

Abstract

From building resistance to building alternatives – post-extractivist perspectives from below

Section Title: Debates and Practices around Post-Extractivism in Latin America

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In this paper we reflect on post-extractivist alternatives from below taking experiences from Argentina and Brazil as empirical references. In this regard we seek to complement the many reflections on extractivism and alternatives that have been discussing in other Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela. In this way we hope to have a more comprehensive picture of the political moment that crosses the continent knowing in what extent these experiences can enlighten and inspire debates and transformations in other regions like Europe.

These resistances recognize complex genealogies shaped by the historical violence represented in the “imaginary geography” of development and colonialism. The notions of progress and development have in the extractivism a strong and current form of an imaginary geography that makes clear the binary division between peoples. Thus configures a hierarchical and unequal geography which attributed differentiated qualities and possibilities to populations and territories according to their level of integration into the global dynamics of extractivist capital.

These imperial geography is confronted by struggles from below that are plural and multi-scale in articulating specific territorial conflicts with cosmopolitan horizons. The case of resistance against water megaprojects in Brazilian rivers represent a claiming of ancient territorial struggles while include environmental urban values. Cultural and symbolic values of water as a source of life and a vital part in the reproduction and maintenance of cultures are recognized. The movement against dams in Latin America has made the link with various social groups that share values such as symbolic reappropriation and respect for nature.

In another way, these resistances are characterized by having a radical power and determination to prevent, neutralize and contest extractivism politics through a variety of strategies. Along the Andes mountain chain, in Argentina, have been consolidated solid movements fighting with relative success against the installation of the mega open pit metal mining. They have had conquests like increased environmental state control or the withdrawal of the companies for lack of social license.

This process carries out a challenge for state democratization and national independence which have historically been linked because the latter has sought the "local control over surplus" while the first has claimed its "progressive redistribution" (Tapia, 2008). In terms of Partha Chatterjee (2008) they would be the "popular politics or those of the heterogeneity" driven by the "political society" expressing the popular life of communities composed by groups whose logic is the fragmented conquest of rights or

claims through legal and illegal channels. We refer to various claims and popular struggles against extractivism, like defense or distribution of land, water and forests, energy or food sovereignty, among others.

This problem requires giving an account of the ways of resolution of the central tension of "modern politics" against "popular politics": individual liberties and equal rights abstracted from the "heterogeneous space-time" of political society and, in contrast, the particular demands based on memories, identities and experiences of "historical injustice".

Accordingly, a re-signification of democracy already is needed. Not as "people's government", but as "the politics of the governed". A reconceptualization of the notion of "popular sovereignty" should be built embodying civil society through the legal framework of the citizenship, in a different form of agency that include in a privileged way the political distributional struggles possessing a strong ethical component or advocacy of social and environmental justice.

The overall objective of the paper is to contribute to the advancement of innovative and critical research on the links between extractivism, distributional political struggles and democratization in Latin American spaces. Make this contribution will involve an specific topics like deepen the knowledge of distributional political struggles that have questioned or confronted extractivism and neo-liberal forms of governmentality and production of nature. To do so, it will be necessary to: (i) deepen knowledge of the global-local driving forces of the extractivism geopolitics, (ii) identify and characterize the relevant and specific struggles that have been fought to defend, claim and/or conquer territory, water, forests or conquer or recover agro-energetic sovereignty, (iii) evaluate the democratization and the effective empowerment that these distributional struggles achieved and what were their deployments in terms of building post-extractivist alternatives.

We want to argue about the following central questions: What political shapes are assuming distributional political struggles in Argentina and Brazil? In what extent they constitute effective socio-economic democratization processes? What has been the destituting/instituent power of these struggles to sign ruptures in the extractivist state action? Is it possible to prefigure from these experiences a geopolitical transformation towards social and environmental justice?

Our general hypothesis argues for the existence of a tension faced by modern state forms in Latin America to deepen and accelerate the institution of conquests achieved by post-extractivist political struggles. This tension would have modern/colonial roots that are updated in the new agro-energetic geopolitics while it boosts these massive distributional political struggles. These struggles are conflictive opportunities to subvert the dominant geopolitical order and institute democratic and social-environmental policies since they demonstrate a common assessment by territorial sovereignty, social justice and reappropriation of nature that confronts the logic of extractivist capital and destruction of nature. In this scenario, alternatives from below are in a state of tension between resistance and creation. Thus far they constitute "experimental fields" that foreshadow societal projects of greater scope and duration.