

### INTRODUCTION

“**Extractivism**”—a development strategy based on private-driven, export-oriented mineral extraction—has been aggressively promoted in Latin America since the 1990s, as part of the region’s shift to **neoliberalism**. The mineral extraction boom which followed has been accompanied by widespread resistance and a surge in **socio-environmental conflicts**. While development institutions, such as the World Bank, have increased their efforts to promote “**sustainability**” in the region’s extractive sector, governments have often responded to popular resistance with repression and **violence**. Even Latin American countries which experienced a “**left turn**” in recent years have not moved away significantly from mineral-extraction-based development. However, a politics of “**post-extractivism**” is being articulated by scholars and activists across the continent...



### RESEARCH AIMS..

The Latin American resource boom and the conflicts it engendered have attracted significant attention from critical scholars; most research, however, has been limited to case study-based, empirical investigation. A **coherent, critical, interdisciplinary and multi-scalar** conceptualisation of extractivism is still missing. The aim of this research is to contribute to such a task—to work towards a “**political ecology of the subsoil**” (Bebbington 2013). To this end, my research seeks to place the empirically-grounded exploration of extractive industries-related **environmental injustice and conflict** against the background of broader theoretical conversations in Political Ecology concerning **neoliberalism, nature and development**.

### ... AND OBJECTIVES

I will follow three key lines of investigation—**political economy, discourse/ideology/hegemony, and socio-environmental conflict and change**. Specifically, my objectives will be to:

- Improve the understanding of extractivism as a result of uneven patterns of **geographical development** and changing **capitalism-nature relations** brought about by neoliberalism;
- Critically appraise the role of **discursive and ideological practices** in the establishment and stabilisation of extractivism as a seemingly inevitable strategy for the development mineral-rich countries;
- Engage with social movements’ **struggles against extractivism** and explore their potential to put forward proposals and actions for a genuinely inclusive and ecologically-sensitive development beyond mineral dependence.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why and how has extractivism emerged as a key development strategy for Latin American countries in the last two decades? How has extractivism been related to the rise of global neoliberalism and the return to “outward-oriented development” in the region?
- How has extractivism been stabilized in the region in the face of widespread local resistance and increased socio-environmental conflicts? How have social movements responded to government strategies allegedly aimed promote the inclusiveness and sustainability of extractive activities?
- How are countries which experienced an ostensibly post-neoliberal turn in the last decade dealing with the question of a post-extractivist transition? How do indigenous and radical political movements envisage such as transition?



### CASE STUDIES

- 1) **Governmentality, minerals and violence in Peru**. In Peru, since the 1990s, the World Bank has been investing simultaneously in extractive sector liberalisation and in furthering sustainability. The green-neoliberal remaking of the country appears to follow a logic of “eco-governmentality”, as analysed by Goldman (2001) and others. However, increasing ecological degradation related to extractive activities, as well as the persistent use of state violence to repress the indigenous movements opposing them, does not quite fit the process of “cooptation by governmentalization” implied by this Foucauldian logic. Is it possible, then, that the territorial logic of extractivism, with its highly uneven geography and predatory forms of expansion, necessarily undermines the tendency towards “democratisation” implicit in governmentality projects?

- 2) **The Peruvian (not-quite) post-neoliberal turn and the demise of the Amazonian indigenous movement**. In 2008-09, the aggressive promotion of hydrocarbon extraction in the Peruvian Amazon was met by an unprecedented wave of indigenous resistance. The movement played a key role in putting the neoliberal Garcia administration out of office. In 2011, the ostensibly post-neoliberal Humala government passed a national law guaranteeing indigenous communities’ rights to “previous consultation” in case of extractive activities in their territory. In the meantime, the Amazonian movement largely disintegrated, while aggressive extraction continued business as usual. How are these processes interrelated, and what do they tell us about post-neoliberal extractivism?
- 3) **“Buen vivir”, plurinationality, and the politics of post-extractivism in Ecuador**. In Ecuador, under the left-leaning Correa government, revenues from mineral exports have been key to funding much-needed social programmes. At the same time, principles such as “living well” and the “rights of nature” have gained constitutional recognition. Yet, the question of a transition towards post-extractivism, debated by scholars and activists, has hardly been taken seriously at the institutional level. A partial exception may be represented by Alberto Acosta’s *Unidad Plurinacional de las Izquierdas* party, and the social movements which supports it. How have these social and political actors envisaged such a transition, and what are their prospects?

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