the free market. Their environments are neglected and publicly disregarded. Simply, it is societal ignorance, political inertia, and lack of social recognition that aggravates the situation for millions of waste pickers.

At the same time, these women are not simply passive objects that will docilely accept subordination. On the contrary. Once they receive social recognition and support, they will fight against social inequalities. For this, however, pedagogies and knowledge production stemming from the community itself are essential because, without their voices, efforts to empower waste pickers will lack depth and credibility and carry the risk of perpetuating the essentialist perspectives of privileged groups. These Dalit pedagogies are an incredibly important facet of daily decolonial praxis. Not only remarkable events of resistance constitute decolonial praxis, but also every single daily act that challenges and deconstructs multi-layered social inequality.

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[101] The Air Quality Index (AQI) was developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide a uniform way to report daily air quality conditions. The AQI is based on the measurement of particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), Ozone (O_3), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2), Sulfur Dioxide (SO_2) and Carbon Monoxide (CO) emissions.

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Comparing Conflicts: Racialized Crisis in Cuba in the Early Republic

Angela Eva Gutierrez

For three months in 1912, the new republic of Cuba put forth a military campaign to quell a protest in the east, labeled a "race war" that would end in the tragic massacre of thousands of Afro-Cubans. This chapter examines the framing of events in the book *Guerra de Razas: Negros contra Blancos* (*Race War: Blacks against Whites*) by Rafael Conte y Mayolino and José Capmany.[102] The title already makes a controversial statement, positioning Rafael Conte as an educated, white male journalist anchored in a white-black dichotomy. The description of the Independent Party of Color (PIC) as the enemy was more a specter of fear rather than a war. The fears that propelled the government's action reflect the interwoven nature of belonging to a nation and race and its complexity. Conte's account frames the PIC as a threat against the nation but, at the same time, a racialized threat against the same citizens that constitute the country that he repeatedly claims are to be protected. The main argument is that focusing on comparing allows an examination beyond othering and can outline how someone uses comparisons, in this case, whether as a rhetorical tool to justify the government's actions or inadvertently through his position as a war correspondent. Nevertheless, the role of comparisons in order to juggle the national ideology in theory while upholding colonial power structures in practice was critical to the arguments presented.

Calling the protest launched by the PIC a war gave the Cuban government the needed pretext to violently crush the protesters through the designating of the PIC's aim as a threat to the young nation. At a fragile moment in Cuba's formation of a nation based on a racial democracy in which all Cubans are bonded by an egalitarian ideology of fellowship, the government's insistence on war, let alone a "race war," lends a contradictory view of what the nation was built upon.[103] For three months, the new republic of Cuba put forth a military campaign to quell a protest in the east, labeled a "race war" that would end in the tragic massacre

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[102] Rafael Conte and José Capmany are listed as co-authors of the book *Guerra de Razas*. They were both journalists, but Conte is usually referred to as the primary author. José Capmany's role in the book is not clearly identified. Conte pens a letter at the beginning where he refers to the editing and collection of the articles as a joint project but does not specify whether Capmany was the author of any of the articles, which are not properly cited to any newspaper or date.

[103] The concept of a racial democracy, a term that denotes democracies free of racial discrimination, originally referring to Brazil, spread throughout Latin America as many independent movements moved to remove racial distinctions and some opened up citizenship to those previously denied political participation (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 2018, 280).

of thousands of Afro-Cubans. The main question is how does the narrator utilize comparisons? And what kind of enduring comparisons does he use and reshape? Conte's argument needed these comparisons to juggle the national ideology in theory while upholding colonial power structures in practice.

Due to the emphasis on race within the name of the party, the opposition considered the party to be a threat to the new nation's stability and sought to delegitimize the party through resurfaced fears that had been echoed in every major rebellion in Cuba, including all the wars of independence, leading up to the claims of a "race war" as articulated by the book *Guerra de Razas*. The book is framed through his position among the soldiers as he was following the military campaign as a war correspondent.[104] and this collection of articles aiming to piece together a narrative ties elements of the notion of a nation grounded in an ideal citizen and how one should embody patriotism with the notion of race as an identity rather than "unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another" (Tyson 2014, 344). Therefore, the accusation of racism that Conte assigns to the PIC seems to come from the idea that publicly ascribing to both Blackness and nationality race would inevitably overshadow Cuban identity. Unlike Conte, this chapter understands race as a social construction of human categorization that attaches a plethora of different traits, such as skin color and physical traits, to assumed behavior and generalized stereotypes that generate a subjective hierarchy maintained by racism, which is the belief that the hierarchy is justified leading to discriminatory actions. While the chapter examines the narrative of Rafael Conte, it is also important not to elevate his argument but to examine how he compares in juxtaposition certain writings of the PIC and government correspondence. Newspapers were instrumental in the formation and circulation of this narrative, and as a journalist, Rafael Conte is one of many actors in this regard. Thus, the chapter also addresses how comparing plays a dangerous role in the discourse surrounding what historians now dub the massacre of 1912.

It may not be evident why one would call upon the commonplace mechanism of comparing to investigate this narrative, but it is precisely the everyday practices, may they be seemingly inconsequential, that order and shape how people see and navigate the world. Comparing is not merely innocent; it has a role in the creation of categories by putting certain entities in relation to one another (Epple, Erhart, and Grave 2020). Setting entities or objects in relation to one another identifies how they are different but also similar in one respect or

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[104] Conte is labeled as a war correspondent because of his many stints as such in other places and because he is considered as such by others. The book was printed by the military press of Antonio Peréz, and therefore a connection to the military through the printing and the production of the book, and also, his narrative heavily reflects the government's narrative against the PIC.

aspect. The importance of comparing in this chapter is not just situated in what comparing can produce but also examining how comparing is done in action with a focus on the individual that sets the practice in motion. The actor decides what is compared but does so in the social space in which they develop. Comparison as a practice stems from practice theory, which composes a theory of human action that entails a plethora of various approaches among practice theorists (Grave 2015). The practice of comparing could reveal more complexities than focusing on othering because its very mechanics include both similarities and differences in the triangular structure of comparisons through the *comparata*, the objects or entities compared, and the *tertium comparationis* or *tertia* plural, the quality that puts the compared entities into relation.

The conditions in which social imbalances thrive are many, but crises, conflicts, and comparisons play a major role in environments of inequality in the wide variety of unequal social relations. While it is not difficult to see where conflicts and crises play major roles in unequal access to power or resources, comparisons are overlooked because comparing is not only large in scope, in that almost everything is compared, but also a practice that can be put under the microscope. In the exploration of how Conte compares, the first section of this chapter provides context, while the second delves into the mechanics of comparing through which the different comparisons between Haiti and Cuba are examined. The third section focuses on some of Conte's inconsistencies, which attempt to reappropriate comparisons justifying racial hierarchies entangled with his understanding of the national ideology.

Context and Comparing

In the wake of gaining freedom from Spain, the United States condition of guardianship in the form of the Platt Amendment put the young Cuban nation in a precarious position between becoming a nation and the influence of external forces like the United States. While the development of the conceptualization of the nation included familiar concepts of fraternity and democracy, in practice, Afro-Cubans were still placed in subordinate positions during the independence wars (Hoffnung-Garskof 2019). The ideal Cuba illustrated in the writings of Cuban Nationalist and intellectual José Martí fell short for the Afro-Cuban community, which did not have the same opportunities as the white soldiers they fought alongside on the battlefield. Once slavery was formally ended in 1886, after a period of prolonged apprenticeship, the role of the newly freed in the insurgency, as well as in the nation overall, was wrapped in Western-inspired notions of freedom and brotherhood, yet the stereotypes and established

comparisons that justified the deeply rooted social hierarchy remained (Helg 1995).[105]

The egalitarian notion of the nation did not dismantle the social hierarchies and racialized systems of knowledge that maintained distinctions. José Martí writes of a Cuban race in which "there can be no racial animosity, because there are no races" in an attempt to join all Cubans under one common identity (Martí 2004, 127). However, does such a maneuver undo the social, economic, and political reality of those to whom those labels were placed upon? The contradictions come from differing interpretations of race, identity, and power struggles, internally and externally, as well as lingering fears, which influenced the actions of President José Miguel Gómez's government. The Constitution of 1901, compiled by the constitutional convention, stated that "All Cubans have equal rights before the law. The republic does not recognize any personal privileges or special rights," and with its ratification, the article to some was seen as a solidified solution to address inequality (Cuban Const. art. XI, § 1).[106]

In an attempt to blur the racial divisions among Cubans, Martí's writings aimed to focus on the common goal of sovereignty rather than division, which could hinder – and could have hindered – earlier independence movements, in the little war, for example. Within the insurgent movement, however, while the national ideology could create opportunities for Afro-Cuban to mobilize and a space to talk about race, it also had its limits and could be a "powerful force of exclusion" (Pérez 1986, 43). Within this complex moment in the early stages of its nation-building, the Afro-Cuban intellectual Rafael Serra stated that:

> The class of color must organize itself, not with absurd pretensions of wanting to govern, but with the just desire of demanding that they be governed well […] it must not trust in the promises of justice written in all of the national constitutions, because since those principles of justice are not embodied in those that have the obligation to make sure that they are complied with and respected (Fusté 2016, 226)

Article 6 of the Constitution becomes a promise with no clear guidelines on how to be implemented or a concise understanding of what discrimination is or what it looks like, and in fact, does not mention race at all (Fúste 2016).[107] Serra's call for the organization of people of color had a long history of Afro-

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[105] The decree for the abolishment of slavery was made in 1880, but an apprenticeship system was put into place called the *Patronato*, which lasted 6 years.

[106] The first section of the constitution explains the rights of suffrage on page 5 of a translated version of the constitution in English. See University of Florida Digital collection at the George A. Smathers Library. URL: https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021686/00001/6. (Cuban Const. art. XI, § 1).

[107] In a 1901 letter to the editor of El Pueblo Libre cited from Fusté (2016) "Translating Negroes into Negros: Rafael Serra's Transamerican Entanglements Between Black Cuban Racial and Imperial Subalternity, 1895–1909 (226).

Cuban social community outreach. The political climate in 1901 was one heavily influenced by U.S. occupation, which brought its own form of racism and authority over Cuban sovereignty, made bluntly clear in the U.S.'s withholding of approval of the 1901 Constitution until the inclusion of the Platt Amendment (Pérez 1986). The Afro-Cuban community was not a monolithic group but rather included social differentiations within the community that experienced social stratification, which was determined by factors such as skin color, ancestry, and socio-economic status (Kemner 2010). However, Afro-Cubans had a long tradition of networking and mobilization exemplified by the *cabildos de nacion* as well as religious fraternities or brotherhoods as known as *cofradias,* which created a unique network that connected the enslaved and the freed working to provide resources to the community and vital to resistance through rebellions (Finch 2019). Having lived in the New York exile community, Serra, alongside many, including José Martí, experienced a Trans-Atlantic realm with which the major actors in Cuban independence were in contact, exchanging and interacting with other diasporic experiences. However, due to the large and connected networks that Afro-Cubans created, the Spanish authorities perceived and spread fear of any large number of Afro-Cuban political and public participation as a threat of a race war stemming from the legacy of the Haitian revolution.

In 1908, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet, who both fought during the independence wars as well as the August Revolution of 1906,[108] founded the Independent Party of Color (PIC). Following the political turbulence of shaping a democracy under the paternal watch of the U.S., Estenoz and Ivonnet belonged to a group of Afro-Cubans that was disillusioned with the promises made by political parties to the Afro-Cuban community and felt politically marginalized from political mobilization (Palmer 2014). The issues of most concern, educational opportunities and securing stable employment, were not being made accessible, as racism and discrimination were ongoing within these vital sectors of everyday life. The founding of the PIC in 1908 sought to identify unresolved issues of discrimination that were not taken seriously and understood as a nonissue in general for those not directly faced with it. The PIC aimed to create a platform, establish an official newspaper as well as win seats in congressional elections. While mounting opposition accused the party of being only for Afro-Cubans, their platform included various points that did not have to do with race. The party had a twelve-point platform in which the two out of twelve that did mention race addressed the ban on Black immigration as well as more opportunities for the employment of Afro-Cubans in public jobs (Robaina

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[108] General José Miguel Gómez launched a Liberal rebellion to overthrow the Moderate government in August 1906 after the reelection of Estrada Palma in the general election of 1905. The rebellion lead to the second U.S. intervention from 1906-1909.

1990, 66).[109] The preference for white workers in these public jobs that paid more and more security was not very subtle. The statistics showed a lack of Afro-Cuban representation in these public jobs, such as teachers, soldiers, and government employees (Pérez 1986).

The accusation of creating a party on the basis of race was not substantiated since there were also white members of the party. Opposition also stemmed from others in the Afro-Cuban community, such as Martin Morúa Delgado, who believed the creation of such a group could encourage white Cubans to establish their own political parties in response (De la Fuente 1999). An article in *Previsión* prompted the arrests of PIC leaders in 1910 on the grounds that it incited violence, according to the authorities. A trial transpired for which Alexander Eastman (2019) stated that "it cannot be underemphasized that in 1910, the year in which the PIC had secured regional committees in every province of the country, the party was unable to present candidates for office because their leaders had been wrongfully imprisoned" (75). The culmination of opposition against the party came to a head when an amendment was passed that barred their participation in the upcoming elections, passed under the name of one of the few Afro-Cuban senators at the time, Martin Moruá Delgado. In response, the PIC decided to fight against the amendment by putting pressure on the government to overturn this policy and allow their participation in the election through an armed protest, attempting to put pressure by going after foreign property.

By using the term "race war," the entities that label the massacre as such, namely the government of President Gómez, suggested that the nation was at risk and promptly declared a threat. However, a racializing of Cuban identity in which notions of white supremacy were increasingly associated with the ideal Cuban citizen ascribing racial characteristics to national identity had been intensified beforehand. The government's reaction to the protest as a threat to the nation brought about a massive show of force through the number of soldiers, new military equipment, U.S. Marines sent to protect property, an increase in unregulated militias, and most importantly, the suspension of constitutional guarantees requested by President Gómez on June 5, approved by the congress, which instituted the 1869 Spanish law of public order (Helg 1995). Many were targeted for their skin color, whether or not they supported the PIC. The tragic result was the murder of around 5,000-6,000 Afro-Cubans at the hands of the military and informal militias (Helg 1995). The label of "race war" has thus been reexamined by historians, and new perspectives have been highlighted to bring light to the victims of what is now labeled a massacre. The historiography

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[109] Job distribution was a major issue, and while some Afro-Cubans were able to enter into secure government employment as a result of this revolution, it was not a long-term solution. (Helg 1995, 138).

of the 1912 massacre has been steadily rising since the 1990s and also includes documentaries that seek to trace the discourse and focus on the lives of those targeted.

In order to examine the debate, it is necessary to look briefly at what kind of research has been done on this topic before looking into the debate at the time and why the contents of *Guerra de Razas* are seldom examined.[110] The first in-depth study of the PIC, titled *Los Independientes de Color: Historia del Partido Independiente de Color*, was published in 1950 by Serafín Portuondo Linares,who was criticized for not taking a Marxist approach in his analysis, which did mention a class struggle but also emphasized race apart from class. *Política y Color en Cuba*, written by Rafael Fermoselle as a dissertation in 1972, used a substantial amount of U.S. archival documents and records and was later published as a book in 1974. Louis A. Pérez's 1986 article "Politics, Peasants, and People of Color" looks more into how U.S. American intervention affected the early republic through various factors such as land distribution, U.S. American investment in said land, population changes reflected in data regarding marriage and fertility, immigration, changing economic opportunities due to agricultural production, and employment rates of Afro-Cubans, as well as their political representation or lack thereof. As for secondary sources looking very in-depth into the massacre, Aline Helg's *Our Rightful Share* is rife with detailed information on the events leading to the massacre and the three months of the military campaign (Helg 1995). Tomas Robaina's *El Negro en Cuba* considers the PIC to represent a more affluent sector of the Afro-Cuban population rather than a wider swath of the community. However, *The Neglected Narratives of Cuba's Partido Independiente de Color* by Alexander Eastman argues that the PIC was more circulated and favored than let on (Eastman 2019). These sources give a rich contextual foundation; however, few of these texts include content from *Guerra de Razas*, only occasionally listing it in the bibliographies. Conte's book reflects a position of power through his post alongside the military, in which the voices of the PIC and the victims of the massacre are not included due to the framing of this event as a war, in effect legitimizing violence. While Conte never uses the word crisis in his book describing the so-called "race war," it is implied because the threat is seen as monumental.

To supplement a close reading, it is important to know more about a major actor making the comparison. Rafael Conte y Mayolino was born in Havana in 1877, the son of a Spanish diplomat. His privileged position in society afforded him the opportunity to attend Harvard, and his experiences in the U.S. were the

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[110] However, a recent article released in 2022 by Julio César Guanche, originally published as a prologue for the new edition of *Guerra de Razas*, does look in-depth at the content of the book. (Guanche 2022).

topic of his first publication, *Impresiones americanas*, in 1908.[111] Conte became a journalist, writing for multiple newspapers and becoming a correspondent on several battlefields: first in Peking (now Beijing) as a reporter on the Boxer Rebellion, then in the Russo-Japanese War, and later in the so-called "race war" of 1912, as well as in the World War I (Paz 2003, 55). Rafael Conte's position as a journalist and war correspondent in 1912 resulted in the publication of the book *Guerra de Razas* shortly after the massacre by the military printing company of Antonio Pérez. The book is a compilation of articles, including testimonials and interviews, but also some that have nothing to do with the 'war' itself, rather editorials that discuss the PIC and the root of the racial divide. His writing style has elements of yellow journalism, emphasizing emotion in the sensational telling of events.[112] For example, he sets the reader up to expect major conflict, like in the chapter "Un Viaje Terrible" (a terrible trip), in which the reader fully expects a dramatic event to happen. Rumors of the PIC destroying trains and taking people hostage were circulating among the passengers, some of whom were brandishing weapons but the emotions only led to an anti-climactic ending in which no such drama occurred. While Conte only mentions Haiti by name once, the notion of raising the black flag as a reference is seen multiple times throughout the text; this next section, however, will look at not only how Conte compares but also how Afro-Cuban journalist Juan Gualberto Gómez uses the same practice to make his own argument in opposition.

Comparing Haiti and Cuba

This chapter understands comparing as a practice that is acted out by an actor situated in a particular context and through the position of the person making the comparison. When an actor makes that comparison, they are putting things into relation with each other, making decisions based on many variables and choosing the criteria for the comparison. Why is the doing of comparing seldom seen as a critical practice? Comparing organizes knowledge, builds patterns, and has meaning behind it, which displays the cracks of its seemingly innocent facade. There are various typologies, but the typology adopted in this article identifies three types of comparisons: neutral, evaluative, and progressive (Steinmetz

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[111] His publications included *Impresiones americanas* (1908), *Guerra de Razas* (1912), *Comparsas de la Historia* (1925), and *Los Mariscales de Napoleón* (1926). He passed away at age 53 in February 1930 in Havana.

[112] The U.S. Office of the Historian says that yellow journalism's heyday was in the 1890s, even mentioning its major role in pushing the United States to war with Spain. The origin of the term was created in reference to a competition of the biggest newspapers in the U.S., owned by Pulitzer and Hearst, to get a popular comic whose main character was called yellow kid, which eventually became a term that was associated to the writing style of certain newspapers competing for more readership, emphasizing sensationalism over the facts. (Office of the Historian 2019).

2019). Neutral comparisons emphasize differences without putting them in a certain hierarchy of value, while evaluative comparisons establish a better/ worse value upon the entities in relation to one another. Progressive comparisons also settle at a value but do so on a temporal scale, in which there are stages to either be achieved or are yet to be reached. Comparing is a practice that also carries with it not only the person making the comparison but also their social and physical surroundings.

Generally, practice theory focuses on practices as the "smallest unit of the social and cultural world" (Grave 2015, 139). Through practices, many elements come into view simultaneously, such as the acting subject and the structures in which the practice is embedded. Defining what a practice is also comes with variations such as human activity, social actions, material events, collective patterns of action, modes of action, cyclical patterns of habits, etc. (Haasis and Rieske 2015, 14-15). All of these variations come down to what people do, namely the patterns of human "doings and sayings" (Schatzki 1996, 89). The focus is on what people do when they compare, and it offers a different perspective without falling into alterity because – though Conte's arguments suggest a strong binary and the social reality that stems from this worldview reduces complexity into black and white – even in such cases when differences are highlighted, there is still the connection that puts both entities into relation, which makes the comparison possible.

The long enduring comparison made between the Haitian revolution and any protest or political action conducted by the Afro-Cuban community strikes a particular chord in the narrative that mostly boasts of patriotism, which aims to put some distance from movements by comparing them to Haiti. Conte asserts that "It has been repeated with marked insistence that the supreme aspiration of Evaristo Estenoz and his lieutenants (Ivonet, Lacoste, Surin, and others) consisted of nothing less than the establishment of a Black republic, carved into the molds of Haiti." (Conte and Capmany 1912, 17). The quote is an implicit comparison in that the reader would need to know that the reference refers to Haiti and the Haitian revolution. The comparison is brought up repeatedly, conjured throughout rebellions and all three of the independence wars, which, in 1912, related the PIC's alleged aspiration of such a republic to that of the Haitian revolution as a model. Ghilani et al. (2017) suggest a typology that considers the effects related to the use of historical analogies, namely examining the representation of a situation, defining the roles of the actors, making decisions, and analyzing the persuasiveness of a message. The employment of the comparison between Cuba and Haiti usually highlights the similarities between the two countries and forms an analogy that assumes a similar result would occur in Cuba, that of a "race war." The typology provided by Ghilani et al. (2017) is meant to be a heuristic tool in

light of findings which, in the case of the "race war" analogy, the four elements provide an insight into the ways in which historical analogies are perceived by dissecting the analogy itself. It is the repeated use of this analogy that makes it a practice of comparing and altering the perception of an event in its application. How is the perception altered? The usage of this analogy, in particular, does not just point to the possible outcome of a "race war." It also conjures the fear of non-white rule and, moreover, violence against whites.

The press also spread this idea and created panic about a possible racial uprising (Robaina 1990). The government correspondence does not make an explicit comparison with Haiti, but Conte does. The association with a Black republic is made several times throughout the narrative, along with the imagery of raising a so-called "racist flag." As the title of the book indicates, he assumes a never-ending racial struggle, but he begins his narrative by designating a threat to the nation, of which the PIC is considered an instigator. The PIC was not only accused of trying to institute a republic, but they were also accused of trying to encourage U.S. Intervention, which is mentioned in Conte's writings. When Conte thanks the military, which he does frequently throughout, he states, "to the brilliant leaders and officers and heroic and self-sacrificing soldiers of the Republic, who, by crushing the racist revolution, saved Cuba from internal anarchy and foreign interference," and thus addresses both concerns (Conte and Capmany 1912, 1). The elements of foreign interference and internal racial struggle are arguments used by the government to use the maximum force possible. While Conte ironically praises the U.S. for training the new military as well as sending ships with marines to the east, the latter is seen much more suspiciously by Conte and the state. When Conte evokes the words "racist revolution," it is also interesting in that it is only an accusation placed on the PIC, whereas the creation of militias that highlight their whiteness and arm white Cubans is not questioned in fighting against a so-called "racist revolution" as whiteness is seen as standard in a position of power (De la Fuente 2001).[113].

The fear and anticipation of a "race war" felt by white Cubans were also addressed by Afro-Cuban intellectuals using comparison to argue a different point. In addressing the idea of a "race war" and whether it would be possible for a "Black republic" to be established in Cuba, Afro-Cuban intellectual and journalist Juan Gualberto Gómez refuted the possibility with a resounding no because Cubans are different, and had a different relationship to white Cubans than the enslaved of Saint-Domingue. He specifically adds a list of why such a war is not possible, including emphasizing a difference in the African origin of the enslaved of both places, asserting that the origin of the enslaved in Cuba

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[113] There are many mentions of unregulated militias or *voluntarios* (volunteers) of Cubans who were armed and patrolling the streets, some even forming all-white militias. (De la Fuente 2001).

was not from warring tribes as opposed to the origin of the enslaved in Saint-Domingue. Gualberto Gómez also states there were more American born among the enslaved in Cuba that the ratio between white and Black was more agreeable. Moreover, he mentions that the conditions under slavery in Cuba were milder in comparison, due to white Cubans who freed their slaves and had a hand in emancipation, and lastly, that there was no known hate for the white man, rather a fraternity that was forged to construct a sovereign nation (Helg 1995, 52).[114] Rather than trying to question the trope as such, Gualberto Gómez called on national context to differentiate between the two. To widen the difference, he uses comparison with multiple *tertium*, adding more elements that serve to establish a difference between the *comparata,* Cuba and Saint-Domingue (Haiti). The emphasis on difference provides a powerful comparison to create distance and resistance to the analogy.

There are various *tertium* in play with this comparison, like the origin of the descendent, birthplace of the enslaved, population ratio, the role of whites in the abolishment of slavery, as well as a feeling towards whites. In order to make that differentiation, the argumentation uses comparisons, but the interesting element, especially when differences are being emphasized, is the decision upon which *tertia* is chosen, which has a lot to do with the actor and the context. The comparison between Haiti and Cuba was already established by this point, having been evoked multiple times in multiple contexts. Therefore, the *tertia* in Gualberto Gómez's argument is a collection of criteria in which the arguments of actors who previously pointed to similarities as a cause for concern were then turned on their head to point out why such a conflict would and could not happen, pointing to the overall context of each country as inherently different. The elements of comparing are present, but the *tertia* are rejected as not being proper aspects to relate both contexts, therefore incommensurable because Gómez perceives "the scales [are] insufficient to deliver a ranking" (Von Sass 2020, 92). Juan Gualberto Gómez puts distance between the *comparata* by emphasizing that there was too great of a difference to assume that a similar conflict or rebellion could occur. It is also under the pretext of a better/worse valuation in reference to slavery and its transition to nationhood.

The Cuban government's action displays two major fears in the discourse on the massacre in 1912: one, the fear of U.S. intervention, and the other, the fear of a black republic – the legacy of the Haitian revolution. The latter fear stems from the idea of an alleged proper proportion of Afro-Cubans, which

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[114] While these articles are mentioned in Aline Helg's book, *Our Rightful Share,* they come from a series of issues from Juan Gualberto Gómez's newspaper *La Igualdad* in 1893, in 4 parts exactly, responding to another newspaper *Diario de la Marina* that mentioned the comparison between Cuba and Haiti and in connection the idea of a race war. Found at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí.

transformed into policy through *blanqueamiento* (whitening), encouraging an increase of white migrants to the country to whiten the population, referencing an imbalance in the ratio of white and Black in Saint-Domingue with a ratio of half a million enslaved and 30,000 white colonists (Geggus and Fiering 2009, 3). The metaphor of racial balance was seen as faltering, and intervention was seen as a possible consequence (Helg 1995). This metaphor lays blame onto the PIC for supposedly triggering an imbalance when the aim was "to be governed well." The metaphor of balancing bars between Black and white points to what is assumed to occur if said harmony was disturbed, namely a "race war," as a reference Saint-Domingue. Census records could be used to justify and implement policies of whitening correlating with massive Spanish migration from 1902-1912 (Loveman 2014; Pérez 1986). Scientific racism was also an influencing factor in the legitimacy of white supremacy, going as far as to exhume the national hero, Afro-Cuban General Antonio Maceo, to measure his bones and skull, which concluded that his strong bones were influenced by his African ancestry and the size of his skull "could be mistaken for the head of the most gifted European in terms of those portions" attributing his "white side" as the source of his intelligence (Montalvo et al. 1900, 4). Conte's text also reflects these ideas of European superiority as well as biological racism.

Alongside the comparisons that have racially charged references to the independence wars or his opposition to the PIC, the next quote has more to do with race than any ideal of a nation. This quote reveals long-held beliefs on race and the social Darwinism that Conte applied to the concept. In a chapter titled "The Fight of Races," in which he outlines what he calls an insurrection and looks back to the independence wars, Conte's argued why a racial conflict was inevitable:

> Similar ethnics, originating from the same mother race, since in this case it could be expected that with the course of the centuries they would end up mixing and confusing themselves, as the Germanic whites of Ataulfo and Alaric were confused and mixed with the Latin whites of the Roman provinces; but, being Caucasians and Ethiopians, the mixture is impossible, since not even through continuous and scientific crossing, can the total disappearance of one of the two races be achieved to the benefit of the other (Conte and Capmany 1912, 9)

By using the term mother race, he is asserting that the mother race is white and that not all races come from the same origin, which would fall under the concept of polygenism, which argues that humans have multiple origins and not just one. Polygenists, like the previously mentioned Cuban anthropologist Luis Montané, collected skulls to measure them and correlated brain size with intelligence to demonstrate his speculation of multiple human geneses (Bronfman 2004, 30).

Therefore, Conte could have been heavily influenced by the anthropology of the time using these measurements and arguments to legitimize a hierarchy of people. The comparison between different groups of white people is a neutral comparison that does not necessarily apply value to them, but in the comparisons between white and Black, the emphasis is that one must win out against the other. He refers to scientific crossing and the concept of social Darwinism, which took the concept of evolution and applied it to social hierarchies in which the statement "survival of the fittest" emerged to justify the hierarchy.

The Function of Comparing

The inconsistencies in Conte's argument show the interests that underline an attempt to not only embody an ideal of unity and brotherhood but also incorporate and sustain a colonial structure that held white leadership as a fundamental order of governance. Comparisons allow these contradictory concepts to be entangled because the actor chooses upon which aspects both *comparata* would be judged on, and while it is clear that these two concepts of a burgeoning egalitarian ideal of nationhood and the social structure of colonial power contrast, it is the comparison that allows a reshaping of the two ideas to fit with each other. When he compares it explicitly, he puts both sides (Black and white) in relation and sets something to the top or bottom of the hierarchy. However, they do not always correlate with better or worse explicitly based on race; rather, it was consistently present in the overall content, cloaked in nationalism. Consequently, as British anthropologist Peter Wade asserts, race and nation work "hand in glove" (2001, 1). The chosen quotes demonstrate the contradictions in Conte's narrative that reflect the inconsistencies negotiated between the national ideology and white supremacy. The frame with which these articles are written is already set due to his position following the military, but his comments on race are not always consistent. Does one need comparing to be able to see the discrepancies? The pitfall might be focusing too much on differences. If only differences or similarities are focused on, then only one side is illuminated while the other is dimmed. With this in mind, it is the aim of this chapter to observe the mechanics of comparing in regard to the discourse surrounding the massacre of 1912 through Conte's publication to determine how comparing functions and is used.

The development of Conte's narrative is surprisingly positive when mentioning the Afro-Cuban role during the independence but then leads to a deep contrast, one he supplements with his comparisons. Conte first outlines the advantages that insurgents, who were mainly Afro-Cuban, had in the independence wars. These advantages were claimed to be knowledge of the terrain and the ability to support inclement weather. The narrative then puts

into relation the image of a heroic Afro-Cuban soldier in comparison to Conte's notion of the PIC that he observes have an

> absolute lack of drive [...] Not once did they dare to charge with a machete; not once did they even confront the loyal troops, nor did they have the courage to raise a railroad, nor did they take their audacity to the extreme of stopping a train of travelers. All their boldness was limited to the sacking and partial burning of La Maya, which they carried out thanks to the cooperation of some of the Black inhabitants. (Conte and Capmany 1912, 13)

The image being presented by Conte highlights inconsistencies with what he expects from a rebellion, as they are not acting like insurgents are supposed to act. This displays a complete contradiction to the majority of the text as well as the rumors and interviews conducted, which are presented as fact in the narrative. The protest did aim to create pressure by going after property but not people, in contrast to the rumors against the PIC (Welch 2001). This statement is more of a reflection of what he expects to be wartime behavior rather than whether or not the label of war is applicable. In Conte's book, that was not in question, especially when it is the very frame of the narrative.

Towards the end of Conte's narrative, he gives particular praise for the Afro-Cubans fighting against the PIC in the army, and this praise comes in the form of comparison. In his reflection, Conte states that "one detail that could not escape me was that the soldiers who worked hardest and made the most effort were those belonging to the colored race. They consider themselves servants of the country, having a true love for the army and within it for their company or squadron" (Conte and Capmany 1912, 55). This evaluative comparison puts Black and white in relation, but one *comparata* is named while the other is implied. Conte's word choice is intriguing because not only does he use a different term for Afro-Cuban, namely as people of color, a more neutral term than what he uses throughout the text, but he does so in correlation with his emphasis on Afro-Cuban soldiers in the army. As *tertium* does not have to come with an explanation, he goes on to explain why Afro-Cuban soldiers fought harder and with more effort than the others, which was not just a love of country but a love of their fellow soldiers, in an image of an idealized fraternity. He includes these soldiers into the fold of the nation and highlights a love of the nation but under the role of servants of the country. Inclusion only up to a certain point when the "natural" order is upheld. By natural order, Conte's narrative refers to a power structure in which the leadership is white, which is the assumed reason why, in the chapter titled "A Faded Legend," Conte mentions the Stanley and Livingston expedition as an anecdote in which white leadership elevated the

tribes which they encountered.[115] The interesting thing about this chapter is that it has absolutely nothing to do with the "war" but rather an editorial piece on what Conte considered to be the racial motivations of the PIC that includes an anecdote to affirm his perspective. This shows a struggle between the nation's founding ideology of racial fraternity with the continuing colonial power structures in which both are intertwined in this narrative.

Conte acknowledges that the PIC also has white members, and his opposition is highlighted when he confirms, "although it seems a paradox, there is also color-independent whites. They are even more criminal than the Blacks, since their intervention in this matter is purely vicious" (Conte and Capmany 1912, 52). What is framed as a "race war" is rooted in disdain for the PIC, and what Conte assumed to be their aim was the result of an increasingly stark black/white dichotomy, bolstered through an associating of Blackness with criminality, an association that was deeply embedded and highlighted in anthropological and ethnographic studies of the time. His admonishment of white PIC members after presenting the PIC in association with Blackness as a threat shows his loyalty to his own constructed racial category of whiteness, while he criticizes the PIC for what he assumes to be taking the side of their race and not the general Cuban republic. The fear is rooted more in an inverted order in which Afro-Cuban leadership is seen as a threat to the dominance of white leadership and privilege. However, in the case of an order in which white leadership is at the helm, his language changes, and his position of associating Blackness as a threat to the nation is overturned as he praises the Afro-Cuban role in the military.

In a similar tone and with repeated praise of the military, Conte observes that while everyone showed heroism, Afro-Cubans, in particular, were distinguished in this regard, so much so that they "had to be restrained, because they were dragged by their swords and wanted at every moment to throw themselves at the bayonet over the enemy positions, to punish with their own hands the bad Cubans who have raised the damned flag of racism" (Conte and Capmany 1912, 58). This comparison highlights distinction with the word especially, presenting one *comparata*, Afro-Cuban soldiers, with the other *comparata* implied as the rest of the soldiers, presumably white soldiers. Throughout the narrative, there is a strong association of a racialized national threat in which links between both race and nation are being made, and certain terms are interchanged to create an image of an Afro-Cuban threat apart from the PIC protest. However, Conte's use

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[115] Conte characterizes this expedition as an exploration of "scary Africa" in which, first, Dr. David Livingstone sought to retrace the Nile to its source and was not heard from for several years. Henry Morton Stanley was then meant to find him in the largely uncharted territory of Central Africa, documenting the whole journey in both American and British newspapers. Conte uses the narrative of the expedition as a lesson for how both races could live together under certain circumstances, namely under white leadership and guidance.

of the word "bad Cubans" implies that the Afro-Cubans soldiers he so praises are good Cubans in contrast to what Conte perceives to be bad, which in this case is linked to raising a so-called racist flag. It is presumed that the phrase "bad Cubans" is directed to the PIC. Yet, the way he interchangeably refers to the PIC and Afro-Cubans as a whole creates a link between the negative perception of the PIC and Blackness. The bounds of good and Cuban are conditional positions, and in this particular case, related to their military service, but based on love for the nation. Who gets to decide who loves the nation? The use of the label war is used to highlight an enemy, yet the government, as well as Conte, has considered a whole race to be such an enemy while espousing in theory that there is a place for Afro-Cubans as citizens of the nation.

However, it is the initial acknowledgment of the essential Afro-Cuban role in the nation that he creates a temporal distance to disassociate the heroic acts of Afro-Cubans during the independence wars from the present, hereby facilitating a negative perception fueled by many aspects contributing to racism, e.g., stereotypes. Therefore, it is the way in which he designates who is a good or bad Cuban that is of interest, something he can only do through comparing, defining what it is to be Cuban, and evaluating situations based on his perception, a perception very influenced by the increased white/Black dichotomy informing his evaluations such as the stereotypes and prejudices of the time. The idea of white supremacy through white leadership is repeatedly mentioned, and it was pushed as a norm as well as various anecdotes offered up as proof of its function. The contradiction is ascribed to a theoretically inclusive ideology while also continuing a colonial hierarchical structure through white supremacy, which was frequently justified through scientific racism.

Conte reflects on certain long-standing stereotypes, especially considering the independence wars, as he asserts, "we believed, for example, and no one who considered himself well informed would have doubted it, that the Black man was braver, more spirited and more insensitive to the fatigues and privations than the white man" (Conte and Capmany 1912, 11). This evaluative comparison puts Black and white in relation under the context of the independence wars. Conte evaluates Black and white Cuban males under the aspects of courage, spirit, and withstanding fatigue, which also serves to strengthen an argument when the aspects under which the comparisons take place are added up. He builds his narration using comparisons within a temporal marker, the wars of independence, to make a strengthened contrast to how he describes those in the PIC, many of whom fought in those wars. By using the superlative form, in which value is subscribed to the *comparata*, however, the use of the past tense of "believed" serves to highlight that the superlative used is no longer applicable. Therefore, this comparison can be seen as a rhetorical tool to further bolster his position. In

doing so, he uses the stereotype that people of African descent deal with the hot climate and have the stamina for hard labor (Helg 1995, 58). Conte then attempts to manage a line in which he claims to honor the Afro-Cubans who fought in the wars of independence while creating temporal distance, from 1895 to 1912, a very short window of temporal distance. Conte tries to highlight a temporal change that serves to affirm old stabilized racialized beliefs to admonish the PIC. Even in his positive attitude towards the Afro-Cubans in the military, they are still racialized in a way because he highlights their race to show the "diversity" of its fighters, the same highlighting of race that he admonishes the PIC for.

Conclusion

The overall question was how comparisons play a role in the book *Guerra de Razas* as well as the example of Juan Gualberto Gómez´s reaction to the comparison between Haiti and Cuba. The first section sought to provide context and a brief historiography to look at what arguments the government used to justify violence, with reference to the Haitian revolution in the second section. The third section examined the contradictions seen in his narrative as well as how comparisons were utilized by Conte's narration.

Conte utilizes comparisons to create distance between the positive role and perspective of Afro-Cubans in the *mambí* army and a negative racialized threat that had been brewing for a while and projected the long-standing fear of a Black republic onto the establishment of a Black party.[116] In some of Conte's quotes, he makes evaluative comparisons of Afro-Cubans but in different tenses, creating a distance between past and present. The change in tense could facilitate a modification of an image to avoid tarnishing the ideal of a racial democracy but at the same time re-establishing former negative perceptions and prejudices. Hence, an image of balancing the ideal of a nation and continuing prejudices against an entire community meant to be a part of that very nation. In doing so, the ideal is not directly questioned, but rather the initial trust in it due to what is to be an affirmation of stereotypes. Conte was essentially pointing to Afro-Cubans for not upholding the national ideology rather than the continuing social and racial stratification as a problem because it was not seen as a problem, particularly among *criollos*.[117] Conte upholds the widely circulating and ingrained stereotypes of the time, but it is important to see where he stands in relation to the contemporary understanding of race and racism in the context of the new nation.

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[116] The mambí army was the name given to the army in the independence movement. Soldiers could be referred to as mambí.
[117] Criollos refers to people with European lineage born in the Americas.

Conte frequently calls the PIC's protest a racist revolution, as demonstrated by the quotations used. Therefore, his understanding of what racism was at the time was based more on belonging to one group (Cuba) and not a plurality of identities. You had to be Cuban first and foremost, and to emphasize an Afro-Cuban identity was seen as emphasizing race over nation, which the government, newspapers, and Conte labeled as racist.

The "'development' of racial ideologies in the West depended upon making particular kinds of comparisons between women, non-Europeans, Blacks, religious minorities," etc., and it is for this reason that focusing on the comparisons themselves can show the mechanism, in turn, mapping out the different ways that comparing is done (Loomba 2009). In looking deeper at the inner workings of how comparison is structured as a human practice, the societal and structural background could give some insight into its formation. There is a plethora of ways people compare. Even when a comparison highlights the difference within the *comparata* in order to put them in relation, the *tertia* is the glue that allows for the comparison to take place. It is through examining these aspects that not only can the limitations of focusing on differences be overcome, but the shared knowledge and context that shape the way actors compare can be observed and analyzed. While the concepts of nation and race in Cuba are deeply entangled through the relationship between the national ideology and the stratification of the society based on the social construction of race, focusing on comparing shows how these concepts are put into relation and connected. The role of comparison in this discourse is vast. Gualberto Gómez's comparison highlights a different context in order to show that such a comparison would not result in the same future. The discourse overall seems to take the past to make an assumption about the future, as the examples show, especially in the main comparison between Cuba and Haiti.

Nevertheless, Conte's comparisons are not always clear-cut or predictable. Racism in a society that theoretically embraced a homogeneous unity in the concept of *Mestizaje* created a complicated understanding of belonging in regard to racial classifications.[118] His repeated praise of Afro-Cuban soldiers does not cancel the suspicion placed upon them in light of who was designated as the enemy, a designation that Conte does not always base on skin color but is very much linked to Afro-Cubans as a whole, which creates a slippery slope of negative

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[118] Mestizaje comes from the word *mestizo*, which refers to the mixing of ethnic groups in Latin America. Although Frank Guridy writes about the Cuban perception of mestizaje, which "had altered the debate on Blackness in Cuba from an emphasis on "race relations" to a focus on 'culture.'". (Guridy Forging, 2010).

perceptions.[119] The arguments and comparisons may also reflect an adherence to the national ideology despite racist statements because Conte, in light of his own writing, placed the label of racism onto the PIC rather than seeing himself as a part of a structure that maintains such prejudices and racism. In the context of the society in which Conte was raised and in a hierarchy that afforded him many privileges, he had no access to the reality of Afro-Cuban daily life and dismissed it as unimportant. This, however, does not excuse his role in the tragic loss of life. Despite the PIC making their aim known and reacting to the rumors and allegations, their voices were not heard. Conte addresses this but considers their defense to be a cover for their real intentions, meaning that nothing they could have said or done would have made him question the mainstream narrative while using comparisons to strengthen his convictions. His comparisons show an attempt to reconcile the ideal of the incipient nation as something new and different from colonial rule, despite some of those era's elements, such as racial hierarchy, being sustained. The emotions of fear and suspicion take the lead in Conte's narration of events wrapped up in allegations and comparisons to a tragic end.

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[119] According to Aline Helg, some Afro-Cuban soldiers in the military were even killed by their fellow soldiers (1995). The end of the book, *Guerra de Razas,* shows pictures as well as a list of the names of the soldiers who died, a death toll in the teens for the Cuban military compared to the thousands of Afro-Cubans killed.

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