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The Indigenous Struggle against 'New' Extractivism in the Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

At the root of much of the deforestation, land rights violations, human rights abuses and ultimately the continuation of unequal, neocolonial North-South relations are the two-fold phenomena of global market pressures for extractivism and mass production of resources and the militarization of response to social conflicts created by these activities. We will investigate the 'new' extractivism economic activities from the perspective of the violence perpetrated by assemblages of power against indigenous protest movements in the Peruvian Amazon region. Specifically, we will probe a grassroots' response to the way Peru's elites have integrated the country within the global economic system: we focus on Indigenous peoples' protests in 2008-9 against the new regulation to open the Amazon for development of resources by private companies carried out by Peru's President Alan García, on the grounds that it represented a threat to their natural resources and livelihood.

Keywords

New Extractivism; Assemblage; Indigenous Protests; Militarization; Resource Conflict

Introduction

What does the term *New Extractivism* add to the debate regarding extractivism? What light does this framing shed on the debate over the impact and consequences of extractivism on earth systems and affected communities? The incipient but growing literature on New Extractivism characterizes the term, in sum, as [Burchardt and Dietz \(2014\)](#) propose: ‘new or (neo-) extractivism partially breaks with the neoliberal strategy of privatising the export of raw materials, an idea known as classic or conventional extractivism and which has been dominant in Latin America in the past few decades’ (p. 469). Most of these scholars generally claim that since the State takes on a larger role in extractivist activities, that leads to a regime different enough as to require a new designation, or at the very least a qualifier. However, it is not clear, as this paper argues, that the term grapples with analyses of extractivism’s political economy that expound the new market dynamics and even of neoliberal rationality itself.

The addition of the operator *new* before the operand *extractivism* implies a novelty, in the sense that it is something substantially different from how it was carried out before. It makes it seem as though one form of extraction of natural resources took over another. We argue that that is not the case. Until now we think of extractivism as a longstanding and localized economic activity operated by and for the benefit of foreign interests that, while benefiting certain groups, harm the living conditions of others by environmental intervention ([Acosta 2013](#)). Our paper shows that in fact, one overlooked element of new extractivism literature is the security apparatus that complements the economic activity against affected populations. For this reason, we affirm that there is no new extractivism activity without calculated mechanisms of localized social constraints and the use of force. The criminalization and regulation of security apparatus against target groups, maximizes the social and legal circuits directly connected not just with local, but with the upscale of new extractivism domains.

It is true that the phenomenon is now more complex than it used to be. There are more actors involved in the different stages of extraction processes. There are state companies’ apparatuses alongside private companies, supported by international finance through loans, acting on pressures to feed a global production chain, the need to finance debt services, and the imperative to keep a positive balance of trade which requires foreign direct investment, while protest against extractivist activities is criminalized in order to keep the system going ([Acosta 2013](#)). Crucially, extractivist activities bear substantial and unequally distributed environmental impacts and generate a backlash in the form of social conflicts that require the deployment of force by the state and by the companies involved ([Acosta 2013](#), pp. 74, 79). That is why we propose the use of the concept of assemblage of power relations to better analyze and understand extractivism practices, in order to take into account the disaggregation and reconfiguration of power structures and relations that traditionally had been carried out under the auspices of the State. Under neoliberal rationality, these roles and structures have been renegotiated with other local, transnational, international, and global sources of power, law and governing practices.

We will look into the wave of indigenous-led protests against extractivist activities that swept the Peruvian Amazon in the latter half of the first decade of the twenty-first century, in order to show the limitations of the *new extractivism* approach and the potential of the assemblage of power relations concept.

In the next section, we will critically review the literature on *new extractivism* and propose a theoretical framework that can more adequately grapple with the complexities of extractivist activities under neoliberal rationality. In third part, we briefly discuss our method of literature review and case study. We then move to our case study in part 4, whereby we lay out the wave of anti-extractivism protests in the Peruvian Amazon in 2008-2009 and the assemblage of power relations that were involved in the activities targeted by the protests as well as in the violent response to them. In the fifth part, we aim to apply our proposed theoretical framework to scrutinize the case study. Finally, we conclude showing that commodities exports,

linked to extractivism, remain key in Latin America, but also shedding light on the current dynamics and actualizations of security apparatus accompanying the political economy of extractivism.

OVERVIEW OF EXTRACTIVISM AND ASSEMBLAGE OF POWER RELATIONS

The first decade of the 21st century saw a sharp increase in global demand for raw materials. This coincided with the rise to power of several left-of-center governments across Latin America, the so-called ‘Pink Wave’ ([Panizza 2009](#)). The commodities boom buoyed the Latin American progressive governments’ budgets, allowing them to spend in social programs while at the same time avoiding distributional conflicts with the upper classes. On the other hand, indigenous, peasant and other frontline communities were faced with increasing pressure from the ever-expanding frontier of extractive capital. Environmental conflicts intensified, ‘engaging communities in a continual battle against natural resource exploitation and the forces of global capital, resulting in repeated and widespread clashes, violence, repression and human rights abuses perpetuated by the state or security forces’ ([Raftopoulos 2017](#), p. 388).

It is in this context that Uruguayan social scientist Eduardo Gudynas coined the term ‘new extractivism’ in 2009. Gudynas formulated 10 theses regarding extractivism under the progressive Latin American governments in the first decade of the 21st century, which can be summarized as follows: 1) extractivism remains a relevant sector in the development strategies of *Pink Tide* governments; 2) but under these left-of-center governments, it is a progressive style of *neo-extractivism*; 3) the State plays a more active role in the extractive sectors; 4) the *new extractivism* is subject to commercial-financial globalization, thus keeping South American countries subordinated to the whims of global markets; 5) territorial fragmentation ensues as a result of a network of enclaves connected to different global markets; 6) the key difference under progressive governments is that the ownership of sources tends to be by the state, whereas rules and operations of productive processes continue to follow classic efficiency criteria of competitiveness, profitability and the externalization of social and environmental impacts; 7) social and environmental impacts continue unabated; 8) a greater proportion of the surplus is taken over by the State, which in turn funds social programs, thus appeasing social pressures and generating legitimacy for the State and the extractivist industry broadly; 9) *new extractivism*, therefore, is elevated as a key driver of economic growth and social welfare; and 10) new extractivism is a novel component of the current iteration of South American developmentalism ([Gudynas 2009](#)).

The new extractivist literature probes the intensification of nature and human exploitation connected to the development of specific economic value chains based on colonial doings. This scholarship revitalizes the political debate on extractivism. But this paper shows we need to challenge our own endeavor to critically understand the power relations of extractivism in the present, so as to deal with the present political complexity of extractivism.

As we will discuss in the following sections, we inquire whether new extractivism amounts to a *novelty*, and we interrogate how a different, strategic approach would provide the scholarship with a broader use and new avenues of a research agenda on extractivism. [Burchardt and Dietz \(2014\)](#) define the concept as referring to a development path specific to ‘the post-neoliberal policies of progressive governments’ in Latin America, consisting of: ‘(1) extracting raw materials and natural elements such as minerals, energy carriers, and forest and agricultural goods; (2) exporting raw materials; and (3) using revenue to improve living conditions’. The authors argue that under this regime, extractivism plays the role of providing funds for national development, poverty alleviation programs, economic diversification and political legitimation, all of which, taken together, amount to a revival of the developmental state ([Onis 1991](#), p. 109; [Woo-Cumings 1999](#)). The authors add that the ecological distribution conflicts under this regime involve subaltern groups such as indigenous communities and traditional family farmers against a coalition of state and non-state

agents, which leads to a reconfiguration of roles across a given territory ([Burchardt & Dietz 2014](#), pp. 469-471, 479).

[Veltmeyer, Petras, and Albuja \(2014\)](#) point out that extractive capitalism has gone through several *mutations* since the time of the European invasion up to today's corporate-finance nexus. They define *new extractivism* as 'the form taken by extractive capital and extractivist imperialism under current and changing conditions of a system (capitalism) and a model (neoliberalism) in crisis' and as a 'development trap' since it is predicated on foreign direct investment (FDI) and with accommodation with extractive capitalists. In addition, the authors point out that *new extractivism's* neoliberal character, restrained by some degree of state intervention but without nationalization, bred distributive conflicts around land and wages and against extractive activities and their environmental impacts more broadly ([Veltmeyer, Petras, & Albuja 2014](#), pp. 3, 8 & 10).

[Bashriov \(2021\)](#), one of the few authors to apply the term outside of Latin America, writing about Azerbaijan, notes that this form of development emerged in Latin America under nationalist governments in the 1990s with the aim of using resource extraction as an economic development policy, by various means of state intervention in extractivist activities, leading to a reconfiguration of state-transnational capital relations more favorable to the former ([Bashriov 2021](#), p. 1831). This assessment contradicts most of the literature by claiming a larger role for the state than most of the authors writing about this topic. A case in point is [Farthing and Fabricant \(2019\)](#), who describe the term as a model in which the states take a larger share of profits generated in extractivist activities than had previously been the case. They add that concomitantly there is also an intensification of the exploitation of natural resources and an expansion of the extractivist frontier, whose financial windfall fund the governments' response to repressed demands of the poor in a context of high international demand for commodities (pp. 6-7).

[Tetreault \(2020\)](#) narrows his definition down more than other authors, by specifying that this 'inclusive' development strategy has been pursued by left-of-center governments in South America starting in the first decade of the 21st century, consisting of using the public revenue stemming from natural resource extraction to fund social programs aimed at the lower societal strata. He notes that in a sense, this is not a new phenomenon. However, he refers specifically to the fact that Gudynas's definition includes agriculture, forestry, and fishing, which have long been part of foodstuffs and raw material sourced from South America for global markets ([Tetreault 2020](#), p. 1).

THE STATE, SECURITY PRACTICES AND ASSEMBLAGE OF POWER

We propose the concept of assemblage of power to more accurately grasp what is at stake in contexts such as the South American case whereby extractivism plays a central role in economic and political life. The concept, which was first coined by [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#), 'designates a contingent ensemble of powers that operate across different scales and political mappings'. Building on that notion, other authors ([Ong & Collier 2005](#)) have expanded the concept to highlight 'the way that new assemblages of power tend to reconfigure state territory and authority rather than completely displacing them' ([Mezzadra & Neilson 2013](#), p. 197). As Mezzadra and Neilson have noted, forms of powers that used to be well established within the realm of the State have been disaggregated and reconfigured 'in specialized assemblages that mix technology, politics, and actors in diverse and sometimes unstable ways' ([Mezzadra & Neilson 2013](#), p. 195). [Sassen \(2008\)](#) has insightfully noted that the State is not going anywhere and continues to be a key player in global processes, but that increasingly that takes shape in the form of assemblages of power in which the State is an important, but not the only or even the main, actor. In addition, she emphasized that the integration of the State within such assemblages has led to significant changes in terms of its roles and structures. Neoliberal globalization has undermined the assumed role of states in exercising power exclusively within a given circumscribed territory, as progressively the state must negotiate its power and

sources of law with other local, transnational, international and global sources of power ([Sassen 2008](#)). One important way the role of the state has been reconfigured is by means of a strategy of regulated security practices, whereby an ever-expanding range of social issues, circumstances, and practices are seen through a security prism in an effort to guarantee access to scarce resources. In sum, *governmental practices under security apparatus* ensues when an issue becomes a referent object to be protected, frequently by means of *speech acts*, in which an agent can *claim* the right to use force vis-à-vis a particular event or phenomenon in the name of *security* ([Jurema 2022](#), p. 16). Importantly, [Grove \(2019\)](#) reminds us that such assemblages are ‘not a closed system’ and in fact consist of overlying and interposed assemblages that exert fluctuating degrees of influence over each other (p. 70). That is to say, there are neoliberal, security, extractivist, political and so on, assemblages which condition or impact one another in different intensities at various times.

The Case Study

To assess whether Gudynas’s concept is helpful to understand the contemporary South America – and the Global South more generally, as we have seen in the literature review that the term has been employed to analyse Africa ([Ayelazuno 2014](#); [Sánchez-Ancochea 2021](#); [Hamouchene 2022](#)), Asia ([Bashirov 2021](#)) and even Europe ([del Marmol & Vaccaro 2020](#), pp. 42-49) – we chose to use a case study approach from Peru ([Burchardt & Dietz 2014](#)). Peru’s economy is amongst the fastest growing in the world ([‘Peru GDP Growth Rate 1961-2022’ n.d.](#)). Its most valuable exports are copper ores and concentrates, gold, refined copper, refined petroleum oils, and inedible meat flour, amounting to 51.4% of the country’s overall exports ([Workman n.d.](#)). This export matrix, and Peru’s insertion in the global market, is at the root of the social conflicts in the regions where these commodities are extracted ([Hughes 2010](#)).

In the following section, we will explore the indigenous protest of 2008 and 2009 against Alan García government’s natural resource policy in the Amazon region, based on private capital development of oil and gas, mining, forestry projects, water resources, and biofuel, and their aftermath in the subsequent years.

Our hypothesis is that Peru’s case shows that extractivism is intrinsically entwined with neoliberal logic. Extractive capital and rentier capitalism dictate the exploitation of natural resources in Peru, in which the state plays a crucial role in enabling the operations of extractive capital by concessions ([Veltmeyer, Petras & Albuja 2022](#), p. 2). Our hypothesis is that the case of Peru shows the complementarity of economic intensification based on extractivism, coterminous with specific security apparatuses. The latter, while driving the economy linked to the international market, also intensifies security practices: either by coercion against affected groups or by regulation of circulation (of minerals, of capital, of cooperation between government and private companies).

The violence carried out by the state in extractivist frontiers such as the Peruvian Amazon is directly associated with extraction with the objective of guaranteeing access to natural resources to multinational companies in search of profit maximization and as the state seeks to acquire a steady source of capital to finance debt services and to keep a positive balance of payments. However, in seeking to extract its natural resources to fill the demand of the world market, ecological distribution conflicts and changes of social relations ensue. This means that ‘national development models based on raw material extraction are constantly producing new social structures determining economic success or failure’ ([Burchardt & Dietz 2014](#), p. 478).

We aim to map how neoliberal rationalities to environment have created and normalized specific political economy for extractivism using an explicit security apparatus. We believe that there is not a ‘new’ element in extractivism but the actualization of global capitalism to incorporate and naturalize specific approaches that justify and amplify security. If scholars tend to use the concept of new extractivism as a term to emphasize exploitation and inequalities, they cannot ignore the transformations on controlling specific groups that

extractivist dynamics accommodate within affected populations. In mapping out these transformations, we hope to understand:

- i. How is civil society re-patterned or integrated into the extractivist mechanism or eliminated when defined as enemy?
- ii. What tensions or contradictions emerge in this nexus?

The Indigenous-Led Protests Against Extractivism in Peru

We focus on the wave of protests against extractivism led by indigenous communities in Peru in the latter half of the 2000s. The protest here was the ultimate social act of resistance. It refused a specific power relation dynamic based on extractivist activity that is inherent in Peruvian history. The participants of these particular protests are used to the violent response of the police and its criminalization. For this reason, compared with many other kinds of protest, indigenous groups in Peru reveal the thin line between resistance and the mechanisms of the current routes of extractivism.

Although the felling of the Peruvian Amazon Forest dates back to the 1940s, it was not until forty years later that the agricultural frontier expanded apace. Intense in-migration set in, driven by deliberate policies that incentivized settlement of the Amazon region. At first, this was a result of government-funded colonization projects, market support and infrastructure expansion, and was later compounded by an influx of settlers escaping violence in the Andes region and attracted by the economic opportunities of monoculture tree plantations, land titling and large road development projects. By the turn of the century, an estimated seven million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon had been clear-felled (about 123,000 hectares destroyed per year) ([Marquadt et al. 2019](#), p. 82).

Throughout the 1980s tens of thousands of people were killed or jailed on misleading or false charges of having links to the Shining Path ([Martinez-Alier 2002](#), p. 118). Government agrarian policies on forests and the promotion of intensified cash cropping as an alternative to traditional swidden agriculture and non-forest policies and processes, such as demographic change, structural and political variations, and transformations of economic regimes, alongside forest conservation programs that aim at strengthening forest boundaries, are often driven by market and capital accumulation logics. Large scale capital intensive agricultural land interests and populational pressure on forest boundaries squeezed out indigenous or traditional forest-based subsistence practices. In sum, 'Government policy of agricultural intensification and the promotion of cash crops have played a facilitative role and contributed to this development' ([Marquadt et al. 2019](#), pp. 98-99).

Since 2000, Peru's forest policy had been centered around the Forest and Wildlife Law No. 27308 which set out as its key objective the 'sustainable use and conservation of forest resources' (Article 1). The Peruvian Amazon consists of a sizable area of woodland, containing high biodiversity, substantial concentrations of hardwoods in high demand in global markets (such as mahogany and cedar), and extensive illegal logging as a result. This makes the Peruvian Amazon 'an important arena in efforts to promote sustainable commercial logging'.

Peru's legal logging concession system was further reinforced by the 2009 US-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). This agreement was molded after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), including labor and environmental standards ([McArthur & Tucker 2010](#)). One study has found that it is precisely this concession system's regulatory documents, set out in the 2000 Forestry Law and strengthened by the US-Peru TPA implemented in February 2009, which have enabled 'widespread illegal logging' which 'continues to threaten all forested areas, including protected areas and indigenous territories' ([Finer et al. 2015](#), p. 1). Under Peru's legal logging concession system, out of the 609 concessions (up to September 2013), 68.3% were under investigation for

significant breaches and 30% were cancelled due to violations ([Finer et al. 2015](#), p. 1). The authors state that their findings ‘lead us to conclude that the regulatory documents designed to promote sustainable logging are instead enabling illegal logging’ ([Finer et al. 2015](#), p. 4).

From the very beginning the implementation of the 2009 trade agreement was a highly controversial topic within the Peruvian political elite and civil society. On 30 October 2007, three days before the agreement had to pass the lower house of the United States congress, Alberto Pizango Choto, the president of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDSESEP), which represents 350,000 indigenous people in Peru’s Amazon region, published a letter in which he advocated against the free trade agreement (FTA):

‘... the FTA will give incentives for further and irreversible destruction of virgin rainforest, which will in turn increase global warming and displace our communities from their home territories. This is an absolutely unacceptable outcome for our planet, and particularly for the territory where our communities live, as we collectively work to reduce the threat of global warming. ... (T)he Peru FTA, if approved, would threaten every aspect of our livelihoods and sustainable development program. We are very preoccupied that the administration of President Alan García is auctioning off Peru’s Amazon at a breakneck speed to foreign firms ranging from Hunt Oil to Occidental Petroleum and beyond.’ (AIDSESEP 2007)

The Peruvian state is responsible for subsurface resources and governs mining and hydrocarbon concession procedures, under the 1993 Hydrocarbon Law 26221. In the same year, Peru’s ratification of the International Labor Organization’s Convention 169 granted indigenous communities the right of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) regarding any actions to be undertaken in their lands ([Orta-Martínez & Finer 2010](#), p. 212). The Alan García government’s natural resource policy in the Amazon region, based on private capital development of oil and gas, mining, forestry projects, water resources, and biofuel, is at the center of the indigenous protest of 2008 and 2009.

On December 20, 2007, President Alan García published law 29157 in the Peruvian Congress, delegating extraordinary legislative powers to the executive branch on various subjects related to the FTA. In the next eighteen months, president García signed 108 decrees related to the implementation of the FTA ([Peinhardt, Kim, & Pavon-Harr 2019](#), p. 60). The most controversial decrees with regards to the environment were ten decrees on the privatization of forestry for foreign investment. In particular, decrees 1090 and 1064 were highly contentious. The decrees were meant to stipulate that a minority of communal land holders could push a vote to parcel off and privatize lands. This decree would have undermined communal tenure of land and would have evolved, according to indigenous organizations and other civil society actors, to the opening up of 45 million hectares, more than half of Peru’s rainforest, to foreign investment in timber, oil, and mining exploitation.

In June 2008 president García signed the decrees as part of his executive power to implement the FTA and refused to withdraw the decrees when a parliamentary commission declared them to be unconstitutional. In response to García’s refusal to take back the decrees, the AIDSESEP organized a national campaign of strikes and road blockades.

The protests – in the form of roadblocks and occupation of oil and gas facilities – began in August 2008, with the main demand being that the two decree laws allowing private investment in indigenous land be revoked, the reinstatement of a 1979 constitutional clause forbidding the sale of communally owned land in indigenous territory, and compliance with the ILO Convention 169. A main target of the protests was the hydrocarbon industry. One of the drivers of the government’s declaration of a state of emergency in May 2009 was the threat posited by the protests vis-à-vis hydrocarbon production ([Stetson 2012](#), p. 80). As a response, the Alan García government declared a state of emergency in three Peruvian provinces, banning public gatherings and suspending free movement, and sent the army to disband the protests, including

with military overflights. Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo justified the government's actions pointing out the need to protect a gas pipeline and the Camisea gas project: 'We are not provoking native communities but safeguarding areas that are of strategic importance for the country'. Vice President Luis Giampietri characterized the protests as 'subversive activities' and argued that 'they are undermining the foundations of democracy'. Meanwhile, the AIDSESEP president, Alberto Pizango, stated, 'The government has declared open war on indigenous people' (McArthur & Tucker 2010, p. 1).

In fact, between February 2008 and July 2009, there was a series of protests and road blockages across the country, many of them directed at the legislative decrees related to the FTA implementation, as the timeline below shows.



A protest campaign led by indigenous peoples' organizations began in August 2008. In the face of what these organizations described as a lack of dialogue, it intensified in April 2009, when roadblocks were put in place across the Amazon region. The government sent the police and the military to clear a blockade in the northern province of Bagua on June 5, 2009, leading to several people getting killed under murky circumstances (McArthur & Tucker 2010, p. 2; Orta-Martínez & Finer 2010, p. 215). Official accounts of the disturbances claimed that 10 civilians and 23 police officers were killed; however, indigenous groups contested these figures, putting indigenous casualties at 40 (Stetson 2012, p. 77).

Several judicial processes involving protests were launched in the criminal court of Bagua. The last of them started in 2014 and ended two years later. The 53 protestors on trial, most of whom were from the Awajun and Wampís communities, faced sentences ranging from six years to life in prison. The court absolved all 53 defendants, 'because the defense of the environment' was a 'superior purpose', and the evidence presented by the prosecution was flimsy. All the other cases also ended with the protesters being cleared of any crime or wrongdoing. However, the security forces and the political authorities responsible for the police operation in Bagua were never held accountable (Amnesty International 2014; 'Dozens of Indigenous Absolved in Peru's 2009 'Baguazo' Massacre' 2016). The indigenous protestors bore the brunt of the full force of the judicial system.

A Human Rights Watch report about the troubles in the Bagua province, which came to be known as the *Baguazo*, had found that security forces under the García administration had 'opened fire indiscriminately against a crowd of demonstrators, injuring several of them, including a well-known indigenous leader and activist' (Human Rights Watch 2009). The special commission named by President García amounted to an attempt to whitewash what had happened there and 'to validate the government's version of the root causes of the events' (Aiello 2010). The protest movement succeeded in pressing the García government to

backtrack on legislative decrees 1015, 1073, 1090, 1064. In another victory for the protests, the Peruvian Congress approved the Law of the Rights to Prior Consultation for Indigenous and Original Peoples as recognized by ILO 169 in August 2011, which was signed into law by García's successor Ollanta Humala ([Stetson 2012](#), pp. 90-91).

As noted above, the García government was forced to overturn decrees 1090 and 1064 and prime minister Yehude Simon resigned from office. President García admitted that his government failed to consult with indigenous communities before signing the ten decrees. Government officials reassured the public that revoking the decrees would not jeopardize the FTA and would not put Peru under U.S. sanctions, a statement which turned out to be true. Despite these incontrovertible gains, legal and illegal mining increased 35 percent immediately after the FTA implementation, as the government auctioned land for mining that included Awajun and Wampis lands ([McArthur & Tucker 2010](#), p. 3).

Discussion

Up till now, we have thought of extractivism as a local economic activity with foreign interests that while benefitting certain groups damages the living conditions of others by environmental intervention. Our paper shows that in fact, one overlooked element of new extractivism literature is the security apparatus that complements the economic activity against affected populations. For this reason, we affirm that despite narratives of mechanisms of consultation and the integration of affected communities, new extractivism activity incorporates the use of force and diverse pathways to employ violence and regulation control over the political economy of extractivism. The criminalization, use of force and dispossession against targeted groups, maximize the social and legal circuits directly connected not just with local, but with the upscale of new extractivism domains.

The violent history of extractivism in Peru also shows that the extractivist economy activates a series of constraints against specific groups. Besides conventional forms of direct violence, such as the use of the police and of force against protests, we have specific economic and judicial implications that keep exploiting or harming these groups, and the violent separation of humans from their former environment, in a mechanism which was already described by Marx in Capital Volume One in the chapter about primitive accumulation ('Ursprüngliche Akkumulation').

The Peruvian case is also a story of how neoliberal practices actualize the extractivist system, particularly as has been pushed by the US-Peru FTA, which has been described as 'groundbreaking' ([Office of the United States Trade Representative n.d.](#)) in environmental terms and as 'environmental stewardship' by Hillary Clinton ([Carlsen & Feffer 2009](#)). It raises questions over the liberal assumption that free trade agreements export social and environmental standards from specific territories to other domains. The case of Peru also questions the model of development introduced by left-of-center government in Latin America in the 2000s. While social programs brought millions out of poverty it also was always based on extractivism, violence against indigenous people and a strong dependency on international markets.

In this case study, we analyzed this contingent interaction playing out in the Peruvian Amazon. These assemblages of power reconfigured the Peruvian Amazon region and governmental rule rather than fully displacing them, highlighting forms of power that are managed and implemented beyond the auspices of the State and have in the neoliberal era been disaggregated and reconfigured. This case also confirms that State monopoly of force takes shape in assemblages of power alongside other actors connected to international financialization, such as extractive companies, foreign governments, private security firms and so on. This happens in the context of neoliberal globalization, in which the State's exercise of power is constantly in negotiation with environmental development narratives and other local, transnational, international and global sources of arrangements.

We identify security as key in extractivist activities. The securitization of the extraction of natural resources, that is natural resources as the referent object to be protected, means that the social protests in response to these activities are seen through and dealt with through a security prism. This security apparatus occurs alongside what we term power assemblage, encompassing social and political dynamics that occur at multiple scales, as is illustrated in this case study as private corporations extract natural resources in the Amazon, protected by State economic privileges and private security, to fulfill international economical circuits and demands for commodities in order to allow the Peruvian State to service its debt to international finance and to have a positive Balance of Payments ([Brady 2014](#); [Jensen 2022](#)).

All this calls into question the usefulness of the *new extractivism* concept, as there seems to be not much that is really *new*. Our case study is the result of the intersection of *new extractivism* with assemblage of power relations. Instead, we propose that researchers apply the assemblage approach, as it better grasps the complexities at play in the extractivist economy, whereby different assemblages – extractivist, security, financial, and so on – interplay across several geographical scales and political territories.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have used the case of the Peruvian Amazon in the period between 2007-2009 to assess the main claims that comprise the literature of the ‘Latin American (neo-) extractivism’ regime, which can be summarized as ‘the exploitation of nature serves to secure national development and sovereignty, to reduce poverty, increase social participation, to diversify local economies and to guarantee political stability’ and thus legitimizing a ‘new development project’, all of which amount to ‘the renaissance of the developmental state’ ([Burchardt & Dietz 2014](#), pp. 469-471, 479).

We have showed that the Peruvian case neatly fits the model described by [Veltmeyer, Petras and Albuja \(2014\)](#), in which huge corporate conglomerates are allied to finance capital whose interests the state (both national and foreign) plays a central role in protecting along a convergence of interests – for the national government, it is especially a matter of accruing foreign direct investment; for the foreign governments, it is about ensuring access to natural resources; and for corporations and finance, the main goal is to ensure profit-making ([Veltmeyer, Petras, & Albuja 2014](#), p. 3, 10, & 18). That is precisely why the concept of assemblage of power better grasps how extractivism plays out, in which state territory and authority are reconfigured rather than displaced, whereby forms of power heretofore exercised within the realm of the state have been disaggregated ([Deleuze & Guattari 1987](#); [Mezzadra & Neilson 2013](#), p. 197).

Furthermore, with this case study, we have shown that extractivism is intertwined with neoliberal governmentality. The Peruvian state plays a key role in ensuring that extractive capital can operate in frontiers such as the Amazon Forest, allowing for profit maximization for the private sector, and foreign reserves for the state to meet its obligations with international finance. Finally, it is important to highlight that social conflicts related to extractivist activities remain latent in the country, in particular in the regions of predominantly indigenous populations – one study indicates that about two-thirds of all social conflicts in the country consist of socio-environmental conflicts ([Sicoli Póseleman & Sallan 2019](#)).

In sum, our inquiry into ‘new extractivism’ literature has led us to conclude that there is nothing *new* per se in the extractivism regime under progressive governments in Latin America, but rather a modern iteration under neoliberal logic and responding to specific social demands – or what has been termed ‘neoliberalism with state intervention and without nationalization’ ([Veltmeyer, Petras, & Albuja 2014](#), p. 3, 10, & 18). We propose that the concept of assemblage is more adequate to grasp extractivism in Latin America as a phenomenon that has led to protests by local and indigenous communities over the enclosure and capitalist exploitation of land, water and mineral resources and the subsequent despoliations, facing state violence on behalf of private and transnational interests.

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