

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA: VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE

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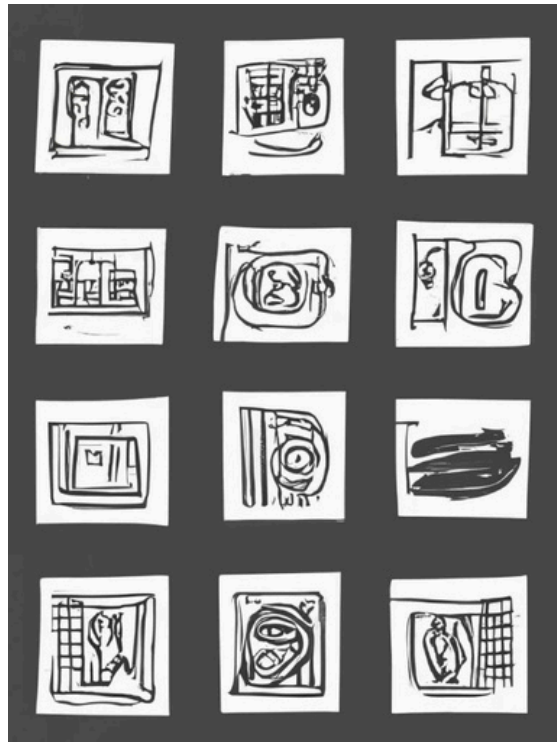
Preface

This publication seeks to shed light on a field of urgent problems faced by nations, people in Mexico and in the rest of the world: primarily the struggle to transform the dominant political-ecological model of extractive, exclusionary, patriarchal, and ecocidal exploitation. Written by a large group of authors, through a wide range of problems and situations, a collective narrative is woven; revealing both the violence perpetrated against communities and their environments, as well as the forms of resistance and hope that emerge in response.

With the publication of this work, we strive to capture and share in a clear and agile manner the current critical situation: the pulse between the oppression of a predatory and inhuman system and the growing awareness of the urgency of an imminent change, in the face of the collapse of the certainties that sustained said system. We underline the relevance of communal organization, tenacity in the face of adversity and the creation of collective knowledge, crucial elements for the desired transformation.

Environmental Justice, more than a set of transcendent ethical principles, is an emerging framework for various struggles,

in which any idea of justice finds its true meaning. We hope that as you go through this material, based on what can be problematized in each case in terms of distributive inequities, procedural injustices and/or lack of recognition; readers can build their own narrative about the problems that Environmental Justice encompasses today. Derived from the results from the IV EnJust Environmental Justice Network Meeting in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, in October 2023, this book aims to foster dialogue, debate and, above all, action towards building a more just and equitable world.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA: VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE

RETURN

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The struggle for life and the environment in Latin America has become a revolutionary act in the face of the complicit silence of the Capitalocene era (Moore 2020) and its violence, challenging the political and economic structures of the region. Today, capitalism in a gore code and frontier code is driven by governments, corporations and businessmen. It is, at the same time, brutally instrumentalized by warlords, paramilitary groups, and criminal gangs that destabilize local economies and displace entire groups and communities. With arrangements and recompositions, an economic system that imposes monocultures, accelerates deforestation, opens mines, builds luxury hotels, disappears people, pollutes water, excludes and subordinates families and people, appears. Gore capitalism (Valencia 2016), racial capitalism (Robinson 2021), necropolitics or necromachine (Mbembe 2011) are concepts that social sciences have used to think about the ecocide and genocide inherent 21st century capitalism: a system that operates in a

"The struggle for life and the environment in Latin America has become a revolutionary act in the face of the complicit silence of the Capitalocene era and its violence."

paralegality, which ignores the principles of solidarity and care on which the democratic nations of the North and South were intended to be founded. The unfulfilled promises and hypocrisies of the liberal order are now unsustainable in a system that openly depends on extermination, inequality and injustice. Naming this violence is not only an exercise against fear, but also helps to not normalize it, as Elena Lazos Chavero and Fernanda Figueroa. In order not to collaborate with complicit silence, in addition to visibilizing the multiple forms that environmental injustice takes, it is necessary to show its ties with the demands for social, economic and political justice, as Carlos Tornel states in his critical work on energy transitions, where he also questions "the metabolically

unequal relationships between different places."

The link between economic, political and territorial aspects of justice becomes evident when we look at the different ways in which violence against organizations and individuals leading resistance movements or promoting alternatives are manifested in the global North and South. The numbers barely reflect the magnitude of the problem. In the last decade, 68 % of the murders of environmentalists have taken place in Latin America. It is the deadliest region in the world for environmental activists and defenders. According to 2022 Global Witness data, Colombia and Honduras are the countries with the highest number of murdered leaders, followed by Brazil and Mexico. Since appeals to environmental justice refer to the protection, care and recognition of territories and biocultural landscapes that are today the final frontier of the expansion of extractivist

"In the last decade, 68% of the murders of environmental activists have taken place in Latin America, the deadliest region in the world for environmental activists."

capitalism. In addition, while demands for environmental justice denounce the unequal distribution of advantages and risks associated with development promoted by the State, activism that mobilizes and demands environmental justice is particularly dangerous in Mexico and the rest of America.

Even if law and institutions were never a guarantee of security, respect and inclusion, they at least channeled struggles and offered a common social horizon—think, for example, of agrarian reforms throughout Latin America or, more recently, of the development of environmental law—. Today, on the agricultural and forestry frontiers, on beaches and in mineral-rich mountains, governments, through their military, paramilitary and police forces, simulate security strategies while allowing their citizens to be murdered, tortured and disappeared with impunity. Progressive laws are repealed or postponed, rights are supplanted, achievements are skimmed on, as in the very recent case of the triumph and almost immediate dismissal of the recognition of territorial rights for the Amazonian peoples (Alonso 2023).



For several years now, we have entered a phase of legal stagnation, even regression, in which the simple act of demanding rights seems to trigger attacks. Thus, the very defense of rights is increasingly questioned by governments and media at the service of economic and political elites. The criminalization of defenders and activist journalism has become a common strategy of factual/de facto powers. Oligarchs and magnates launch judicial and media persecution against all those “uncomfortable voices” through so-called gag lawsuits, by creating culprits, such as those denounced before the UN by the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Center. The factual powers co-opt the judicial system and facilitate the creation of a “legal” way of silencing the voices of public condemnation and the demands for environmental, social, cultural and gender justice. Should we then abandon and give away the space for ethical

"Los gobiernos, mediante sus fuerzas militares, paramilitares y policiacas, simulan estrategias de seguridad mientras permiten que se asesine, torture y desaparezca impunemente a sus ciudadanos."

reflection and argumentation as if it were sterile? Absolutely not, on the contrary. We believe we should not forget that, during the last decade of the last century and the first of this one, the rights framework was a fundamental resource in the hands of peoples, families and communities in their struggles against corporations, companies or political institutions. Facing the advance of the *necromachine*, we believe that the claims that raise ideas of environmental justice help in the construction of a common ethic and knowledge that sustain, legitimize and connect the multiple current resistances.

Every justice appeal opens up the possibility of politics, and this is where the option of solidarity between academia and environmental activists also arises. How can we fail to underline the importance of accompaniment, of documentation and of the well-founded and systematic denunciation carried out by researchers and teachers, when the complicit silence of governments at all levels has never been louder?

At the present time of erosion of democratic values and the onslaught of the extreme right, religious fanaticism and ultra-

nationalism, we consider it essential to reflect on the reasons why the claims for justice are losing moral force. This is crucial to identify progressive solutions rather than regressive ones. The rise of anti-right ideologies does not occur peacefully, but, on the contrary, erupts with the violence of a fragmentation grenade.

Therefore, proposing and enriching the principles of environmental justice are urgent tasks.

However, we are witnessing the rise of sources of violence that challenge the political-democratic order, establishing secret agreements with parties and political and social leaders. In this necrostate, no one knows who is who anymore. The spiral of violence is amplified and crosses different scales. It is becoming increasingly difficult to trace its networks and its origin. In this regard, Evelyn Mejía Carrasco analyzes the violence that has taken place in the forests of

Guerrero, Mexico. The later as a result of the interference of organized crime, where cyberactivism has been a tool used to link collective action with the appropriation of new technologies and politics.

Who and what are holding the monopoly on violence and for what purposes? Who and what are allowing and encouraging violence in all scenarios, from the micro, domestic and day to day, to the macro, national and global scenarios? Aware of this context in which the instigators of violence are increasing and the legal and institutional framework is eroding, we propose three major thematic axes that direct the discussion on the issue of environmental justice: communal organization, intersectionality and environmental justice, and links between human and non-human beings. None of them operate separately, since the complexity of the problem requires establishing communicating vessels between them.

Regarding environmental rights, we observe a persistent trend to ontologically separate that which regards nature (species, ecosystems, climate, sea) from that which regards society (people, culture, marginality, inequalities, social diversity).

"Governments, through their military, paramilitary and police forces, simulate security strategies while allowing their citizens to be murdered, tortured and disappeared with impunity."

Demands for the protection of this or that landscape, this or that species, this or that ecosystem multiply, while the link established by the human groups that have inhabited these spaces of natural wealth is hidden. This creates the risk of imposing an exclusive conservation model, commercialized and controlled by scientific and governmental elites.

Payments for Ecosystem Services programs or strategies for the commodification of atmospheric carbon are the epitome of a process of neoliberalization of nature that often incorporates latent violence towards the populations that are the object of these interventions, as exemplified by Claudia Horn's study in the Amazon with the Test Program for the Conservation of the Brazilian Rainforest.

Benefiting only a few, "Nature without people" becomes the motto of this model. The latest twist that supports this trend is the so-called Agenda 30x30, a proposal to conserve 30% of the planet that imposes conservation imaginaries defined by a biological positivist science that leaves unattended the intimate and ancestral interaction between those who inhabit the ecosystems

to be conserved and the environment in which they live. Yvonne Kunz questions the effectiveness of these conservation imaginaries in the field of marine conservation, pointing out how they leave the structural violence and socio-environmental injustices generated by the neoliberal conservation model unaddressed. Environmental justice must point out and bring forward the fundamental articulation between human and non-human beings. In that sense, it must be understood as eminently social and help to build a post-human society. In this regard, Angélica Navidad Morales analyses the relationship between the human and the non-human in the production of agave, which, from the logic of monoculture, has meant the alteration of the ecosystem in the Mexican Bajío region. The ecological destruction has impacted the local flora and fauna, some of which are in danger of disappearing to make way for agave cultivation. At the same time, the farmers in the area, encouraged by local authorities to pursue immediate economic interests rather than long-term care of the land, see their food

security threatened due to the drought caused by this form of agriculture.

In a different context, that of artisanal fishing in coastal-maritime areas, the work of Rogelio Josué Ramos Torres reveals similar processes of destruction, which force coastal fishermen to face the need to redefine their relationship with the sea, seeking ways to adapt to new realities without losing their ecological link and their historical identity, while enduring the criminal violence that ravages the Pacific coasts in Chiapas and Oaxaca.

Regarding the actions inherent to extractivist capitalism, Edith Kauffer visibilizes the violence surrounding the sand extraction process in the Usumacinta River basin. This situation has increased exponentially in the current six-year presidential term in Mexico with the construction of the Mayan Train. Works of this magnitude require a social and economic readjustment. In the

case of Mexico, it has implied the entry of national and international companies, as well as the involvement of organized crime as well as the reinforcement of social inequalities. Kauffer traces the path of the relationships between culture and nature to reflect on the complex grid that sustains them.

In the dialogue regarding connections between human and non-human beings, Andrea Bianchetto and Daniel Arellano Chávez map the resistance that the civilian population in Oaxaca has put in place against projects that plunder natural resources, territories and ways of life. In this context, the construction of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec has led to the reconfiguration of the territory and the population's mind around the logic of economic demand. Bianchetto and Arellano analyze how, by expressing to the governments in power the need for programs to control the territory, Canadian mining companies have played an active role in acts of state repression against the population.

Injustices, state neglect, and the fragmentation and demobilization of environmental

"The criminalization of human rights defenders and activist journalism has become a common strategy of the powers that be to silence voices of denunciation."

struggles are also evident in urban peripheries, as shown by the research of Edgar Delgado Hernández and Oscar Adán Castillo Oropeza on the environmental and health risks to the population due to exposure to radioactive waste in Temascalapa, State of Mexico. The authors trace the institutional neglect and irregularities surrounding the construction and operation of a radioactive waste storage center in that municipality, both in environmental terms due to the risk of contamination of aquifers and in relation to the misleading information given to the population regarding job creation and other benefits for the communities.

Conflicts and claims for environmental justice challenge the State in the first instance, but also international organizations and corporations. The reach of these struggles is extremely uneven in terms of resources and scales. We cannot fail to pay attention to interconnected markers that largely determine who will be the main victims of systemic violence: class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and species. On one hand, through the various symbolic, structural and material expressions of racial, ethnic,

"Environmental justice must point out and present the fundamental articulation between human and non-human beings; and, in that sense, it must be understood as eminently social and must help build a post-human society."

ageist and anthropocentric discrimination. On the other hand, through the predominant patriarchal gender order, which not only subordinates women by exposing them to certain forms of physical and symbolic violence —by excluding them from spaces of power and decision-making to the most horrendous acts of violence such as rape and femicide— but also structurally conditions them to continue assuming care giving, including care for the environment and nature, as well as unpaid and frequently invisible reproductive work. Racialization, the promotion of ethnic tribalism, the cancellation of the future, and the extermination of species based on their commercial utility are interconnected, producing multiple experiences

"Gore capitalism, racial capitalism, necropolitics or necromachine are concepts used to think about the ecocide and genocide attributed to 21st century capitalism."

and positions of subordination that need to be unraveled. **Violeta Gutiérrez Zamora** explores the notion of this type of care work by approaching the field of ecological care from a standpoint of inequalities based on racial, gender, and class hierarchies. This reflection advocates thinking about environmental justice beyond the protection of so-called "natural resources". Using qualitative methodologies, Gutiérrez proposes to dive deeper into the problem in a way that gives importance to the issues of representation, reparation and recognition that take place in rural and forest communities in Oaxaca and in a region of the Asian country of Laos. From a feminist political ecology perspective, **Diego Lugo-Vivas** has carried out fieldwork in the Cesar coal mining area in Colombia to show how environmental violence and the

presence of paramilitary groups have accentuated gender disparities and social inequalities. Lugo-Vivas states, through interviews with women and displaced people from coal mining municipalities, the unexplored relationships between environmental impacts and the deterioration of the physical and emotional health of the area's inhabitants. The historical dimension is also essential in understanding the complexity of systemic violence. In this regard, **Raquel Neyra** takes as an example the extraction of energy in Peru and its relationship with the construction of modernity with which the Creoles, once achieving independence from the Spanish viceregal center, obtained control of the state and military authority. In this manner, anything indigenous was transformed into a subjectivity that establishes a sacred relationship with nature, the opposite of the Eurocentric version in which the land consists of a set of resources waiting to be exploited. This colonial dynamic has been perpetuated thanks to the facilitating and repressive role that has prevailed since the governments of the republican

period until the present in their relationship with the people. How can we dismantle or eliminate these interconnected markers, so deeply rooted in the collective psyche, that have normalized violence and are now experiencing an alarming resurgence? Devrim Eren reflects on these questions by turning her attention to the logic of the caste system in India, specifically to the cultural construction around Dalits. For centuries, they have been stigmatized through the denial of access to land, water and food. In this case, the vectors of caste, gender and environmental violence are decisive in documenting the perennial dehumanization that Dalits have suffered.

We have more questions than answers. However, we consider that participation is a fundamental component of the contemporary principle of justice. Its denial —through silencing, hierarchization, misrepresentation and exclusion — involves, as feminist criticism has been teaching us for years, forms of symbolic and material violence that hinder all progressive praxis. Defending territory is a form of community participation that has been expressed in a region

continually threatened by private and political interests. Marcela Talamantes and María Alejandra Gallego analyze the expressions of resistance of the indigenous people of Milpa Alta, a community located on the outskirts of Mexico City that is affected by urban expansion. One of the central points of this reflection lies in the identification of territory as a space of communality: it is from there that food is obtained, where celebrations and coexistence take place. Environmental justice in this context also constitutes a defense of forms of sociability that do not operate in harmony with the modernizing projects of extractive capitalism; as exemplified by the work of Ivet Reyes Maturano, Jazmín Sánchez Arceo, Ariana Escalante Kantún and Rodrigo T. Patiño Díaz in relation to territorial transformations that cause the convergence of various large-scale public infrastructure projects. Starting from the developmental

"Naming this violence is not only an exercise against fear, but it also helps prevent it from becoming normal."

"Environmental activism aimed at defending the commons and territories has become one of the riskiest political exercises in Latin America today."

scenario in the Yucatan Peninsula, the authors broaden the framework of environmental justice, based on the notion of epistemic injustice, to identify imbalances in the recognition of forms of knowledge and participation among the diverse participants that are interwoven in this context.

Environmental justice is also a strategy of struggle and change that shakes up normative frameworks, questions or demands rights, and opens up a field in which diverse ontologies and epistemologies are constructed and debated. In such construction and in the elaboration of critical arguments for public debate and politics, committed academic praxis is important.

In recent years, academia has met with community organizations so as to build together a type of common knowledge that contributes to the search for environmental justice. Nicolás Vargas-Ramírez and Jaime Paneque -Gálvez take up the case of the Jardines

de la Mintsita Ecological Community in Morelia, whose springs have been contaminated by industrial activity promoted by the government of Michoacán since the 1970s. For more than half a century, the town of Mintsita, through a form of horizontal organization and decision-making assemblies, has managed to resist government action in a context also marked by the emergence of organized crime. Vargas-Ramírez and Paneque-Gálvez argue that the co-production of knowledge, i.e. academic work in collaboration with communities, has made it possible to visibilize the resistance that these types of organizations have carried out. For their part, Ever Sánchez Osorio, Manuel Garza Zepeda and Fernando Salmerón Castro, through a research-incidence methodology, develop learning communities and accompany the Nn'anncue Ñomndaa (Amuzgos) from Guerrero, Mexico, in their territorial and environmental justice struggles. The authors highlight the worldview of these indigenous communities, which opposes the commercial and extractive use of natural resources. They underline the particularity of their struggles highlighting their way of relating to the world and their understanding of themselves in it,

the way they live, and their right to exist as a people.

The legal route is another issue in relation to the axis of community participation. Ana Carolina Gómez Rojas analyzes a series of cases in which legal frameworks constitute a space of dispute in the search for environmental justice. In Colombia, for example, the Environmental Committee in Defense of Life prevented the entry of the mining industry into their territory thanks to the use of a popular consultation. Gómez highlights the need for communities to appropriate the legal tools that have long been a monopoly of the State. This appropriation contributes to the strengthening of structures that help a more equitable distribution of natural goods. Rachel Sieder and Ana Braconnier also analyze the transformative scope of socio-legal strategies in favor of the land rights of marginalized groups in different agrarian regimes. Investigating several cases in Guatemala, the authors advocate for a consideration of the “diffuse effects” of indigenous legal mobilization, which go beyond the administrative dimension of legal adjudication of collective rights to indigenous peoples.

Considering that those exchanges, coalitions, and communality in its many expressions is the most

"Today, on the agricultural and forestry frontiers, governments allow their citizens to be murdered, tortured and disappeared with impunity."

valuable resource we have, we seek that this reflection contributes to a non-violent and supportive collective practice in the different contexts where we live and work.

Despite these challenges, we celebrate the inclusion of the living planet in the moral sphere as a significant advance in the expansion and recognition of social rights. Environmental justice is a useful framework for thinking about and confronting extractivism, the degradation of biocultural environments, and the proliferation of environmental risks that result from the prevailing development pattern throughout Latin America. It is a framework that

"The usefulness of a legal framework fades in the face of violence from a fragmentation grenade that erupts with anti-rights ideologies."

also allows us to connect with the various organizations that have long been working for the recognition of their rights and for the stop of violence.

We position ourselves as people in the academy concerned about violence; we are in a process of dialogue, learning —it should be noted that none of us consider ourselves experts on the matter—. We are interested in supporting, from our spaces and activities, those who face these injustices on a daily basis. One of our purposes is to seek the construction of meaningful and respectful channels that do not reproduce the logic of violence in which the academy itself sometimes falls, based on the use of emancipatory discourses to place itself in a position of moral superiority. Ultimately, the circulation of our research, with its condemnations and accusations, is placed at the service of our collective inquiry.

"We position ourselves as people in an academy concerned with violence; we are in a process of dialogue, learning, and listening. We are interested in supporting, from where we stand and what we do, those who face these injustices on a daily basis."

"We are witnessing the rise of sources of violence that challenge the political-democratic order, establishing secret agreements with political and social parties and leaders."

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ARMED PARTICIPANTS, SUBJECTIVITIES AND VIOLENCE IN FOREST CONFLICTS IN GUERRERO, MEXICO

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In the Sierra de Guerrero, Mexico, violence linked to forest conflicts has intensified with the active participation of organized crime. These transformations can be analyzed through an approach articulated by political ecology and contemporary sociology for the study of violence, since they allow us to investigate the transformations that have occurred in collective action and political subjectivities. One of the paradigmatic cases was that of the Ejido Guajes de Ayala, municipality of Coyuca de Catalán, which in 2020 declared the reactivation of forest conflicts in a turbulent scenario where various armed participants coexist.



This reflection highlights concepts such as *technopolitics* or *cyberactivism* to refer to the appropriation and use of shared content services (particularly on Facebook) by those involved in conflicts over land and nature. Through this, it is expected to contribute to the understanding of the relationships between armed participants, violence and information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural territories in Mexico, since these

are established as spaces that clarify both the interests in conflict and the meanings developed around violence, security and nature.

The Ejido Guajes de Ayala, municipality of Coyuca de Catalán, located in the Sierra de Guerrero region, is characterized for being an eminently rural territory inhabited by a pattern of dispersion in small towns, localities and ranches with high rates of poverty and

logging and wood commerce. In this common land there is a self-defense group that uses Facebook to expose its conflict narratives, institutional questions, political and criminal participants, as well as calls for collective action in order to stop the looting and visibilize the “trail of death” left among the local population by the violence carried out by various participants. Recovering fragments of the videos published in this profile, claims and grievances that are posted in the public space are exposed. From this, a critical review of the concepts of *technopolitics* and *cyber activism* as the main tools used to refer to the link between collective action, appropriation of ICTs and politics is essential. Both appeal to horizontal relationships, the democratization of virtual space, political processes driven by marginal groups or belligerent voices, collective action for the transformation of reality and demands oriented to the State and institutions that hope to generate solidarity among society. Both concepts find a limit to addressing the subjects of violence and their subjectivities, since they reproduce the binary discourse between good and bad civil society (Alexander 2010).

Our challenge is to generate categories to understand the appropriation of ICTs by the subjects of violence immersed in conflicts over land and nature.



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MILPA ALTA: EXPRESSIONS OF TERRITORIAL DEFENSE AND PERI-URBANITY IN MEXICO CITY

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The territorial defense demonstrations led by people from the community of Milpa Alta, an indigenous town inserted in Mexico City, reflect the dispute over the social construction of space in a context of constant threat to local ways of life and to the natural ecosystems essential for sustaining life.

Located in a space whose borders blur between rural and urban, Milpa Alta is home to processes of resistance; from its peri-urban background, within which different types of social movements are consolidated that confront not only territorial dispossession and ecosystemic destruction, but also symbolic and identity-based dispossession, in a dynamic of self-managed citizen participation for environmental justice and the right to life.

Various political manifestations show the change in social organization in response to multiple and complex threats, such as the expansion of urban

sprawl over this community and its territories, the destruction of strategic ecosystems for the community's sustenance, and the challenges and violence it faces. People recognize the risks that dispossession, megaprojects, and infrastructure processes bring to areas where the countryside contributes to the sustenance of their existence and that of the cities.

Territories are the space where social, political, cultural and productive relations take place, where daily life is based on identity meanings, subjectivities and spiritual frameworks. It is the place where food is obtained, where parties and



neighborhood gatherings take place. The notions of life of various indigenous peoples recognize the possibility of existence through the cornfield, cultivation, food, prayers, rituals and festivals or traditions, which represent the roots of worldviews that seek to subsist between memory and the present.

The territorial defense led by some participants is not only a matter of disputes over space, but also of environmental justice that upholds the defense of relationships with life.

These expressions of struggle, denunciation or resistance are a counteroffensive to the development, modernization and exponential growth projects of overwhelming capitalism that threaten the persistence of life networks in this area of the Valley of Mexico.

When we talk about territories beyond a geographical distinction, we refer to a set of meanings that is built from the interdependence between species and ecosystems, places where different social groups produce space and configure socio-spatial praxis. Territories are not defined solely by their material characteristics, but by the interconnection of social relations with other non-human life forms.

It is no coincidence that in recent decades, conflicts have and resistance movements have

and resistance movements have emerged in defense of their resources, especially water (Solano et al. 2021). These disputes have intensified in the face of a State that manages access to and distribution of ecosystems to accommodate the interests of economic expansion. This imposed management violates, on the one hand, the constitutional rights that safeguard indigenous peoples and, on the other, strains historical relations between the State and citizens. Under the authoritarianism of a single possible State, territories are subordinated and the autonomy of those who inhabit disputed territories is subjugated.



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COMMUNITY RESISTANCE AND CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN VIOLENT ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS

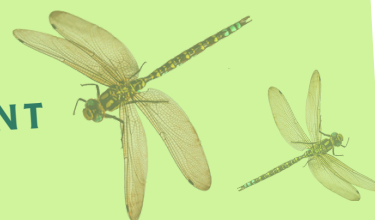
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The co-production of knowledge between academia and other social participants can be an effective strategy in building alliances with communities facing violent environmental conflicts. Such is the case of the Ecological Community Jardines de la Mintsita (CEJM), which over the past fifteen years emerged and consolidated itself as the main participant in resistance against urban and industrial expansion in the southwest of Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, seriously affecting the springs of La Mintzita.



The environmental conflict over these springs began in the mid-1970s with the installation of a cellulose factory, which transformed its surroundings from farmwork activities to industrial ones, followed by impacts of air and water pollution. In the mid-1980s, the urban expansion of Morelia triggered legal disputes between the factory and the local government for control of the springs, in part due to the pressure exerted by the city's growing water needs. In the early

1990s, farming communities protested against water pollution, blaming the factory and occupying its facilities. These protests were followed by the announcement of the bankruptcy of the factory, which received government support to prevent its closure. Government support also served to ensure the supply of water from springs to the factory and to guarantee greater tolerance of its levels of pollution. Farmworker protests against the factory ended due to



changes in government regulations on water, which affected their political organization.

Following the establishment of five informal settlements near the La Mintzita springs in the early 2000s, the government of Michoacán created a natural protected area around the springs and factory in 2005, followed by its designation in 2009 as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. Environmental regulations and local and political disputes in one of those settlements led to the creation of the CEJM in 2011, who have since been the leading environmental advocates for the La Mintzita springs and its water recharge zones. After receiving multiple threats and suffering several violent attacks by participants with economic interests in land and water, the CEJM forged alliances and devised collective strategies to resist the threat of dispossession, championing in its actions and speeches the defense of the La Mintzita springs —the



city's main source of water— and its surface and underground recharge zones, including three protected areas so far declared in search of their conservation. The actions of the CEJM and some allies, including the co-production of knowledge, in addition to contributing to vizibilizing the importance of the La Mintzita springs for the city, also encouraged the creation of a new state protected natural area in 2023 to partially safeguard its water recharge zones (Vargas-Ramírez 2023).

Since its formation, despite its number of members —less than fifteen families in 2011, and since then decreasing due to economic and health difficulties, political-organizational disagreements, among other factors— the CEJM has managed to pressure government action and generate environmental awareness among citizens. Thanks to its horizontal organization, its decision-making in assembly, the collective resolution of its problems and the co-production of knowledge with academia (Vargas-Ramírez et al. 2023), the CEJM strengthened its processes of communalization and territorialization within the framework of the environmental conflict (Vargas-Ramírez 2023). This has allowed them to resist



real estate pressures and water and land speculation in a peri-urban context marked by the growing violence of organized crime and territorial disputes due to drug trafficking; especially since mid-2019, when the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel burst into Morelia and began to dispute control of the city with other cartels such as the Familia Michoacana and the Caballeros Templarios, among others (Vargas-Ramírez 2023). An important element in community resistance has been our collaborative work with the CEJM since 2016, which we base on a committed and activist research design focused on the co-production of knowledge and learning useful for environmental justice through territorial mapping and community environmental monitoring, using various technologies (Paneque-Gálvez 2019, Paneque-Gálvez et al. 2016, Vargas-Ramírez et al. 2023). The co-production of knowledge has allowed, on the one hand, to make visible the actions of the CEJM and their importance for Morelia, and, on the other, to draw attention to the growing influence of organized crime around the use and management of common goods present in the springs of La Mintzita and its surroundings. The political-organizational commitment of the CEJM claims aspects related to

ecological justice, while its actions aspire to become an example for other ways of satisfying human needs without losing sight of the needs and possibilities of the territory itself.

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CARE AND DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY BY THE NN'ANNCUE ÑOMNDAA OF GUERRERO, MEXICO

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In Mexico, as in other countries, mobilizations rejecting projects affecting indigenous territories have been witnessed. Resistance has risen mainly due to the occupation of lands, the exploitation of natural resources or the implementation of large infrastructure projects.



This is the case of the Nn'a n ncue Ñomndaa (Amuzgos) in Guerrero, Mexico, who reject the irrational use of water, logging, and the extraction of soil and gravel for private and commercial use. Although these are not large projects, their opposition to extractive forms relating to natural resources is evident. Based on field information in the municipalities of Ometepec (Ndyawe), Xochistlahuaca (Suljaa')

and Tlacoachistlahuaca (Sei'chue), we reflect on the way in which the worldview of this people carries out a defense of the territory that opposes the commercial use of natural resources. The bases of this opposition are related to the Nn'a n ncue Ñomndaa worldview and the centrality they attribute to water, which derives not only from its capacity to materially sustain life, but from the very



definition of their being, defining themselves as those who speak "the word of water." Additionally, their conceptualization of territory, or living space, includes elements such as language, practices and representations, which may or may not have physical materiality, and which are found in that complex space of nature (land-water). These elements that give meaning and structure to the world include knowledge of plants, seeds and fauna that are applied both to traditional medicine (farming knowledge) and to ritual traditions (sacred sites and other components of spirituality).

From this definition of territory, we seek to identify what the *Nñ'ancue Ñomndaa* defend as such, how they conceive it, where they set its limits and what strategies they consider for its defense. The discussion is important because the delimitation of their territory is not necessarily reflected in the administrative divisions of the municipalities of Ometepec (*Ndyawe*), Xochistlahuaca (*Suljaa'*) and Tlacoachistlahuaca (*Sei'chue*). Territorial boundaries imply a complex construction that is not limited to physical space, but rather incorporates other material and immaterial elements that are found in that space that they recognize as the "place where they live." The defense of the territory,

then, is not about respect for certain political-administrative limits, nor a struggle for the use of a material "resource," for the distribution of the benefits resulting from its exploitation, or for the right to be consulted, or to participate in decisions about its use. It is about a struggle to defend a way of relating to the world and of understanding oneself in it, of taking advantage of it through a respectful use of its elements, of a way of living, of the right to exist as a people. The threats to this way of conceiving relationships with the world have materialized not in the visible aggression of the State or of large corporations, but in the more subtle but more dangerous form of change in individual subjectivities. This change results from the daily operation of the capitalist mode of production, which gives rise to conceptions that instrumentalize the natural



world and reduce it to a "resource" susceptible to private appropriation and commercialization.

The project that supports this text —PRONACE CONAHCYT No. 322656 Worldview Nn'a n ncue Ñomndaa: emerging biocultural heritage for health, food and environmental justice—, in addition to presenting the concepts of the *Nn'a n ncue territory Ñomndaa* and its forms of defense seek to support this struggle by developing activities aimed at promoting environmental justice in that region, undertaken by the local participants themselves. This work based on research and advocacy will develop *learning communities* that allow, identification of the dangers that result from changes in the conceptions of the natural world, to define strategies for the preservation of their ways of relating to it and to promote uses of the territory in a responsible, ethical and balanced manner, with

full respect for the worldview and traditional forms of organization.

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USE OF LEGAL-POLITICAL TOOLS IN SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES IN MEXICO AND COLOMBIA

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Resistance to oppression and violence against communities has historically been expressed on various fronts. One of them has been the use of legal-political tools. Although it is taken for granted that legal instruments are neutral and, above all, univocal, legality is a highly political field that is constantly being constructed and disputed. The use of institutional channels is inserted in asymmetrical power relations, where the voice of the person representing the State is often privileged over the voice of the communities.

However, law is subject to multiple uses and meanings (Azuela 2006) that arise not only from judges and legislators, but also from social groups that express their resistance through strategic litigation. This work examines two cases of resistance to megaprojects in Mexico and Colombia to show how the participants involved in a conflict use tools such as advocacy and popular consultation, thereby contributing to redefining these tools and countering the institutional violence exercised by the central power.

In the case of Mexico, we analyze the resistance processes led by the Peoples' Front in Defense of Land and Water of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala against the Morelos Integral Project, where a citizen consultation was imposed to legitimize the position of the federal government. In Colombia, the Environmental Committee in Defense of Life has led the resistance against the Colosa gold project; in this case, organized communities built a legal strategy from the ground up to hold a popular consultation to prohibit mining in their territory. Cases such as those mentioned



demonstrate that, despite the deepening of an extractive and environmentally predatory economic model, current national and international legal frameworks create spaces and mechanisms for public participation and access to justice that favor social resistance to megaprojects. Beyond victories or defeats in court, the fact that communities appropriate tools that are usually a monopoly of the State is productive in itself because it opens up possibilities for producing counter-expertise (Wertheimer 2013) and territorial reflexivities (Melé 2014), of conquering new local, regional and national political spaces and of strengthening community management. These three elements are fundamental when thinking about environmental justice from a local level, because if we do not question how decisions are being made in the territories, if we do not identify the structures that constrain or enable certain decisions and the



agents that participate in them, it's impossible to land global aspirations around a more just and equitable distribution of natural resources.

In both cases, Mexico and Colombia, it is possible to recognize that:

a) Despite the deepening of an extractive and environmentally predatory economic model, current national and international legal frameworks create spaces and mechanisms for public participation and access to justice that encourage social resistance to megaprojects.

b) The law is subject to multiple uses and meanings (Azuela 2006), and these do not arise only from judges and legislators, but also from social groups that express their resistance through strategic litigation.

We are facing a historic moment of multiplication of spaces for citizen participation at different levels and territorial scales; at the same time, recent decades have seen an increase in social conflict (Melé 2016). The above may suggest that, despite expectations about the law, according to which legal instruments are neutral and, above all, unambiguous, the law is a highly political field that is in permanent construction and dispute.



The first findings of the research suggest that to understand the use, scope and meaning of the legal tools used in resistance processes against megaprojects, it is necessary to take into account the following variables:

- The geographic, economic and sociocultural scope of the project: is it a project that covers more than one municipality? How many populations are affected? How different are these populations from each other?
- The level of progress of the project: is it a megaproject with advanced infrastructure or is it in its initial and exploratory phase?
- The nature of the participants implementing the project: are they government entities or transnational companies? Is it an alliance between the two?
- The nature of the participants opposing the project: are they previously organized communities? Is there a mobilization of young people, of urban groups around it?
- The relationship between opposition groups and groups of lawyers: what organizations do legal advisers come from? What interests do they pursue?
- Historical and legal decision-making structures: Are they assembly spaces? What are the historical gender relations?

It can be concluded that the use of legal tools in environmental conflicts is not a neutral practice, but rather a highly political exercise in which one can resist the institutional violence with which the discourse of development is imposed.

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PLURILAND: THEORIZING CONFLICT AND DISPUTE IN PLURAL LAND RIGHTS REGIMES IN GUATEMALA

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PluriLand research project seeks to explain the nature and the transformative and non-transformative effects of socio-legal mobilization in favor of the land rights of marginalized groups under different agrarian regimes.



It is a comparative project that studies the cases of Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, India, Ethiopia and South Africa, in order to offer a theoretical-methodological proposal to understand the necessary conditions for strategic litigation to have positive effects for marginalized groups. By agrarian regimes we understand the “legally plural constellations of norms and sites that govern de jure and de facto the models of ownership, access and use of land”. These are a consequence of historical processes that determine the conceptions of property, rights and development models. We propose to analyze the relationships between agrarian regimes and the processes of socio-legal

mobilization to guarantee land rights and the defense of the territory, crucial aspects for environmental justice and the self-determination of peoples in the management of livelihoods in their territories. In the example of Guatemala, we consider four judicial cases that have mobilized two legal figures: the recovery of ancestral lands and free, prior and informed consultation with indigenous peoples. For the first figure, the types of conflict have to do with the historical dispossession of indigenous collective lands by the Property Registry system. For the second, the conflicts involve mining, hydroelectric plants, roads serving the cement industry monopoly and electric transmission lines, with licenses



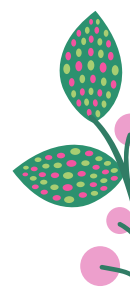


granted by the Ministry of Energy and Mines. The cases were selected based on their “greater” or “lesser” transformative effect. We are still building a database with the universe of judicialized cases, so it would be early to draw conclusions. However, our central hypothesis is that cases of recovery of ancestral lands framed by national legislation are more efficient than cases of prior consultation mobilizing international standards. The land recovery processes have had more tangible direct and indirect effects: land has been titled in the name of community authorities, historical memory has been reconstituted intergenerationally, the internal way of redistributing plots at the family level has been respected (Sieder, in press). On the other hand, prior consultation has not managed to redistribute the material and political resources (in terms of participation in decision-making) of megaprojects in ancestral territories. This variation between land recovery

processes and prior consultation is framed in a context of constitutional justice captured by the ruling elites and traditional economic elites with economic interests in indigenous territories (Braconnier De León 2021). One of the questions that guides our research is then: To what extent is litigation in defense of territories and access to land positively strategic when the courts of justice respond to powerful entrenched interests?

We have faced conceptual and methodological challenges that engage with discussions around “environmental justice.” First, what do we mean when we talk about “transformative” justice? Can we refer to Nancy Fraser’s landmark work with her dual conceptualization of “recognition/redistribution”? (Fraser et al. 2006), or are we referring to court decisions and public policies that challenge the *status quo*, as South African colleagues have written? (Dugard 2016) Is justice transformative from whose perspective and over what time frame?

Another challenge we face is what effects do we consider in order to have a complete and fair analysis for transformative “justice”? The effects of sociolegal mobilization are multiple and go beyond what happens within a court of law (Sieder 2020). In this project we include of course the normative



analysis of judicial decisions — taking into account the files with their memorials of protection, the defenses, the *amicus curiae*, expert opinions and judgments—. We have observed that there may be judgments that formally appear to be “transformative” and progressive; however, the implementation gap turns out to be less transformative than what could have been read in the judgment.

That said, it would be very limited and unfair to understand “transformative justice” only in its administrative dimension of judicial adjudication of collective rights to indigenous peoples. For this reason, in this analysis we also incorporate what we have called until now the “diffuse effects” of indigenous socio-legal mobilization. In these effects we include three aspects that seem relevant to us. First, the effect of “self-determination of peoples.” Does socio-legal mobilization reinforce self-determination and their own legal systems? Second, the effect on the “recentralization of marginalized voices.” Does socio-legal mobilization amplify the voice(s) of marginalized sectors in the public sphere? And third, the effect in terms of the positioning of “alternative narratives” concerning the

historical dispossession of ancestral territories. Are alternative narratives placed in the public sphere on land ownership, its use, development models, environmental damage, governance? These are some observations that contribute to the discussion on environmental justice.

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INTERSECTIONALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

RETURN

INTERWOVEN CARE WORK AND ECOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN FOREST CONSERVATION: A FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY APPROACH

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Political ecology has increasingly emphasized the fundamental role of caring practices and affects in socio-natural relations. As various programs for the conservation of tropical forests and the social development of rural populations, based on the principles of green capitalism, move forward, it is necessary to recognize 1) the changes in practices and labor involved in such conservation systems and 2) the entanglements between care work and violence that they entail. In this way, I propose to discuss how ecological care work is integrated within theorizations of environmental justice, from a perspective situated in the field of feminist political ecology.

Ecological care work is generally described as attempts to reduce harm and violence to the earth, species, or human populations that inhabit it. However, many of these attempts can also be immersed in relations of oppression based on historical, racial, gender, and class hierarchies, as well as relations of domination over nature. Based on a reflection within feminist political ecology that focuses on a socioecological perspective of caring for life, this text seeks to delve into how we understand ecological care work, and its

interweaving with the power and violence exercised in current forest conservation systems. It also aims to explore how ecological care practices and work and the effects in forests can persist in the face of socioeconomic changes produced by green capitalism. In this sense, this work attempts to deepen the necessary discussion on environmental justice and ecological care as ethics and work. Similarly, it attempts to incorporate critical aspects of ecological care work that have been addressed in feminist theoretical discussions on the



intricate relationship between care, work and violence. These critical reflections emanate from two different qualitative investigations. The first is the research I carried out for my doctorate on the framework of environmental rationalities in community forest management in the temperate forests of the Sierra Sur of Oaxaca, Mexico (Gutiérrez-Zamora 2023); and the second, the postdoctoral research, which I am currently carrying out, focused on the implementation of value chains for the use of non-timber forest products (NFM), such as bamboo, in Lao PDR. Although both investigations are independent and the socioeconomic and political contexts are different, the common thread seeks to understand how daily practices and work are socially redistributed and recognized, and the ways in which these processes are intertwined with the construction of knowledge, values and affections in and with the forests (s. Gutiérrez-Zamora 2021, Gutiérrez-Zamora et al. 2023). In both cases, it has been essential to examine the power mechanisms reproduced in the daily life of rural and forest communities, as well as to identify the conflicts between various internal and various internal and external participants (Gutiérrez-Zamora



and Hernández Estrada 2020). In this sense, both investigations seek to think about environmental justice in a broader way; that is, beyond the distribution of the so-called “natural resources”, raising the need to include issues of representation, recognition and reparation to confront the different but daily mechanisms of oppression and violence.

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SILENT VIOLENCE TO THE CORE: PERPETUAL EXTERMINATION, ENVIRONMENTAL SUFFERING AND SUFFOCATING UNCERTAINTIES IN THE COAL INDUSTRY OF THE COLOMBIAN CARIBBEAN

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For many, the coal industry in Colombia has been synonymous with progress, economic growth, and access to health, education, and housing opportunities in the Caribbean coal mining frontier, which includes the areas of La Guajira and Cesar, in the north of the country. However, there have been few national and international dissemination works that address the slow, measured, and silent environmental violence that has permeated the condition of ecological systems and people.



The Cesar coal mining area, the second largest producer of thermal coal in the country, has witnessed this slow, measured environmental violence, in addition to a set of structural violence characterized by an inequitable rural property regime, high poverty rates, and gender disparity, among others; as well as armed or direct violence, in which the presence of a "paramilitary culture" stands out, through which massacres and collective expulsion phenomena

have been carried out, such as rarely seen in Colombia (FCSPP 2020, Gutiérrez 2012, Lugo-Vivas et al. 2021, PAX Colombia 2014). In the context of armed and structural violence as seen in Cesar, conditions are generated for the perpetuation and intensification of environmental violence of different kinds (Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas 2021), associated with the intensive and extensive extraction of coal, in which the health of ecosystems and people

is seriously affected. Through feminist political ecology perspectives (Sultana 2007a, b, 2009a, b, Sharp 2009), this work seeks to approach a part of the El Descanso-La Loma-Pribbenow-Calenturitas-La Jagua coal complex, to describe infrastructural damage and impacts on the health of rural residents of the municipality of Becerril. Through a two-stage interview process, carried out in 2022 with social leaders, as well as rural residents linked to different labor activities in Codazzi and Becerril, we sought to inquire about infrastructural damages and possible diseases and consequences of the persistence of rural families on properties where coal mining has been intensive in terms of the volume of mineral extracted and extensive in terms of the geographic coverage of the impacts.

To this end, the research focuses

on interviews with women from the previously mentioned municipalities to portray experiences of environmental suffering due to the presence of diseases possibly associated with coal mining activities—although little is said about them and there are no records of studies that address these diseases—. A first group of interviews seeks to portray life experiences and testimonies of women affected by thyroid cancer and the presence of cysts and nodules in the respiratory tract, neck, upper chest and scapular area, with the aim of drawing attention to the unexplored relationships between environmental impacts and deterioration of the physical and emotional health of residents in areas surrounding coal mining complexes. The second group of interviews focuses on displaced residents from coal mining municipalities who are involved in litigation due to complaints of forced displacement and in land restitution processes. These are lands that have been environmentally degraded by conglomerates from the United States, as a response to restitution processes, in which they have been involved as opponents of communities claiming land.





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RURAL LABOR VERSUS RENTIERS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PAYMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

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Payments for ecosystem services (PES) have lent themselves to the literature on the “socioecological fix” in neoliberal capital accumulation. Prone to reversals and land conflict, these mechanisms displace the burden of climate mitigation to Global South countries, increase rather than curb big polluters’ gains, and greenwash rural violence.



Pes critiques focus on project-level resistance to nature commodification, but little on collective and class-based resistance and policies for environmental justice. This paper traces the evolution of PES and the role of labor in the Brazilian Amazon, drawing on over 150 interviews and participatory and archival research. The G7’s Pilot Program for the Conservation of Brazilian Rainforests (PPG7, 1995-2008) stimulated contrary concepts: Market-based PES projects, many funded by the Amazon Fund (2008-), have been based on the market value of carbon and incentives to cover the opportunity costs of sustainable use. But in the early 2000s, farmers’ movements proposed the public Program for the Sustainable Development of

Rural Family Production in the Amazon (Proambiente, 2000-2008), which compensated for practices such as agroforestry based on the cost of labor, through rural extension, credit, and technical assistance. This paper argues that the green economy paradigm promotes an anti-production rentier logic and risks green exploration on one hand, and cooptation by landowners on the other. Beyond resistance, social movements defending environmental justice have proposed and implemented public policy alternatives to PES that strengthen ancestral forms of small-scale production and food security.

This article is part of my research agenda that explores the histories and political economies of environmental governance at international, national, and local





scales and how they shape struggles for environmental justice, especially power relations over access to natural resources, and exposure to environmental risks. This agenda is driven by several broad questions, including: What are the mechanisms, actors, and institutions that reproduce and perpetuate the exploration of nature and people in the Global South, including under the premise of climate action? How can a historical and multi scale analysis of these forces guide effective climate action towards sustainable policies and greater socio-environmental justice? The project on the Political Economy of Payments for Ecosystem Services emerged out of my PhD and links two different approaches to researching environmental justice. First, my main research project explores the influence of environmental foreign aid on the spread of market-based land use policies in the Global South. Titled *State Agents of the Green Economy*, this manuscript examines the emergence of environmental aid from industrialized countries to

conserve forests in Latin America at the end of the 1980s and its redefinition as climate finance in the 21st century. It draws on critical theory and several years of multi-site interview, participant, and archival research to reconsider the relationship between international environmental institutions and broader political and economic structures. With two case studies, the G7 Pilot Program for the Conservation of Brazilian Rainforests (PPG7, 1992-2009) and Brazil's well-known Amazon Fund (2008), funded mainly by Germany, the UK, Norway, and the World Bank, the book explains how and why pilot programs built environmental modernization style institutions and technologies, as well as constituencies for the integration of forests into global trade and carbon offset markets. For instance, I have published an article based on my Ph.D. research in *Antipode* (Horn, 2023a) that considers Brazil's Amazon Fund and its role in international controversies around carbon markets. Second, the analysis of PES links to another related research project on the intersections between agrarian, labor, and environmental justice activism in Latin America, which has rich, often overlooked socioecological and decolonial feminist theory traditions (Horn, 2021). I explore these traditions and their



expressions in mobilizations in rural and urban peripheries, examining to what extent these are also intersectional—linking marginalization along gender, race, class, sexual orientation, or belief. Theoretically, this project draws on and contributes to materialist eco-feminist and decolonial literature on social reproduction and reproductive labor in the context of extractivism and the unequal effects of climate change. I have published two articles from this project about the first of these cases, namely the protest against the Tocantins-Araguaia industrial waterway project in Northern Brazil, which seeks to expand the export corridor for soy through the Amazon Forest, threatening to destroy ecosystems and local traditional communities' socioeconomic base (Horn, 2023c, 2023b). Dispersion, precarity, and isolation from political participation impede the collective organizing of those in rural “sacrifice zones” affected by this infrastructure and energy project. This paper investigates how fishermen, family farms, indigenous people, Quilombola, women, youth, and church groups address this difficulty. It argues that the campaign's intersectional practices —recognizing autonomous cultural identities, building solidarity around crosscutting threats to production and social reproduction, and



formulating unifying, inclusive alternatives and demands— address the collective action problem in these peripheries. This article draws on five years of fieldwork in Brazil's Amazon region, including working at the city government of Belém, the capital of Pará, participation in a social movement boat caravan in 2022, divers meetings and activities organized by rural social movements in the Baixo Tocantins region and across Brazil. It draws on interviews with activists, local scholars, members of the state legislature, and the public prosecutor's office.

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RECONSTITUTING ENERGY JUSTICE FROM THE “GROUND UP”

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Global Fabric of Alternatives



Despite several important critical contributions, the debate on energy transitions has been concentrated at high levels of government, has accommodated corporate interests, and has remained tied to a unilinear, teleological, and modern vision of development. The term “transition” itself is a euphemism for crisis inherited from the 1970s, which reaffirms extractivist and colonial epistemologies, aestheticizing and legitimizing dispossession strategies through “green,” “just,” or “equitable” processes.

Consisting primarily of a dichotomy between fossil fuels and “renewable energy,” hegemonic debates around the transition process leave capitalist consumption patterns and power structures intact. Especially in the Global South, the deployment of so-called “renewable infrastructure” has sparked criticism of its supposed “renewability”—associated with demands for space, “critical” minerals, fossil fuels, and the deployment of counterinsurgency tactics used to maintain dispossession systems, what we can now call accumulation by decarbonization. or the new

“decarbonization consensus” (Bringel and Svampa 2023)—. Proposals for radical socio-ecological transformations also question metabolically unequal relations between different places. In colonial-extractive terms, these reproduce “green” sacrifice zones through doctrines such as terra nullius and colonial occupation strategies that inaugurate new commodity frontiers through spatio-temporal ‘fixes’, essentially ‘buying time’ to sustain capitalist accumulation. Replacing the debate on *transitions* with *transformations* offers an important rethinking



of simplified logics of technological substitutions. While this shift in conceptual focus has generated important analyses on power imbalances and (in)justices, on the uneven metabolic nature of the process, on its spatial character, and on its commitment to a teleological conception of progress and a narrow Western universalism (Tornel 2023a), much of this work remains focused on the State's role as a facilitator or driver of the energy transition process. The experience of Latin America is especially relevant here for two reasons. First, neo-extractivism, which has shaped the region's politics over the past two decades, has revealed the limits of decolonization and the deep dependence of States on the international division of labor and global capitalist forces. Second, *the ecoterritorial turn*, which largely emerges in response to this phenomenon, positions "community-popular" and "territorial" alternatives as new participants and new spaces (re)configuring the geopolitical and socio-ecological transformation of the region. Most of the work addressing the *ecoterritorial turn* has focused on the material and epistemological struggles of movements linked to a specific territory in the creation of autonomous projects (Tornel



2023b).

These movements —generally articulated around broader networks of multiple territorialized communities, civil society organizations, and academics— are (re)conceptualizing energy as a territorialized relationship, based on solidarity, mutual aid, and knowledge. Furthermore, their struggles, ranging from extraction resistance to struggles for "re-existence", embody a pluriversal set of post-development alternatives that are transforming the material, political and thermodynamic relation to energy imposed by capitalism, conceptualizing energy as a relational matter and as another source of autonomy and self-determination beyond the State. Drawing on a series of post-developmental and pluriversal experiences arising from these struggles in communities in Yucatán, and their search for autonomous and pluriversal





self-determination —through the recognition of multiple ontological and epistemological ways of being in the world— my research argues that the energy analysis transition must reconceptualize concepts such as “energy justice,” decolonizing and separating its fundamental principles from the ontoepistemic commitment to a unilinear model of development, thereby leaving space for pluriversal equity constituted by a series of “rooted normativities.” It also argues that, while the State will play a role in shaping the transition process in the near future, community-popular alternatives and practices “from the ground up” are progressively broadening struggles for territorial autonomy and epistemic justice towards a collective, democratic and autonomous ownership and management of energy. These alternatives embody a political horizon of the possibilities against and beyond the State.

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RACIALIZED VIOLENCE AND COLONIALITY IN SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS

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Currently, Peru's main economic activity is the extraction of energy and materials, which today, has dramatically reinforced the country's dependence on this sector. Throughout its history, the extractive components of social metabolism have been changing and have adapted to the commodity consensus (Svampa 2013) and then to the Beijing consensus (Slipak and Svampa 2015), while the colonial behavior of the State and companies persists.

Governments prepare the ground for extractivism with an arsenal of laws and political measures that favor national and foreign investment (Neyra 2016). The State will respond to the claims that have become active resistance by the affected populations with excessive violence throughout the development of the project, from the granting of a concession without prior consultation to its closure, with the abandonment of the tailings by the company. Violence in the numerous socio-environmental conflicts that Peru is experiencing — according to monthly records from the

Ombudsman's Office, between 60% and 70% of all social conflicts are socio-environmental— are expressed in many ways, from the criminalization of protest to multidimensional poverty with the abandonment of large regions and populations by the State and environmental pollution that affects bodies and identities. Violence occurs against territory in the exploration stage through the invasion of the territory, with the company offering ridiculous prices for the purchase of land, against people accused of terrorism or victims of physical violence and with injuries and deaths. It is institutional violence

with states of emergency, agreements between companies and the national police. Historical retrospective is essential to understand the origin and formation of this racialized violence in socio-environmental conflicts. By understanding the construction of modernity conveyed by the coloniality of the Creole republic, we will better understand the phenomenon of violence, which will allow us to distinguish the role of each social class and also avoid falling into populist solutions. With the independence of the Spanish viceregal center, racialized violence continued, but no longer to that extent: the possession of land changed hands, but not the situation of the Indians. The Creoles maintained the “colonial pattern of power” —excluding those they called Indians— by controlling the economy, state and military authority, while they controlled knowledge and introduced modernity (Quijano 1992, 2000, Mignolo 2001, Lander 2000). Through this they conveyed their Eurocentric vision of development. The *indigenous* person was created as a euphemism for a new subjectivity (Quijano 2000) who had to learn the language and thought of the supposedly superior being who had freed him from the Spanish yoke, an indigenous person



classified as primitive and irrational who sacralizes nature, the object of greed of the Creoles. Faced with this modernity, the supposed inferiority of the indigenous peoples justified the violence against them by demanding environmental justice for their peoples.

While extractive governments assume the role of facilitator and repressor, they abandon their people at the mercy of corporate social responsibility programs, which appear as major benefactors. With a manifested colonial governance (Banerjee 2008), where colonial patterns of power and knowledge are reproduced, companies hold all knowledge regarding the project. Many companies, in an attempt to depoliticize the conflict, try to stifle the claims of the affected populations and ignore environmental injustice with monetary compensation, which causes a pernicious circle:





compensations initially claimed and accepted by the affected populations, because the project has destroyed their crops, water sources, livelihood activities, their culture and identity, displacing them to other centers and leaving monetary compensation as the only alternative to the increase in multidimensional poverty.

Faced with this complex situation, in which a country is completely dependent on extraction and export, historical retrospective becomes important to understanding the racialized violence from the Republican period until today, against peoples who demand environmental justice. This can only be achieved if this colonial dynamic is reversed.

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INVISIBLIZED VIOLENCE IN SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL (IN)JUSTICE

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The construction of everyday living environments in contexts of profound inequalities reflects situations of socio-environmental injustice. However, in most cases, they are rendered invisible or normalized through speech. These normalized experiences are considered sociological phenomena present in people's daily lives and are the product of the accumulation of inequities and vulnerabilities generated by asymmetric and highly hierarchical power structures.

In these scenarios, violence may appear, whether expressed in explicit confrontations or, not openly manifested, but experienced as silenced or marginalized violence. In the case of externalized violence, the participants and actions are presented in testimonies, narratives, declarations, demonstrations and oppositions, giving rise to forms of resistance by an organized civil society. These forms of violence and the resulting social movements form the core of the environmental justice agenda. However, socio-

environmental (in)justices are broader than the obvious processes that we observe in the different types of socio-environmental conflicts. There are other forms of systematic socio-environmental injustices that are recreated and expanded without vizibilization, since there is no event or intervention that generates them, but rather they spread and expand without generating open processes of resistance. These invisible and silenced forms of violence are the result of structural exclusion processes and are articulated in all spaces at different levels, from the





domestic group (work and responsibilities) to the community level (access to decision-making, access to land, water or electricity) or at the institutional level (education, health, work, access to justice). What do we eat? Where and how do we live? What do we do for work and what are the wages according to gender and generation? In all these daily activities, structural exclusion processes are generated leading to long-term socio-environmental injustices.

Many of these situations are the product of a colonial history rooted in deep discrimination and racism that, under dominant power structures, led to entire populations being marginalized from making decisions about their own destiny. The refusal to accept different epistemologies and ontologies not only led to “forgetting” or “forced silencing” of populations, but to a hegemonic model of life that denies everything else. Oral

histories, oral negotiations or agreements were not recognized. Obliviating history was the hallmark of a society that was denied a just existence, a political structure that continues to this day.

In this work we want to understand and analyze the socio-political and cultural frameworks underlying the various forms of silent violence: slow violence, symbolic and structural violence, marginal violence, which translate into daily vulnerabilities and uncertainties. These structural forms of violence go unnoticed, are easily silenced and, therefore, are rarely addressed. From our perspective, it is essential to bring to light and address the silent forms of violence that are not only woven through socio-environmental conflicts but are part of the daily life of a large part of the world's population. Only by vizibilizing these forms of violence can the mobilizations, struggles, resistance and social pressures necessary for fighting environmental justice be generated.

To do this, we want to theoretically analyze how the loss of meanings and senses occurs and how every process and every action that is not recognized from hegemonic places dissolves. People have been stripped of their own histories, but also of their different ways of conceiving work, life and territory. The mixtures of truths and lies give

power to hegemonic centers, allowing them to control information and invisible violence. At the same time, the imposition of market logic has created both direct and invisible violence.

The sociology of absences and emergencies advanced by Boaventura de Sousa helps us build bridges between silenced violence and the absence of justice, freedom, equality; and to understand that there is no single form of domination nor a single principle of social transformation, but rather many forms that are interconnected. The five monocultures, described by de Sousa Santos (2005), contribute to explaining the various processes of silenced violence by not recognizing other ways of life: a) monoculture of knowledge, b) of progress, c) of the naturalization of hierarchies, d) of the universal as the only valid thing and e) of productivity based only on economic growth. The contributions of feminist sociology allow us to articulate the narratives between the structures of power and the invisibility of violence and injustice, overshadowed by the androcentric nature of the sociological discourse of modernity.

This critique allows us to glimpse other ontologies and epistemologies for the present



and the future; and to bring a diversity of identity consciousness. With this, we wish to fight against the disregard of the histories of invisible violence and against the denial of colonial traces. Finally, we seek to explore alternatives to legitimizing other ways of seeing the world; building plural, local futures, based on care activities and on the recognition and legitimization of diverse knowledge, practices and agents, based on socio-environmental justice and on converting invisible violence into forces of transformation.

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CASTE, GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES IN INDIA'S URBAN PERIPHERIES

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Caste, gender and nature are deeply intertwined in India and embedded in its environmentalism. Yet, the academic world has paid little attention to this phenomenon. For Dalits, formerly known as "untouchables", little has changed since gaining independence. Especially regarding violence, a subject to which they have been exposed for centuries, despite affirmative action enshrined in the Constitution.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between Dalits and their ecological environment follows the perverse logic of caste, through justified religiousness, perceives them as bodily epitomes of impurity, pollution and filth. This centuries-old system of stratification has diverse implications for Dalits' environmental experiences, ranging from stigmatization, denial of access to land, water and food, bonded labor to brute violence and displacement in rural contexts.

As far as metropolises are concerned, the relationship between caste mechanisms and environmental conflicts has been scarcely investigated. This is due

to multiple reasons. First, the metropolis has been imagined as a space of escape from the crudeness of society and as a guarantee of socio-economic improvement. Second, India, a post-colonial nation, defines nature and city as divergent elements, following the old Cartesian binary. Driven by this deepening *status quo* that continuously dehumanizes Dalits, this investigation examines the intersection between caste, gender and environmental violence by focusing on waste pickers in India's urban peripheries.

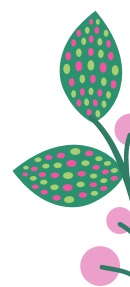
As Harriss -White (2020) has pointed out, garbage collection remains a caste-based and highly feminized profession, with the





majority being Dalit women. This research argues that there is a double colonization of Dalits, relative to India's position in the world-system and to their social status within the postcolonial nation. It is not simply the interdependence of social categories such as class, caste or gender that contributes to creating social exclusion and privilege, but also the unequal distribution of power, access to rights and resources. Furthermore, migration plays a significant role in this study. It is evoked in all cases by the denial of landownership and worsened by natural disasters such as droughts and floods, which force Dalits to migrate to cities. Also, the complicity of the current right-wing regime and capitalist elites, has exacerbated land grabbing and forced eviction for "development" projects that see vulnerable groups as an impediment to carrying out their agendas. Due to political violence and lack of compensation, Dalits

are forced to move and work in highly toxic environments. Recycling remains one of the few options that resemble the traditional "dirty" and polluting work to which they have been consigned, due to narratives that have embedded an inferior status in their minds and bodies. Because of this, garbage collection can be considered a "pharmakon" (Dhawan 2014), a double-edged sword. Based on nine months of intensive fieldwork in informal settlements and landfills in Delhi and Mumbai, my research highlights the environmental injustices encapsulated by "racial capitalism" (Gilmore 2022), "waste colonialism" (Liboiron 2018) and what I call "environmental casteism". In total, over 50 qualitative interviews were conducted with women waste pickers, their children, social activists and NGOs, focusing on their *habitus*. and hopes for the future. As my work does not conceive theory and praxis as separate entities nor of recyclers as "passive objects", it also focuses on decolonial praxis. It examines everyday forms of resistance among recyclers and the possibilities of collective action under rising authoritarianism, the grim fact of capitalism — disguised as "globalization"— and its continuing environmental



exploitation, following a Freirean approach. The concepts of “border thinking” (Mignolo 2012), “transmodernity” (Dussel 2008) and “decolonial feminism” (Lugones 2010) are important influences.

Within this framework, self-help groups within NGOs serve as spaces of affirmation for these marginalized individuals; they also serve as a discursive space to destigmatize them by creating attainable alliances. These NGOs are led by Dalit women, which is an astonishing shift from charismatic leadership to an approach where the disempowered can appropriate activism and find their voices and skills, while working to fight marginalization. These women are the first in their families to be given the privilege of education and decided to educate other women in their communities by experiencing first-hand the tug-of-war between the caste system, capitalism and patriarchy. The forms of resistance and healing are multiple: legal assistance to victims of violence, awareness seminars, but also creative activities such as art therapy and drama therapy. This highlights the confluence of memory and purpose, united to strengthen the rights of scavengers. These NGOs are important to rebuilding liberation narratives and creating sustainable alliances.

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THE BLUE AGAVE, A PROBLEM THAT EXTENDS THROUGHOUT THE BAJÍO REGION

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Mexican agave production represents one of the most dynamic economies in the country: it has maintained a constant growth since the eighties in the twentieth century, especially in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato. These last three make up a territory known as Lerma Bajío, one of the areas recognized since colonial times for its high productivity and which came to be known as the New Spain's granary.



In this work we want to point out how in the last twenty years blue agave has grown without any kind of restriction, occupying large extensions of valleys, plateaus and hills between Pénjamo in Guanajuato, La Piedad in Michoacán and the lowlands of Jalisco, completely changing the landscape to the detriment of the ecosystems of the region, such as the low deciduous forest and the scrublands.

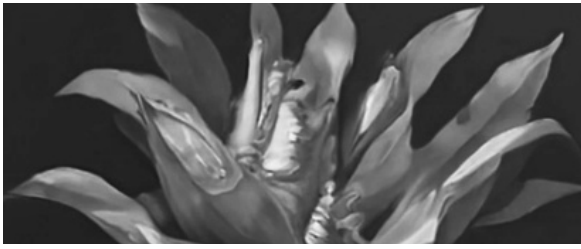
On the one hand, the local flora and fauna are affected to such an extent that even endemic plants of the region, such as the cotton pochote (*Ceiba petandra* or *Ceiba parvifolia*), have begun to disappear previously common landscapes between Pénjamo and La Piedad. On the other hand, there are little-valued plants

belonging to the scrubland, such as the huizaches (*Vachellia farnesiana*), which, because of their little or no value, are cut down to make room for agave.

In this context, local authorities encourage farmers to continue planting blue agave, even leaving plots of cornfields free for its production: its commercial value has been increasing in international markets such as the United States, China and Spain, where it arrives in large quantities as tequila with a designation of origin (SAGARPA-SENASICA 2017).

The Lerma Bajío region is also part of the Lerma Chapala basin, which has been directly affected by human activities. Now, large areas planted with agave are added to deforestation and little water filtration into the subsoil. By 2018, it was estimated that





Michoacán had more than seven million plants, 500 agave producers, in addition to a production that oscillates around 800 thousand liters of tequila and 300 thousand liters of mezcal (Government of Mexico 2018). While demand for tequila and mezcal is increasing on the global market, the impact on the region's biome shows an ecological destruction that is already evident because of low rainfall. An area that previously was considered mild, with an average temperature between 22 and 24 degrees, now temperatures reach more than 35 degrees Celsius during the month of May. Rainfall is less, and the Lerma River that surrounds part of the city in La Piedad is increasingly dry. Rob Nixon, a specialist in violence against the natural environment, tells us about violence that has gradually occurred, dispersed over long periods of time and that is not as visible or spectacular as a war, but that leads to equally cruel forms of violence through deforestation, toxic accumulation, ocean acidification or climate change, especially in regions of vulnerability or poverty (Spyros 2021). In the Lerma Bajío region, these conditions of vulnerability exist, and in more isolated

localities, conditions of communication and services in general are not the most adequate. Even though residents work in agriculture and grazing, these activities can hardly provide adequate subsistence.

It is necessary to reflect on the responsibility of caring for the environment beyond the profits offered by a monoculture such as agave. In the Bajío region —also in other parts of Mexico— this form of agriculture has led to a drought that could have serious consequences for food security in one of the most populated regions of the country. Maintaining the balance is everyone's responsibility, but above all that of the authorities that encourage it.

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OAXACA, DISPOSSESSION AND RESISTANCE: MINING COMPANIES IN COMMUNAL TERRITORIES

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The mining industry in the state of Oaxaca has pressured various communities to initiate exploration and extraction projects for precious and industrial metals. A review of the last fifteen years shows various conflicts throughout the region; in response, a strong, sometimes successful, resistance has risen.

This is added to the incessant conflict for control of the territory between the indigenous and farming communities that have historically inhabited it and the transnational companies protected by the three levels of government. Added to this dispute is one of the present government's priority works, the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which intends to reconfigure the territory and reorganize the population to meet the demand of the global market.

In Oaxaca, violence is used as persuasion in the implementation of "development" projects imposed from upper ranks and to

control social movements. Also, the sociopolitical context is marked by absolute impunity: with the repression of the Loxicha people in 1997, the operation of federal forces against the APPO in 2006, the June 2016 massacre in Nochixtlán, to name a few cases. In the last three years, 21 defenders of the territory have been murdered, not counting threats, imprisonments or forced disappearances.

Consequently, this work aims to account the dispute over territory in the state of Oaxaca through the penetration of different companies, particularly those in mining, and the multiple resistance strategies that



communities and organizations have implemented to counteract the continued plundering of their natural resources, their territories and their way of life.

Analyzing the panorama of mining plunder in the state of Oaxaca until 2023 goes far beyond electoral positions in the Mexican political scene; at its root lie territorial dispossession, abuse of power, repression, environmental pollution and damage to the health of people around mining projects, as well as the huge profits for the owners of transnational companies and “national” capital.

We take as example the case of the Ocotlán Valley, where continuously, presidential term after presidential term from Felipe Calderón to the current president, the Canadian mining company Fortuna Silver Mines has not stopped its advance, while at the same time Gold Resource has continued its path of expansion from San José del Progreso to San Pedro Totolapan.

Repression by security forces, the murder of opponents and harassment have been the constant that goes hand in hand with territorial expansion and the extraction of metals such as silver and gold in these territories. In that same manner, the resistance of the occupied towns or those adjoining the exploited deposits has continued over the years.

More than a decade after the imposition of the mining project in San José del Progreso, community rejection of the dispossession remains firm. This happens as part of a struggle for the defense of “natural resources, territoriality, culture, collective life, and community self-management; always emphasizing the strength and importance of the assembly. It is, above all, a struggle in defense of territory and identity, as a demand against the imposition of death projects” (Bianchetto 2023: 83).

On the other hand, the Canadian mining company Vortex Metals has been launching exploration work since last year in two existing mining concessions located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in the municipalities of Santiago Astata and Santo Domingo Tehuantepec. This company will greatly benefit from the construction of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of

Tehuantepec and the Development Poles.

Both companies have repeatedly told the governments in power that they need infrastructure, discipline programs for the poor rural population, control the territory and to "enforce the rule of law" so as not to scare away investment.

In this context, environmental justice is far from being present in the State of Oaxaca, firstly due to the impunity related to the murder of environmental defenders, and secondly, due to persistent mining pollution. The most recent cases have been two chemical spills from the Minera Cuzcatlán facilities (San José del Progreso) in October 2018 and July 2020, which have been repeatedly denounced by the inhabitants of the affected communities. Despite the complaints and evidence of the serious damage caused to health and the environment, Fortuna Silver Mines continues to operate normally in Oaxaca. Since then, SEMARNAT has seen four different heads of its office pass (among them Víctor Manuel Toledo), who promised to do justice for these events; however, the Canadian company continues its unstoppable expansion.



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AMONG DECEPTION AND UNCERTAINTY: EXPERIENCES OF SUFFERING AND INJUSTICE BECAUSE OF EXPOSURE TO RADIOACTIVE WASTE IN THE PERIPHERY OF THE MEXICAN METROPOLIS

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The Radioactive Waste Storage Center (CADER), located in Temascalapa, on the outskirts of the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico, has endangered the population of the nearby areas, who day to day face uncertainty regarding the possible counterproductive effects to their health and their immediate territory; as well as socio-territorial stigmatization by local authorities and inhabitants of other surrounding areas.



The resistance and political action that advocate stopping the harmful effects of CADER have been demobilized and fragmented, preventing any further direct influence in the decision-making of its definitive closure.

CADER was built by the no longer active National Nuclear Energy Commission (CNEN). To build the Center, this agency acquired a 14.7-hectare plot of land in the municipality of Temascalapa, State of Mexico. This facility was to be operated by the National Institute of Nuclear Research, an agency that, in 1993, acquired an additional 1.7 hectares for its expansion. The construction of this facility

came to cover the demand for confinement of this type of material, since provisional storage in Tlalnepantla, State of Mexico, was not sufficient; Also, in 1984, it was designated as the ideal site for the storage of radioactive, a title given to it because of a nuclear accident in Chihuahua (CNNS 2021, ININ 1998).

This work discusses how the State, through a strategy of deception and institutional abandonment, puts the population living in these places at risk. Every day, they face uncertainty regarding the possible counterproductive effects on their health and their immediate territory, as well as socio-



territorial stigmatization by local authorities and inhabitants of other nearby spaces. Finally, it analyzes how resistance and political action are demobilized and fragmented, preventing any further direct influence in the decision-making of its definitive closure. To do so, semi-structured interviews with key informants, field investigation and observations, newspaper articles and geographic information systems are used.

CADAR is located between the towns of Santa María Maquixco and San Juan Teacalco, Temascalapa, State of Mexico. The reasoning given to the population of these communities for the placement of this center by the official authorities was that this place would be a factory and that this supposed establishment would bring jobs to communities; also that schools and other services for the community would be built. Aside from these irregularities, federal regulations indicate that “there should not be areas with natural resources [...] and areas of underground water” (SENER 1997: 4) in the area where CADAR is located. However, this establishment is located directly above the Cuautitlán-Pachuca aquifer, which puts this water element at risk of contamination. The promises and lies have created a scenario of profound uncertainty where neither the

municipal authorities nor the inhabitants have clear information about the risks they have because of exposure to pollution by radioactive waste. Since the eighties, this has led to various political actions, such as neighborhood meetings, demands to the relevant institutions, blockades and protests demanding the performance of medical studies to confirm the health effects suffered by these two localities. Inhabitants are seeking CADAR's, defunct and relocation as well as compensation for damages.

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THE 30X30 AGENDA: JUST MARINE CONSERVATION IMAGINARIES?

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Healthy oceans play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity as well as in the struggle against climate change. To guarantee this health, the international community has committed to increasing and enlarging so-called marine protected areas (MPAs). In December 2022, the UN Biodiversity Conference COP15 held in Montreal came to an end with the landmark agreement to put 30% of the planet, hence also 30% of the oceans under protection by 2030 (the so called 30x30 agenda), met little resistance.



Yet the effectiveness of these areas regarding both nature conservation and climate change adaptation has been strongly contested. Zooming into case studies in Indonesia and the Caribbean, I disentangle tensions between the international level imaginaries of marine protected areas and what they are capable of achieving on the local level. I depart from the assumption that dominant ways of imagining ocean conservation are detached from cultural, social, and political meanings of the environment and climate. The dominant way of imaging solutions leads to MPAs as the main area-based tool while the detachment from local ways of knowing the ocean challenges the success of MPAs. Applying the lens of governmentality to

marine protected areas in the context of the 30x30 agenda, I aim to understand what knowledge regimes define problems, how solutions are framed accordingly and how they become the accepted truth framing practices. To make maximum use of comparative information, one MPA in Indonesia (Bunaken Marine Park) and one in the Caribbean (Bonaire National Marine Park) were studied, which were established before climate change shaped the policy agenda. One site per region is currently being set up (Aruba and Lease), taking into consideration climate change (Kunz in review). The analysis aims to understand how ocean governance can be more responsive to current challenges such as climate change





and species loss, but to also take societal participants and their worlds into consideration. This also allows us to consider questions about environmental justice. Utilizing the tripartite approach to environmental justice (Kunz and Hein 2023), changes in access to marine resources for inhabitants living adjacent to the MPAs are obvious. It is often the people with less power who are restricted from access, while those in power are able to benefit. The procedural dimension shows that it is often participants external to the contextual setting are in charge of designing MPAs. The design determines the outer boundaries of the MPAs and how the zoning within the MPAs is informed and decided on. Often, these decisions are allegedly biological or ecological aiming to consider consequences of climate change. In the study cases, it was challenging and almost impossible to gather information on what the decisions were based on. The Lease MPA was an exception in many regards. Here, the decisions were taken after stakeholders, especially customary leaders, were provided with the opportunity to contribute to the zoning design. Concerning the

recognition dimension, often it is not the contextual knowledge that seems to be of highest value, but knowledge generated by external “experts”, often scientists and consultancy firms. The 30x30 agenda pushes MPAs as the (imagined) solution towards biodiversity loss and more recently as a response to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Currently, marine protected areas are extremely challenged in their viability, while struggling to protect biodiversity and incorporate climate change aspects into their design. Biodiversity protection would also mean being able to control what is happening next to the boundaries: infrastructural development on land, wastewater treatment, cruise ships activities, and other aspects of land impacting the marine ecosystem. In terms of climate change, so far, most participants in charge of designing or managing MPAs do not yet know how to incorporate the topic into the design. The viability of MPAs does not increase either, when bringing justice aspects into the debate.

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SANDS OF VIOLENCE? RIVER SEDIMENT EXTRACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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After water, sand is now the second most used natural resource in the world, and its extraction has been exponential since the 1950s. The extraction of river sediments (sand, clay, gravel and small river stones) —those found in bodies of water— contributes greatly to the so-called “sand” industry in Mexico. This extraction today presents characteristics that put environmental justice at stake by presenting notable situations of violence.



Based on a review of international literature and field work in the Usumacinta River basin, the research addresses the situation surrounding violence related to “river sand mining” (*sand mining*) in contrast to the Mexican case, for which there is little published literature. The transboundary basin of the Usumacinta River (Guatemala-Mexico) is crossed by the largest river in Mexico and Central America and numerous tributaries, which means an abundance of sediments not interrupted by dams on the Mexican side is present. The literature published in Asia points to a scenario of violence that can be grouped into two

broad categories: the extraction of river sediments which illustrates a series of workplace violence and environmental injustices linked to the lack of regulation and control of the activity. It presents high risks due to the lack of protection for workers, the absence of medical services and basic infrastructure, the location of activities in remote areas and the predominance of informality: consequently, accidents in the process and in transportation are numerous. In the case of Usumacinta, divers are the most vulnerable to the risk of drowning, since they work without any protection and without equipment. In April





2023, The South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People reported 261 deaths in India in eleven months. Among these workplace violence cases are health effects caused by labor exploitation. Among the realities of violence are the sand mafias that commit various crimes in India and other countries (Torres et al. 2017). These are made up of networks of politicians linked to companies organized around illegal, unlicensed, or unregulated large-scale extraction. For example, in June 2019, an environmental activist was murdered in the Usumacinta River basin and his perpetrators left written evidence that he was killed because of his complaints about illegal sand extraction. Compared to the situation in other countries, the Usumacinta River basin has so far shown a low level of violence. However, conflicts we observed during fieldwork between 2018 and 2023 are on the rise due to two

situations based on clear environmental injustices.

The first is the construction of the Mayan Train, one of the main infrastructure projects of the 2018-2024 presidential term. In fact, this project requires sand from various sources and one of these is the lower bed of the Usumacinta River. This has implied a rearrangement of participants, the entry of national and foreign companies, and a reorganization of the forms of corporatism associated with transportation that have disrupted local extraction scenarios.

The second allows us to state that the emergence of conflicts tends to appear when there is competition between the presence of companies and artisans; because the former enter without consideration for the previously existing artisanal work, articulated with power networks, sometimes in conditions against the law imposing themselves on the latter, because of unfavorable social, political and economic conditions.

Both situations have exacerbated tensions in the Usumacinta River basin: the results of the research demonstrate that the Mexican regulatory framework is inadequate, ineffective and inefficient, reinforcing





inequalities and encouraging pre-existing environmental injustices due to the increase in industrial extractions that affect riverside populations in terms of environmental impacts. Today, the involvement of organized crime in sand extraction in Mexico poses a major threat to environmental justice. What the future is likely to hold is an increase in violence associated with the multiple effects of hydroextractivism (Kauffer 2021) of river sediments. Since September 2023, part of the Usumacinta River basin has been controlled by organized crime groups, a situation that adds to the mentioned violence foreshadowing a complex scenario in terms of environmental (in)justices.

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THE ARTICULATION OF MEGAPROJECTS WITH THE MAYAN TRAIN: AN EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE ANALYSIS

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The south-southeast of Mexico has been a hub that has been attracting more and more attention in national and international economic dynamics. This situation is putting the biocultural wealth of the region in jeopardy, with a strong component of indigenous groups, who have tried to maintain their ancestral relationship with the biodiversity of the ecosystems they inhabit; not only maintaining them but also transforming them through worldviews that consider a respectful use of natural resources (Escalante Kantún et al. 2022).

Under the López Obrador administration, this area is undergoing a turbulent territorial transformation due to the rapid and unusual convergence of various large-scale public capital infrastructure projects, such as the Olmeca Refinery (in Dos Bocas, Tabasco), the Interoceanic Corridor (in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, between Veracruz and Oaxaca) and the so-called Mayan Train (in Chiapas, Tabasco and the Yucatan Peninsula), these projects are linked together as well as with

other private capital projects that have been developed since previous administrations. Primarily, in the Yucatan Peninsula, the Mayan Train is catalyzing and consolidating, in an uncontrolled manner, investments related to agribusiness —which include large areas of monocultures, poultry and pig farms—, to the massive development of tourism-real estate and energy projects, which combine gas pipelines and electricity generating plants with fossil fuels and renewable energy





sources, such as photovoltaic and wind farms, among others (Sánchez Arceo *et al.* 2023). Consequently, conflicts arise from these transformations, due to the fragmented vision of the impacts of various projects that converge synergistically and cumulatively in the region, blurring the territorial repercussions through decision-making processes characterized by a lack of transparency and a vertical and external predominance. As a tool to broaden the framework of environmental justice, based on the notion of epistemic injustice, we propose to identify imbalances in the recognition of forms of knowledge and participation among the diversity of participants that are interwoven in this developmental context. Epistemic injustice is conceived from philosophy as involuntary discrimination, which may well be personal, but also structural and political (Fricker 2021). Two types of environmental injustice

are distinguished: a direct one, called testimonial injustice, which comes from prejudices towards a speaker who is undervalued or perceived as inferior; the other, indirect, called hermeneutical injustice, where the speaker finds themselves in a context of inequality and disadvantage, both to understand and to make other people understand this same disadvantage.

Among the testimonial injustices identified as a result of the Mayan Train Project is, the lack of recognition of the self-determination of indigenous peoples, a commitment that Mexico has had since its ratification in 1990 through agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization. We can also add the lack of participation of local participants in the planning of the project and an absence of public participation mechanisms, as well as a lack of attention to citizen complaints against the Mayan Train, whether public or legal, which caused attacks by the authorities or were simply ignored.

As part of the hermeneutical injustices that can be pointed out, one outstanding experience is the inequality of dialogue during the Indigenous Consultation process carried out in just one month, at the end of 2019, according to the report of

the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico. However, in general, a lack of mechanisms needed to share accurate information with the local public, as well as to listen to public voices, can be noted, along with a lack of social organization structures and local democratic mechanisms for decision-making.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize how a better distribution of knowledge, testimonial and communication abilities based on personal experiences can lead to a strengthening of territories. It is therefore suggested to develop and strengthen the mechanisms of collective organization and citizen participation that allow typically discriminated sectors to have a voice in the decision-making of the territories they inhabit.



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BLACK WATER AND CRIME: THE DILEMMAS OF FISHERMEN IN THE ISTHMUS OF CHIAPAS

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The lagoon system of the Isthmus-Coast of Chiapas is made up of a network of estuaries, canals and plains, where one called the Dead Sea stands out, a 60 km long lagoon that is distributed between Chiapas and Oaxaca. This has been the cradle of dozens of generations of artisanal fishermen, representatives of a lifestyle closely linked to the sea, where they have found their livelihood, and through which have built their identity.



During the 1970s, the region was the target of government incentives for fishing production (Alcalá 1999). These initially increased fishing efforts causing unprecedented economic benefits; creating the conditions for the accumulation of significant local capital and for the opening of commercial connections with various regions of the country, which, as a whole, translated into improvements in the quality of life of many families. The economic boom stimulated migratory processes that had an impact on population growth for both the fisheries and the municipal capitals.

But the transformation of fishing, based mainly on the introduction of new technologies and on the

reorganization of work through the creation of cooperative societies, had, at the same time, a negative impact on the relationship of the coastal fisherman with their ecological environment. The influence of the new public policies, aimed at expanding fishing markets, as well as the arrival of new participants interested in natural resources, meant a process of re-territorialization, which displaced many of the vernacular logics and practices (Ramos 2023). In this way, by being reduced to functioning as a space for economic competition, the sea lost some of its most important historical social functions, such as promoting the organization of work and the reinforcement of



reciprocal relations.

The effects of this process were soon visible through the deterioration of ecosystems, where the existing aquatic connections between rivers, wetlands, estuaries and the sea bore the brunt of the problem. This, in turn, caused the decline of the most profitable species, thus intensifying the race for fishing, and raising internal conflicts, which gradually tore apart the social fabric, and stratified the populations by marginalizing large sectors. In addition to this, the failure of the state project, visible in the ineffectiveness of the cooperatives, created a series of vices, illegal practices and networks of complicity articulated around the commercial and political structures of fishing, which since that time have not ceased to evolve.

Around twenty years ago, the combination of these types of factors created the conditions for the emergence of human trafficking and drug trafficking networks linked to various organizations in Central and South America. With the sea as their main means of transportation, these criminal forces found in impoverished coastal fishermen an efficient and expendable workforce. The latter, for their part, found in



this type of activity a way of overcoming the fishing crisis. As a result of these approaches, criminal networks and the violence associated with them have proliferated in the Isthmus area primarily around the Dead Sea, using fishing as a front and the fisherman as bait or cannon fodder. The proximity between fishermen and criminals, however, has been decisively favored by the deterioration of the lagoon systems, caused today also by the chaotic growth of the urban centers of the region which, given the ineffectiveness of the regulatory frameworks, dump large quantities of residual discharges into the rivers that flow into the estuaries where the fishermen fish.

In this context, the coastal fisherman today faces the need to redefine his own relationship with the sea, seeking the necessary balance to adapt to new realities, and trying not to lose in this attempt the link with the ecological environment



where his identity and history are rooted. His job therefore oscillates between the appropriation of illegal practices and the demands for justice that seek to stop the damage to its natural resources. Two apparently opposing strategies, but which have as a common denominator the need to maintain a lifestyle that can only exist next to the sea.



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PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Her research has focused on the study of violence and subjectivities. From the intersection of contemporary sociological theory and Latin American political ecology, she has investigated its expressions in conflicts over nature in Mexico. Lines of research: violence and subjectivities; indigenous peoples, ethnicity and interethnic relations; qualitative research methodologies and applied research.

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Raquel Neyra

Economist and PhD in Sociology of Public and Social Policies from the University of Zaragoza, Postdoctorate at IDEA-UNAL. Master's in International Economics and MBA from the University Paris I-La Sorbonne. Activist and researcher. Visiting professor in the Doctorate in Economics at the National Agrarian University La Molina. Vice President of the Andean Society of Ecological Economics. Member of the Work Group Political Ecologies from the South / Abya Yala coordination. Lines of research: coloniality, violence, land grabbing, socio-environmental conflicts.

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I am a professor of sociology at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at UNAM. In my research work I have sought to describe and discuss the politics of environmental risks and their links with large and unequal processes such as agrarian reform and the development of tourism in the southern coast of Mexico.

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Professor-researcher at CIESAS, Mexico City and Research Associate at the Chr. Michelsen Centre, Bergen. PhD in Politics from the University of London. Research interests: law and society, indigenous rights, indigenous law and legal anthropology. She has researched indigenous justice in Guatemala for many years and works with collectives of indigenous lawyers to provide expert reports for cases where collective rights of indigenous peoples are violated. She has also worked extensively on gender issues and indigenous justice systems.

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Full-time academic and Director of Advocacy Programs at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. Graduated in Psychology from ITESO, Master in Gender and Culture Studies from the University of Chile and PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at Ibero University. Specialized in the management of psychosocial projects with women and youth, her work dialogues with gender studies and feminisms. Lines of research: violence, socio-territorial conflicts and collective movements.

Carlos Tornel

Researcher and member of the facilitating team of *Global Fabric of Alternatives*, as well as the process of *Crianzas Mutua México*. He has a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Durham, United Kingdom, and his work focuses on the decolonization of energy justice and on the processes of pluriversal energy transition towards other worlds and other ways of relating to energy. His lines of research are justice and energy transformations, decolonization, ontology and political ecology. He is co-author of *Navegar el Colapso* (Bajo Tierra, Mexico) and *Gustavo Esteva; vida y obra de un intelectual deprofesionalizado* (Bajo Tierra, Mexico).

Nicolás Vargas-Ramírez

Técnico académico asociado del CIMSUR-UNAM. Integrante de las redes EnJust, Red Latinoamericana para el Uso Comunitario de Drones, Red Latinoamericana para el Estudio de Conflictos Ambientales y Red Latinoamericana por la Defensa del Patrimonio Biocultural, y del Colectivo por la Protección de la Provincia de Sugamuxi y la Colectiva Cartográfica de los Sures Globales. Doctor en Geografía por la UNAM. Su trabajo integra la geografía ambiental, la coproducción de conocimientos cartográficos y etnográficos y el activismo académico para estudiar conflictos ambientales. Líneas de investigación: conflictos ambientales, territorio y organización social colectiva; cartografía participativa e información geográfica voluntaria; etnografía comprometida y justicia ambiental.

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Social anthropologist, graduated from the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City, with a Master's degree in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands) and a PhD in Social Anthropology from McGill University in Montreal (Canada). She works and researches issues related to rural change, political ecology and environmental justice. She has participated in various academic, interdisciplinary and cultural production projects in Mexico, the Netherlands and the United States.

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Economist from the Autonomous University of Yucatan, Master in Ecological Economics from the University of Leeds (United Kingdom) and PhD in Environmental Economics from the University of York (United Kingdom). She researches topics related to sustainable energy transitions, environmental governance and processes of participation in decision-making in socio-environmental policy. She is currently a researcher in the Land and Territory Program at Fundar, Center for Analysis and Research.

Rodrigo T. Patiño Díaz

Since 2004 he has been a researcher at the Mérida Unit of the Center for Research and Advanced Studies (CINVESTAV). In recent years he has worked on issues of energy transition, socio-environmental impacts and public policies for sustainable regional development. He is widely interested in promoting inter- and transdisciplinary work, as well as science communication. Since 2016 he has been part of the Articulación Yucatán collective.

Rogelio Jusue Ramos Torres

He has a PhD in Social Anthropology from CIESAS, Southeast Campus, and a Master's degree in Political and Social Studies from UNAM. He works from the perspective of political ecology, mainly through the combination of history and ethnography in the field. He is interested in the study of political dimensions and power dynamics in disaster processes, violence and socio-environmental conflicts, especially in coastal contexts.

About the meeting

Environmental Justice and Violence: Resistance, Articulations and Intersections **RETURN**

The IV International Environmental Justice and Violence meeting: Resistance, Articulations and Intersections took place from October 3 to 6, 2023 in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. It was organized by the EnJust Network together with the Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), UNAM, through the Center for Multidisciplinary Research in Chiapas and Central America (CIMSUR-UNAM), the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences (FCPYS-UNAM) and the Department of Geography of Christian - Albrechts - Universität zu Kiel. The EnJust Network was founded at the University of Kiel, Germany, in 2019 to raise awareness on environmental justice issues and strengthen the democratic participation of people affected by environmental problems. The aim is to bring together participants from science, planning and civil society as well as to initiate spaces for communication and collaborative research.

The EnJust 2023 meeting was established as a space for collective reflection on the patterns of violence faced by environmental justice movements

with the aim of vizibilizing, characterizing and understanding their different modalities and their origins. The meeting began by giving an account of the concerns and challenges that the meeting itself brought with it. The topic is unavoidable throughout Latin America, gripped by violence, but where demands for environmental and climate justice are multiplying, confronting de facto and hegemonic powers with diverse ideas, strategies and feelings. The meeting sought to promote a space for dialogue and learning that starts with the recognition of these defenses and resistances through life.

The meeting took place in person in San Cristóbal de Las Casas and brought together participants from Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, the United States, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Finland, the United Kingdom and Sweden. The format included short communications in different formats and interactive debates in an informal and collegial atmosphere.

The meeting proposed academic contributions on topics related to, but not exclusive to, the various sources and forms of violence in the field of environmental justice, including: violence as legality/

illegality; symbolic and structural violence; extreme violence in the form of extermination, disappearance, necropolitics; violence and resistance in urban and peri-urban environments; climate change and environmental degradation as forms of slow violence; resistance, agencies, networks, strategies and responses to overcome violence; strategies to build hope, for example through art and alternative methodologies; the role of critical academia committed to environmental activism.

We chose to meet in San Cristóbal de Las Casas because of the city's history with violence from its colonial past. Its thriving tourist economy is tied to gender violence, ethnic segregation, the material and spiritual kidnapping of youth and militarization. It is a city that faces serious environmental challenges such as deforestation, the drying up of its mountain wetlands, water shortages and pollution in all its forms. At the same time, it is an emblematic city because of the political movements it houses, the Zapatista Movement, one of the most important libertarian movements of the last decades; because bridges have been built between academia and organizations; and because we want to think that transformative

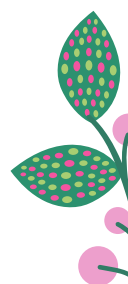
forces also nest in its contradictions and tensions. The demand for environmental justice in Chiapas and throughout Latin America is centered on the defense of the territory and is inseparable from social justice and historical reparation. San Cristóbal de Las Casas is located in a region affected by long-term conflicts and a low-intensity war, which is currently exacerbated by the attack of drug trafficking, the intentional omissions of the State, the excessive exploitation of its natural resources, the historical marginalization and impoverishment of indigenous peoples. We witness here what the Franco-Maghrebi sociologist, poet and painter Mustapha Saha points out, following Robert Jaulin's conceptualization, as the decivilization imposed by the West (Saha 2023). However, it is also a place where progressive and hopeful proposals are built, with a long tradition of resistance and struggle for justice. In the face of dehumanization and material and symbolic destruction caused in the name of developmental progress, technocracy and corruption, San Cristóbal is home to civil and academic organizations that recreate, from collective feeling and living, an alternative world that is socially and environmentally just.


Organizing Committee

- Celia Ruiz de Oña Plaza / *Center for Multidisciplinary Research on Chiapas and the Southern Border* (CIMSUR-UNAM).
- Ignacio Rubio Carriquiriborde / *Center for Sociological Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences* (FCPYS-UNAM).
- Florian Duenkmann / *Department of Geography, Kiel University* (CAU).
- Libertad Chavez-Rodriguez / *Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology* (CIESAS Noreste).
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Bibliographic references

- Saha, M. (2023). France versus Africa: The “decivilization” ideologized by the extreme right. *Latin Network Without Borders* (Blog). (Translation of the original article in French *La France invente la mise au ban of students africains*, *Mondafrique*, September 18, 2023).
<https://redlatinasinfronteras.wordpress.com/2023/09/22/francia-versus-africa-la-descivilizacion-ideologizada-por-la-extrema-derecha/>





This publication seeks to visualize an array of urgent problems faced by nations and peoples in Mexico and the rest of the world: the struggle to transform the dominant political-ecological model of extractive, exclusionary, patriarchal and ecocidal exploitation. Through a wide range of problems and situations, written by a large group of authors, it weaves a collective narrative that reveals both the violence perpetrated against communities and their environments, as well as the forms of resistance and hope that emerge in response.

With the publication of this work, we strive to capture and share in a clear and agile manner the current critical situation: the pulse between the oppression of a predatory and inhuman system and the growing awareness of the urgency of an imminent change, in the face of the collapse of the certainties that sustained said system. We underline the relevance of community organization, tenacity in the face of adversity and the generation of collective knowledge, crucial elements for the desired transformation.

Environmental Justice, more than a set of transcendental ethical principles, is a framework of emerging meaning in the field of very different struggles in which, in any case, any idea of justice finds its true meaning.

We hope that by going through this material, based on what can be problematized in each case in terms of distributive inequities, procedural injustices and/or lack of recognition, readers can build their own narrative about the problems that Environmental Justice encompasses today.

Emerged from the IV EnJust Environmental Justice Network Meeting in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, in October 2023, this book aims to fuel dialogue, debate and, above all, action towards building a more just and equitable world.

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