

## Book Review

—*La Amazonía Minada: Minería a gran escala y conflictos en el sur del Ecuador*, by Karolien van Teijlingen, Esben Leifsen, Consuelo Fernández-Salvado, and Luis Sánchez-Vázquez, Editorial Universidad San Francisco de Quito, 2017.

*La Amazonía Minada* (2017) is an important and timely book. Through a political ecology framework and extended case studies it offers close analyses of recent extractive projects in Southern Ecuador. Over the course of nine chapters, and with the important commentary in the editors' introduction and conclusion, the book carefully renders the complex politics of resistance and refusal within a relatively new embattled zone of frontier capitalism. Addressing the topics of environmental justice, Indigenous rights, struggles over water, land, and multinational debt in relation to local and national resources, the book's introduction is a compelling account of why studying political participation matters in times of extractive intensification. By focusing on a Latin American region that has experienced dizzying levels of expanded economic activity over the past decade, and equally active social movements, *La Amazonía Minada* offers broad lessons for how to study and activate against the logics of developmentalism in the Americas, upon Indigenous territories and beyond.

One of the book's central contributions is to challenge the myth that populist and progressive governments are antithetical to the teleology of capitalist growth. As the experience of the Latin American pink tide states makes evident, leftist governments have mostly identified with the dominant economic neoliberal model of privatization and deregulation.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, extractive capitalism can only expand through the legitimization of state sanctioned projects that further insert Global South nations into an economic paradigm of radically unequal outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The authors elaborate these important points by analysing Ecuador's specific pathway to neoliberalism, undoing the ideology

---

<sup>1</sup> See my book *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents* (University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See my book *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Submerged Perspectives* (Duke University Press, 2017).

that a natural progression of economic advancement takes place through resource extraction.

The book's strength is to focus closely on Southern Ecuador where new regional mining projects can be distinguished from the Eastern Ecuadorian petroleum activities operative since the 1960s. In a press conference on March 5, 2012, then President Correa highlighted the significance of Southern Ecuador as a new site of extraction. The book's opening page cites Correa as saying, "Today, fellow citizens, we initiate a new era in Ecuador. This is a moment of singular importance because we make a qualitative jump to the exploration of projects at a grand scale, and to the first project of copper exploitation at the industrial scale" (p. 11). The exaggerated rhetoric here of firsts and new eras of exploration is all too relevant to our current moment of dispossession. Correa's quote is also notable for his desire to produce new economies and markets, even as the hyper exploitation of natural resources has been a failing strategy in Latin America for centuries. Given the long history of extraction in the Andes, in Northern Chile, and throughout Brazil, Correa's notion that there is anything new about industrial level practices in relation to mineral extraction sounds naive. Yet, the transnational, Chinese, and Ecuadorian state in Southern Ecuador represents a new and dramatic phase of development based upon mining. What is specific to this region and reiterated throughout the edited volume, is the time/space compression of the shift to a new region of exploration and another model of exploitation. To put this in a compact way, the book richly investigates old questions with a new sense of urgency in the era of extractive intensification. And, it does so with methodological rigor and texture, providing an important model of grounded collaborative research.

*La Amazonía Minada* also considers the moment of mining expansion to be decisive for social movements and for the study of political fragmentation, feminist ecology, Indigenous territorial struggles, and anti-mining resistance. For instance, Riofrancos' excellent chapter on The Mirador copper mining project thoughtfully illuminates how Correa's government arrived at state power through the empowerment of social movements that then found themselves embattled over natural resource extraction. Though Riofrancos does not describe state power as extractive governmentality, I would argue such processes reveal how a state which expands its authoritarian control over populations and resources does so precisely through the legalized mechanisms of dispossession. Riofrancos chapter gives us important conclusions about how cross coalitional movements, such as Yasunidos, offer a model for future anti-extractive organizing. I would note that the case of Mapuche solidarity in the aftermath of monocultural pine and eucalyptus plantations in Southern Chile bears some important similarities to Yasunidos for future oriented models of multidirectional resistance and refusal.

In Yépez and Van Teijilingen's chapter they discuss how Indigenous Shuar women have been profoundly impacted by mega-mining. The gendered division of labour where women were seen as the centre of subsistence farming,

---

fishing, and at the core of community spiritual life has been profoundly transformed by the contaminating presence of extractive mining, both within the water table and also in surrounding territories. On the one hand, this means that female reproductive activities in the informal sector have been radically transformed by the increasingly difficult modes of survival. On the other hand, female work has changed as Shuar women become increasingly vocal and visible presences within anti-extractive movements. The notion that extractivism is gendered and racialized is not new, yet the case study of Shuar female labour and activism is important for showing the complex role that women play and negotiate on the frontlines against extractive regimes.

Indeed, the new economies of mega-extractivism present a major challenge to local and embodied land and water defence by Indigenous, Mestizo, and Afro-descendent groups throughout the Americas. Mega-extractivism in the context of Ecuador and throughout Latin America today refers to the new scale of neoliberal economic activities. In Ecuador this means that new mining and hydroelectric projects have been designed at an inhuman scale. In fact, mega extraction requires infrastructures of technologies and materials that are hardly fathomable on the human level, except in the wake of their destructive capacity. So how can anti-extractive activities find success in the era of mega-extraction? This is a perplexing and worrisome question, and this book begins to offer some answers.

Overall the book does an important close examination of the politics of dispossession by contamination that define mega-extraction. For those of us in the North American academy and primarily working in the English language, we might note the importance of our own acts of solidarity in relation to the Amazon and Indigenous territories throughout the Americas that have become increasingly under control by militarized states. The book's conclusion asks us to also consider how territorial pluralism imagines new horizons of political activity and novel ways of articulating "identities, memories, spirits, rooted sentiments and dignity." Such descriptions of the embodied arts of political participation are heartening, even in these increasingly terrifying times of mega-extraction.

Macarena Gómez-Barris  
Pratt Institute