

An Ecofeminist Contribution to the Debates on the Neoextractivist Development Model in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a materialist ecofeminist critique of neoextractivism by highlighting its historical origins and elaborating its economic policy implications in Latin America. Three questions addressed are as follows: 1) How can materialist ecofeminism contribute to understanding the current dynamics of capitalist development in the Global South, 2) why (neo)extractivism hits women hardest, and 3) to what extent and how ecofeminist movements can shape a post-extractivist transition to a just and sustainable future. The article's main argument is that exploitation and oppression in Latin America can be understood in terms of gender, race, and class and, therefore, require an intersectional analysis framework. Within this framework, post-extractivist alternatives in this region must incorporate an ecofeminist analysis to understand better how social expression systems (including sexism, white supremacy, and ecological crises) intersect and reinforce each other. In this framework, this study is intended to contribute to the growing literature and debate on the development and resistance dynamics of neoextractivism in Latin America, where long-standing racial and gender inequalities intersect with class inequalities.

Keywords: Materialist ecofeminism, neo-developmentalism, post-extractivism, social reproduction, patriarchal capitalism.

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Introduction

Third World development has long been a significant topic within Marxist International Political Economy (IPE). The debates on neo-developmentalism can be considered the extension of this issue in the 21st century. A growing body of Marxist literature addresses the limits of the neo-developmental strategies implemented by the so-called "pink tide" governments in Latin America over the past two decades. Neo-developmentalism (also known as post-neoliberal developmentalism) can be considered the reshaping of import-substitutionary developmentalism within the context of neoliberal globalization. Supporting the national bourgeoisie takes precedence from the standpoint of neo-developmentalism, just as the "old" developmentalism. However, the main issue here is to increase their global

competitiveness and to provide them with investment opportunities (Agosin 2012: 337). In the neo-developmental model, the state rearranges the accumulation conditions for the transnationalization of local capital. However, protectionism and state interventionism are not opposed to but supportive of the market mechanism. In other words, a strong state is a prerequisite for a strong market. Unlike the “old” developmentalist model, which sees a specific inflation rate as bearable for economic growth, maintaining macroeconomic stability is central to the neo-developmental model. In this respect, neo-developmentalism can also be seen as a middle ground between statist developmentalism and the neoliberal model based on the Washington Consensus.

Neo-developmentalism is closely related to (neo)extractivism since it forms an internal bourgeoisie, especially in extractivist sectors such as agribusiness and mining. Leftist governments’ support for extractive industries and their denial of the social and environmental impacts of neoextractivist strategies are considered one of the significant weaknesses of the Latin American left. Social struggles against neoextractivism have been marking a principal field of conflict for popular sectors and indigenous people who demand political autonomy on their traditional territory and control over natural resources. The concept of “neoextractivism,” therefore, becomes a critical factor in analyzing the relations between Latin American social movements and leftist governments, as well as the relationship between capitalist development and the environment.

Neo-developmentalism and neoextractivism in Marxist IPE literature have been widely discussed in terms of changes and continuities in the process of capitalist development in Latin American countries. The main question centers around the extent of neo-developmental alternatives to challenge neoliberal hegemony, and the contradictions of this new kind of capitalist development (i.e., Féliz, 2012; Morais and Saad Filho, 2012; Sianipar and Maya, 2020). On the other hand, the critique put forward by ecofeminists against the neo-developmental strategies employed by Latin American governments highlights the continuities in gendered inequalities shaping patriarchal capitalism and their devastating effect on women and nature. This critique contributes to the Marxist IPE in two ways. First, it pays attention to the women’s reproductive roles, a shortcoming common to all IPE literature. Especially in the Global South, where the position of women among the marginalized requires special attention, ecofeminism provides a better understanding of the interrelated problems of economic injustice, environmental degradation, and militarism. Second, the epistemological standpoint of feminism contributes to the formation of ethical perspectives for sustainability and alternative models/types of development. Since women are represented in large numbers in Latin American social movements, they are in a position to make a significant contribution to the counterhegemonic struggles.

This article presents a materialist ecofeminist critique of neoextractivism by highlighting its historical origins and elaborating its economic policy implications in Latin America. Three questions addressed are as follows: How can materialist ecofeminism contribute to understanding the current dynamics of capitalist development in the Global South, why extractivism and neoextractivism hit women hardest, and to what extent and how ecofeminist movements can shape a post-extractivist transition to a just and sustainable future. The article’s

main argument is that exploitation and oppression in Latin America can be understood in terms of gender, race, and class and, therefore, require an intersectional analysis framework. Within this framework, post-extractivist alternatives in this region must incorporate an ecofeminist analysis to understand better how social expression systems (including sexism, white supremacy, and ecological crises) intersect and reinforce each other. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of the contemporary dynamics of class struggle in Latin America, which are shaped by struggles over social reproduction and resistance against neextractivism.

On this basis, the article first examines ecofeminism as a historical materialist perspective on the dynamics of capitalist development in the Global South. The Marxist-feminist concept of social reproduction will be addressed as a guideline for such an analysis. Secondly, Latin American neextractivism will be discussed from a materialist ecofeminist perspective. It is argued that neextractivism reconstructs dualisms of culture/nature, men/women, production/reproduction, and civilized/barbarian and reinforces four structural factors that sustain patriarchal capitalism: Latin American economies' dependency on global markets, promoting "green economy" as a new phase of capital accumulation, the ethnocide of indigenous people, and violence against women. Lastly, the potential of Latin American ecofeminist movements for constructing a post-extractivist future will be examined. Ecofeminism is suggested to complete an alternative, post-extractivist, ecologically just, and women-centered development perspective.

Ecofeminism as a Historical Materialist Perspective on Capitalist Development in the Global South

Ecofeminism, inspired by grassroots activism from its beginnings in the 1960s, focuses on historical, material, and ideological connections between the subjection of women and the domination of nature (Terreblanche 2019: 163). The term "ecofeminism" was coined by French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974 to highlight the responsibility of men and the entire male system in subjugating women and nature. Linking feminism and ecology was a practical need to free both women and nature. Theoretically, Rachel Carson's pioneering 1962 work *Silent Spring* paved the way for such an intersectional approach, linking environmental issues with social concerns. However, ecofeminism is not just a feminist perspective on environmental issues but a re-articulation of feminist concerns about social equality by connecting it to ecological justice. As Gaard (2016: 69) indicates, ecofeminism is unique for bridging human justice, interspecies justice, and environmental justice by producing links among gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, and nature.

Ecofeminists, in a comprehensive social and ecological context, aim to deconstruct the perceived dichotomies between "culture" and "nature," which go hand in hand with the man/woman, mind/body, human/nonhuman, public/private, reason/emotion, production/reproduction dichotomies. In light of these hegemonic binaries maintaining the actual domination by "othering", ecofeminists question existing power relations and offer a pluralistic and holistic form of thinking to stem the masculine, hierarchical view of the world

(Terreblanche, 2019: 163). What gives women a unique perspective on their analysis of other forms of oppression and exploitation is their experience of subjugation in a patriarchal society. However, as Mellor (1993: 101) highlights, while linking feminist struggle with environmentalism, it should be considered that securing the planet's future does not necessarily guarantee women's salvation. Ecofeminists argue that an ecologically sustainable society cannot be fostered without challenging the patriarchy. Ecofeminism, in this sense, can principally be characterized as a "sort of feminism" rather than a "subdiscipline of ecology." Gebara (2003: 95) defines ecofeminism as "an echo of feminism" to focus on solutions to daily-life problems of marginalized people, especially marginalized women suffering from a patriarchal society with a capitalist dominion of nature.

Two of the early ecofeminists' works, *Women and Nature* by Susan Griffin and *The Death of Nature* by Carolyn Merchant, both focused on understanding the roots of the subjection of women and nature by men, can be considered milestones in forming two different "echoes" of feminism. Griffin (1978) argued that women are "essentially closer to nature" biologically and spiritually. This stance celebrates women with nature as a source of strength and virtue. On the other hand, Merchant (1980) claimed that there were no unchanging "essential" characteristics of gender or nature. Accordingly, celebrations of the connection between women and nature cement existing forms of oppression against women and nature rather than liberating them (Merchant 1980: xvi). Taking the concepts of nature and women as historical and social constructions, she questioned the role of the European Scientific Revolution in shaping modern constructions of nature and women as "culturally passive" and "subordinate."

The Death of Nature was a fundamental text not only for rejecting essentialism but also for bridging ecology and socialist feminism with an intersectional approach that allows analyzing the linkages of racism, sexism, speciesism, colonialism, capitalism, rationalism, and positivism (Gaard 2011: 28). Three centuries of witch-hauntings that maintained the control of social order and women's place within are at the center of this intersectional analysis. The view of nature associated with witchcraft was based upon the assumed nature-culture dichotomy fundamental to the justification for keeping women in their place below men (Merchant 1980: 127-144).

Merchant's account was highly relevant in linking the witch trials of the sixteenth century to the rise of modern science and the destruction of the environment. However, the technological domination of nature and the appropriation of women's creative powers, Federici (2004: 202) argues, was also a fundamental part of the processes of dispossession and one the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation that set the necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism. Likewise, Mies (1986) examines the relationship between the burning of witches and the subordination of women and nature, the rise of modern science, and the primitive accumulation of capital. Accordingly, the persecution of the witches was not an element of the irrational "Dark" Middle Ages but a manifestation of the rising modern society and was justified as a "civilizing mission" of the Christian nations (Mies 1986: 83-90). Most significantly, there was a connection between the "civilizing" process by which European women were persecuted during witch hunts and "civilizing" of the "barbarians" in the colonies (Mies 1986: 90). In this respect, the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries in the New World

played a crucial function in colonization as a deliberate strategy of enclosure and a tool to destroy the resistance of the colonized (Federici 2004: 219-229). Women strongly defended the old mode of existence and opposed the colonial structure that negatively affected them. The prayers and rituals of the indigenous healer women (*curanderas* in Spanish) were an obstacle to spreading the teachings of the Catholic Church, one of the most basic institutional structures of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. For all these reasons, the Andean women were accused of the same crimes as in the European witch trials: prescribing herbal remedies, using ointments, pacts with the devil, etc. (Federici 2004: 231). Colonialization, which radically transformed the human-nature relationship, required Christianizing the Latin American indigenous people and cutting their spiritual and religious connection with nature and land.

Although materialist ecofeminism (also called socialist ecofeminism) developed partly as a critique of spiritual ecofeminism, materialist analysis has a complicated relationship with earth-rooted spirituality. Materialist ecofeminists have always been careful with the Western binary on spirituality/rationality, leading to a reductionist, gendered scientific approach. Besides, such dualisms do little to help us understand the relationship between humans and the environment around them. Mellor (1993: 71) alerts us to the possible outcomes of categorizing ecofeminists into certain groups since making a distinction between the “biological” and “social” aspects would reproduce the male perspective. Those who only emphasize biological and spiritual intimacy may ignore the material public world on which women depend. Those who overstress material conditions fail to see the importance of women’s insights and intuition that have persisted throughout the ages and cultures (Mellor 1993: 101). Spirituality has long been an essential channel for women to believe in themselves (Mellor 1993: 85). It is not for nothing that one of the most insistent slogans of contemporary feminism today is “We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn’t burn.” Today, the power of ecofeminist political action derives from the ongoing ability of women to unite social, physical, and spiritual experiences (Mellor 1993: 99). The Chipko movement in the Himalayas exemplified both women’s affinity with nature and their capacity for social and political action (Shiva 1988). Women of Reni village protested deforestation in 1974 by tree-hugging (*chipko*), representing both a spiritual unity with nature and a material necessity in daily life. Indigenous women’s anti-mining activism in the Andes is another critical example of contemporary ecofeminist movements with a spiritual and material base (Jenkins 2015).

Taking an anti-essentialist, material approach grounded in labor, ecofeminists such as Mellor (1993) and Salleh (1997) adopted a Marxist framework and maintained an “embodied and embedded materialist” ecofeminism. As Mellor (1997: 162) outlines, “despite the influence of cultural and spiritual feminism, ecofeminism is necessarily a materialist theory because of its stress on human existence’s embodiedness and embeddedness.” From a materialist standpoint, it is argued that spiritual connections to the earth relate to material conditions (Foster 2000: 11). In line with this perspective, the ground of male supremacy lies in patriarchal capitalism, which relies on the dichotomy of production and reproduction. The materialist ecofeminist political economy thus begins with focusing on the relations and forces of reproduction, the women’s private, unseen, unspoken, and unvalued but fundamental life-sustaining work in the home such as birthing, raising children, caregiving, cooking, water gathering, cleaning, and waste removing. The gendered separation of disregarded social reproduction from valued

economic production constitutes the principal basis for women's subordination in capitalist societies (Fraser 2016). Since the reproductive roles of women are generally ignored and the gendered division of labor is seen as fixed in Marxist analysis, feminist IPE has long been trying to break down the artificial boundaries between the public sphere of production and the private world of reproduction (Tickner 1991: 306-307). However, the specific ecofeminist contribution is to examine the intersections of reproductive politics and environmental politics and relate economic justice to environmental reproductive justice basically in the Global South whereby women's reproductive activities are more dependent on the environmental factors. This is seen as a fundamental contradiction of patriarchal capitalism since men's productive labor is removed from nature, and women's reproductive labor remains in nature. Shiva (1997) points out that women's expertise in the life-giving economy is closely related to their competence in ecological science through their daily management of natural sustenance processes. The devaluation of women and nature means economic profit in the global capitalist system that describes women's reproductive and subsistence work as "externalities" that don't appear in the calculus of production (Gaard 2016: 68-70).

Another related contradiction is that it is assumed that there will always be sufficient capacity to sustain social reproduction in capitalist societies. Nature is treated the same way, just like an infinite reservoir from which we can take as much as we wish. Ecofeminism aims to demonstrate that neither nature nor social reproductive capacities are infinite (Fraser 2016). In this way, it will be possible to see how capitalist society simultaneously embodies a social-reproductive and ecological contradiction. Benefiting as much "free" reproductive labor as possible exhausts women and gives rise to "crises of care" while pursuing infinite profit from natural resources endangers ecosystems and expends the atmosphere's ability to absorb carbon emissions (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019: 65). In their *Manifesto*, Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019: 65) state that the capitalist system, "cannibalizing its conditions of possibility than to jeopardizing accumulation," creates consistently not only economic but also ecological, political, and social-reproductive crises. Therefore, they argue that "the liberation of women and preserving our planet from ecological disasters go hand in hand with each other and with the overcoming of capitalism" (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019: 49).

This stance also aims to connect with women in the Global South, whose concerns and problems are not articulated by the discourse of Northern feminism. Attention to women's concerns in the Global South requires awareness of their position within global capitalism. For instance, while climate change is produced primarily by the world's advanced capitalist nations (the US has cumulatively produced more CO₂ than any other nation), it most profoundly affects communities that are less able to survive. Within those communities, in the Global South, women are hit hardest by climate-related disasters due to gender roles that restrict their mobility, discrimination, poverty, and exclusion from participating in decision-making processes about climate change (Gaard 2016: 68-70). Ecofeminists have also examined the intersections of reproductive justice and environmental justice. Mies and Shiva (1993) highlight how reproductive technologies enforce economic hierarchies, dividing elite Global North women from disadvantaged women through access to reproductive health.

Salleh (1997) discusses how to formulate women's subordination and the overlap of female exploitation with ethnicity and the North-South axis in Marxist terms. Taking the "nature-woman-labor nexus" as a fundamental contradiction of patriarchal capitalism, "ecofeminism affirms the primacy of an exploitative gender-based division of labor and simultaneously shifts the economic analysis towards an ecological problem" (Salleh 1997: 120). Salleh conceptualizes reproductive workers (women, peasants, and indigenous people) as a worldwide "meta-industrial class" who maintain the humanity-nature metabolism with their "free services." Accordingly, capital owes an "embodied debt" to those whose caring labor protects biological growth and cycles of regeneration, including the future labor force of capitalism (Salleh 1997: 30). This debt is interconnected with the "social debt" owed by capitalists for the surplus value extracted from workers and the "ecological debt" owed by colonial to colonized countries "for direct extraction of the natural means of production or livelihood of non-industrial peoples" (Salleh 2009: 4-5). Putting together the overconsumption in the industrialized Global North and its polluting fallout in the Global South, the cost of patriarchal capitalist development can be outlined as an ecological debt on indigenous communities and an embodied debt on women (Terreblanche 2019: 163). Mies (1986: 48) defines the exploitation of these non-wage laborers (women, peasants, and indigenous people) as a "super-exploitation" because "it is based on the time and labor necessary for people's survival or subsistence production," and it is "mainly determined by force or coercive institutions." According to Mies (1986: 48), "this is the main reason for the growing poverty and starvation of Third World producers."

The characteristics of survival and ecological sustainability differ in the Global South and North. In the Global South, women are still responsible for a significant portion of food production. Still, they are increasingly losing their ability to access land or are being pushed into less productive areas. Under patriarchal colonialism and a male-dominated market economy, taking measures such as land enclosures for ranching or dam construction, it is tough for women to maintain their usufruct rights in communal lands and feed their families (Mellor 1993: 157; Salleh 1997: 94). All things considered, the study of capitalist development should include men drawing on women's labor and the Global North extracting resources from the Global South.

Neextractivism and Women in Latin America: A Materialist Ecofeminist Perspective

The necessity to understand the historical and social context of "nature" points to the dialectical conception of natural history in which nature and humanity are dialectically connected and interacted in a way that transformed them both. Marx's analysis, combining a materialist conception of history with a materialist conception of nature with all the force of natural history, allows us to analyze capitalism based on the contradictory union of capital and nature (Foster 2000: 19). In this framework, ecological crisis can be analyzed as the crisis of capitalism. Extractivism, one of the key elements in our understanding of the ecological crisis, has been analyzed by Marxist thinkers over the last decade (i.e., Veltmeyer 2012; Petras 2013; Veltmeyer and Petras 2014; Gudynas 2015; Foster 2022). It is argued that extractivism must be conceptualized within a historical materialist framework, associating it with the capitalist

development process, and it must be considered one of the principal methods of capitalist accumulation.

Extractivism can be defined as a type of extraction of natural resources, in large volume or high intensity, and which are essentially oriented to be exported as raw materials or with minimal processing (Gudynas 2015: 13). Since extractivist policies have always been central to colonialism and imperialism, their historical development can be traced back to the 1500s. In Latin America, which became a source of raw materials for Europe during three centuries of colonialism, the concept of extractivism was often used in response to the colonial process in which natural resources were extracted from peripheral countries and transported to central countries for processing. The main issue here is that instead of the concept of “extraction”, the process is met with the concept of “extractivism”, which refers to logic, policy, or ideology, thus emphasizing the political context of the tendency to “constantly take from nature”. Ecological devastation, in that sense, may not be unique to capitalism; however, as Fraser (2022: 79) indicates, what is unique is the “structural character” of the link between ecological crisis and capitalist society. In capitalist societies where capitalists determine the relationship between humanity and nature, the “ecological contradiction” that both needs and consumes nature is inevitable, so it is impossible to establish sustainable interaction patterns with nature. This contradiction finds itself best articulated in Marx’s “metabolic rift” theory,¹ defining the disruption between humans and the natural metabolism of the earth in the process of industrialization of agriculture depleting the soil. Extractivism, thus, should be understood as a structural feature and a contradiction inherent in capitalism rather than a specific stage in its historical development. A contradiction that inevitably creates metabolic rifts and puts barriers continuously between women and the land.

Neoextractivism, on the other hand, is a phenomenon that needs to be understood in the context of Latin American neo-developmentalism in the 21st century. It can be defined as a development model based on the overexploitation of natural resources and growth with income from the export of raw materials (Svampa 2019: 6-7). Leftist governments’ reliance on this model as a tool of income redistribution makes it more controversial. Since neoextractivism, unlike traditional extractivism, serves a progressive strategy to eliminate income inequality, the social and environmental problems caused by natural resource exploitation are mostly ignored, and progressive goals provide a certain degree of legitimacy to extractivist policies (Svampa 2019: 7). Neoextractivism, in this context, refers not only to a development model but also mechanisms of inclusion (conditional cash transfers, social programs, and participatory planning processes for social services) and exclusion (enclosure and land grabbing), and eventually a very contradictory process of social transformation.

This article argues that despite having progressive aspects, neoextractivism is in continuity with extractivism and sustains patriarchal capitalism by reinforcing four structural factors: Latin American economies’ dependency on global markets, promoting “green economy” as a new phase of capital accumulation, the ethnocide of indigenous people, and violence against women. These interrelated factors reconstruct dualisms of culture/nature, men/women,

1 For an ecofeminist account on Marx’s metabolic rift theory see Salleh 2010.

production/reproduction, and civilized/barbarian lying at the heart of the historical process from colonial patriarchy to patriarchal capitalism that ecofeminists emphasize. Significantly, the ecofeminist perspective reveals the interaction between these factors and highlights the social-reproductive and ecological contradictions of neoeextractivism in line with the research questions of this article.

Firstly, neoeextractivism, which Svampa (2013: 31-32) defines as the “Commodity Consensus”, referring to the Washington Consensus, reinforces Latin America’s traditional role as an “exporter of raw materials” in the international division of labor. Export-based growth strategy in the Global South determined the structure of integration into global capitalism since the 1970s. Within the neoliberal framework, mainly after the debt crisis of the 1980s, the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank forced Latin American countries to open their markets. Veltmeyer (2012: 62) argues that the neoliberal policies of structural adjustment were designed to pave the way for a new wave of capitalist development and a turn in the politics of what he terms “extractivist imperialism”. This development strategy was promoted to capture the “comparative advantages” derived from the wealth of primary commodities (i.e., raw materials, minerals, food products) and to pay foreign debts. The result of the resource extraction process was the accumulation of capital based on the plundering of natural and human resources and the destruction of the environment and livelihoods of the local communities (Veltmeyer 2012: 62). Since the 2000s, rapid economic growth and increasing commodity demand in developing countries, especially China, have resulted in a “super commodity cycle” that lasted for more than a decade and created new extractive pressure on the countries of the Global South. Especially in Latin America, extractivism has become one of the most controversial areas regarding the relationship between development and the environment.

The extraction of natural resources in the process of “large-scale investment in land acquisition” has been termed “land grabbing” in the discourse of critical agrarian studies. Veltmeyer and Petras (2014: 62) define the strategy of transnational corporations to extract and exploit natural resources by “land grabbing” as “agro-extractivism.” While profit-oriented agribusiness spreads its monocultures to all lands, the diversity of plant and animal species disappears. As the land becomes a commercial asset rather than a community resource, traditional agricultural farmers, mostly women, are driven off the land. Unlike the Global North, the privatization and enclosure of common lands are rarely accompanied by the opening of alternative employment opportunities in new industrial areas (Mellor 1993: 180). Poverty in the Global South is the hidden cost of highly productive and commercially successful market products. It can be argued that the debt crisis has increased the exploitation of both the environment and women. Women are used as cheap labor both in factories and at home.

The Earth Summits (1992, 2002, and 2012) played a crucial role through this phase in opening the way from “neoliberal development” to “sustainable development” and entangling the debt crisis with the environmental crisis (Isla 2022: 68). The direct management of nature and human resource development in the responsibility of states and the World Bank, opened new areas for extractivist capital accumulation. The discourse of “sustainable development,” prioritizing “permanent growth,” required “natural capital” (water, air, land, minerals, forests,

animal species, etc.) to be embedded in the economic system (Isla 2022: 69). Accordingly, the “green economy” was publicized as the process to “eradicate poverty” in which forests turned into environmental services to be managed. Sustainable development policies in the Global South are re-packaged by the Global North in foreign aid programs or as the “green economy,” whereas the ecological contradiction between industrializing aid projects and sustainability was neglected (Salleh 1997: 30, 159).

This brings us to the second essential factor: promoting a “green economy” as a new phase of capital accumulation. The history of capitalism begins with a process of accumulation originating with the dispossession of small-holding agricultural producers from the land and their means of production (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014: 66). These conditions of primitive accumulation, which constitute the historical basis of capitalism, did not arise only in a particular region in a certain period. The previously mentioned ecofeminists, such as Mies (1986) and Federici (2004), argue that the primitive accumulation of capital is a continuous process in which witch-hunting, land enclosure and the rise of modern science are closely associated. In line with this argument, this article examines “green technology” as a new form of “modern science” that sets conditions for the contemporary processes of primitive accumulation.

“Green developmentalism” discourses aimed at reducing dependence on fossil resources such as oil, coal, and natural gas and switching to renewable energy are used for legitimizing neoextractivist policies. Accordingly, the “transition to a green economy” is based on investment in developing renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and biofuels (bioethanol derived from plants, especially sugar cane and corn). However, in the “green transition” process, dependence on fossil fuels is replaced by reliance on metal and mineral mining. Wind power plants and electric cars requiring more mineral substances than conventional ones trigger the “green extractivism” phenomenon based on the extraction of lithium, copper, graphite, nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements. This considerable demand increases the extractivist pressure, especially on the countries of the Global South. More than half of the global lithium reserves are in the “lithium triangle” in South America. Lithium, a vital input of batteries used in electric vehicles and mobile phones, is one of the most critical rare elements that come to the fore in the “green transition” process. In the triangular region, the rich lithium reserves concentrated in the salt flats (*salars*) of Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia attract the attention of investors and constitute an essential part of the development agenda of the leftist governments.

“Green extractivism” can be defined as the effort to harmonize large-scale natural resource extraction with “sustainability.” There is considerable continuity between traditional extractivism and more “green” forms. Under the guise of “solving the climate crisis,” green extractivism places an endless extractivism above human rights, biodiversity, and the ecosystem and continues to feed capital accumulation through the appropriation of nature and labor exploitation (Bruna 2022). One of the phenomena that stands out with green extractivism is the form of land closure defined as “green grabbing” (Fairhead et al. 2012). Green grabbing is appropriating land and resources by putting forward environmental goals. Statements such as “a more efficient, ‘green’ agriculture will be made on the leased or purchased land” and

“biodiversity and ecosystem will be protected” justify the appropriation of land. For instance, the massive expansion of palm oil plantations and increased trade is justified by palm oil being a carbon-free fuel. However, the cultivation of monoculture-based crops such as palm oil decertifies the land in the long term. Enormous amounts of fertilizers and pesticides used in adapting green technologies also threaten the soil (Mellor 1993: 181). “Greening,” as Isla (2022: 70) signifies, is the denotation of massive expropriation of lands, depredation, and contamination of soil, and dispossession of workers, transforming commons into resources, skills into deficiencies, autonomy into dependency, and men and women into commodified labor power. Therefore, “greening” formulates a new kind of domination of women.

The idea that “new” and “green” extractivism is indispensable to “developing” and “combating climate change” is promoted by Latin American leftist governments, labeling social movements and local communities as “anti-developmental” and “eco-unfriendly.” Women and indigenous people are the primary agents to resist neoextractivism and are also the ones who mostly face violence, which has been the primary tool for primitive accumulation since colonial times. The third and fourth factors reinforced by neoextractivism are related to this violence.

Violence in the accumulation process does not only result from “destroying nature,” Patel and Moore (2017: 20) argue, but also from “putting nature to work as cheaply as possible.” Cheap is considered “a strategy, a practice, violence that mobilizes all kinds of human and animal, botanical and geological with as little compensation as possible” (Patel and Moore 2017: 22). Correspondingly, the strategy of “cheap nature” was channeled by Christopher Columbus, from the first moment that he saw the New World on October 12, 1492. The colonial mechanism of the *encomienda*² was an early practical use of the gendered division between nature and society. It became “a strategy to shift certain humans into the category of Nature so that they might more cheaply work the land,” leading Indigenous Andeans to be called “*naturales*” in the sixteenth century (Patel and Moore 2017: 44-54). Since their lives are also considered “cheap,” the ethnocide of indigenous people has become a central aspect of the accumulation processes in the New World.

Expropriation of territories has been another central mechanism of violence since the very beginning of colonization. As the invasion of capitalism expands and indigenous peoples struggle to maintain or regain control of their general lands, land ownership and management have become a significant battleground in many parts of the Global South (Mellor 1993: 181). In the Latin American democratization processes, especially since the late 1980s, the indigenous movements gained momentum and had significant legal and political achievements. The 1988 Constitution of Brazil guaranteed the Amazonian indigenous people’s languages, cultures, and lands. However, the process of Brazilian democratization was accompanied by neoliberalization, creating obstacles for the indigenous people to exercise their rights over the lands they lived in. The process became more complex and conflictual when the indigenous communities claimed traditional lands that were privately owned. Therefore, the indigenous people continued their struggle for rights over their lands and their ecological

2 *Encomienda* is the legal system defined in 1503 that rewarded Spanish colonizers with the forced labor of indigenous people until the late eighteenth century.

resistance during the leftist PT (The Workers' Party) governments under Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) (Akgemci 2022). As commodity revenues began to decline, the economy stagnated in the Rousseff era, and extractivist capital became more concentrated in the Amazon, exacerbating deforestation and what Petras (2013: 478) calls a "silent genocide" against indigenous peoples. In 2011, the Belo Monte Dam in Pará province, which began construction as part of a mega-project supported by the Rousseff government, led to the forced displacement of indigenous people and triggered violence against indigenous people. Neextractivist policies have inevitably turned Amazonian rainforests, regarded as a "repository of ecological services," into an arena of war.

Conflict has been inherent to neoextractivism since it depends on the destructive impact on ecosystems, displacement of indigenous communities, and social fragmentation. The impacts of mega projects trigger resistance and increase regional conflicts that cause the criminalization of people who defend nature and their territory. The conflicts between the leftist governments and indigenous movements have intensified in Bolivia and Ecuador, where indigenous groups comprise a significant portion of the population. *Buen Vivir* (Living Well), the worldview based on the collective memories of the indigenous peoples, manifests itself in various forms in the discourses, political projects, and cultural and socioeconomic practices of many different indigenous communities living in the Andean and Amazon regions, was recognized in the Constitution of Ecuador in 2007 and the Constitution of Bolivia in 2009. As an ethical perspective for sustainability and a holistic development alternative, *Buen Vivir* is based on complementarity and reciprocity and prioritizes care and the reproduction of life, which capitalism does not value. The inclusion of *Buen Vivir* in the constitution by leftist Rafael Correa and Evo Morales governments did not prevent them from implementing neoextractivist policies and created a contradictory arena of conflict.

Finally, in an extractivist context, bodies become tightly united to the territories people inhabit. The feminine is seen as responsible for sustaining the reproduction of life even when ecosystems are destroyed (Isla 2022: 71). Moreover, women are the ones who have the burden of substantial environmental impacts of the mega-scaled extractivist operations. Mining, one of the leading extractivist activities defined as sustainable development, dramatically contributes to global warming and destroys nature due to the toxic chemicals used to process the minerals extracted and the heavy metal mining waste. According to Rodriguez Fernandez (2020), contamination of water is the main ground that leads to gendered forms of dispossession since indigenous peasant women are subsistence producers and social reproducers whose activities are water-centric. Ironically, technocratic environmentalists, in the name of "progress," demand women to conserve water or recycle garbage while toxic discharges from male-managed industries pollute streams (Salleh 1997: 169). What is unseen is the never-ending struggle for women to access resources and increasing care tasks since women are expected to look after people sickened because of pollution. (2022: 71). Those who resist dispossession are controlled, objectified, appropriated, violated, and sometimes killed. The assassination of Berta Cáceres, Honduran environmental activist, indigenous leader, and co-founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), in 2016 has evoked international condemnation; however, as Federici (2022: 558) remarks, it is only one of the examples of "territorial femicide" that cost the lives of women leaders in Colombia,

Brazil, Mexico, and Honduras. The principal agents of violence against women are soldiers, policemen, paramilitary forces, narcotics traffickers, and the guards hired to fend off protests (Federici 2022: 558). Extractivism has increased militarism, combined with violence, forced disappearance, femicides, and rapes in rural areas in recent years. The escalation of the number of women murdered daily in the region is an important indicator.

Federici (2018) argues that as capitalist social relations expand, we witness new surges of institutional violence against women, including “new witch hunts.” Accordingly, new forms of violence should be examined in a historical context and concerning new forms of capital accumulation. The burning of witches in the New World as a “form of discipline” was related to destroying alternative knowledge about nature. As Patel and Moore (2017: 49) denote, witchcraft and indigenous knowledge constituted existential threats to capitalism, challenging its epistemology and ontology. The recent concept of “*terricidio*” (terricide/the murder of the earth), coined by the Movement of Indigenous Women for the Buen Vivir (*Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir*) in Argentina, includes genocide, ecocide, femicide and epistemicide³ and defines the systematic violence to consume all life and all existence. This concept refers to an ecological and feminist ethic and an alternative, earth-based knowledge for our future survival.

In the Anthropocene (human-centric) epoch, As Foster (2022) indicates, extractivism has become a core symptom of the “planetary disease of late capitalism/imperialism,” threatening all life on Earth. The new surge of violence against women cannot be understood without considering the reliance of capital accumulation on the practice of extractivism, which requires the destruction of women’s means of reproduction (Federici 2018).

Conclusion: Women’s Agency to Construct a Post-Extractivist Future

“Why do women lead ecology movements?” The answer doesn’t lie in “essentialism” but in the necessity learned through the gendered division of labor, as women are forced to provide food, water, health, and care (Shiva 1997). Neoextractivism, from an ecofeminist perspective, is primarily a process that deepens the crises of social reproduction. Therefore, resistance against neoextractivism is closely related to the struggle over social reproduction. Across the globe, women lead struggles against the privatization of water and seeds for sustainable farming and preserving biodiversity. In the Global South, they constitute most of the rural labor and play a leading role in coping with pollution, drought, and the exploitation of land (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019: 47-48). Since women’s interest lies in challenging existing productivist structures, women as an “economic underclass” are in an excellent position to bring about the social change essential for ecological revolution (Salleh 1997: 41).

Since the 1980s, ecofeminists have been developing post-development politics, proposing a “subsistence perspective” that validates the ecological knowledge of women and peasants and anticipating contemporary alternatives such as the *Buen Vivir*, degrowth, and regenerative solidarity economies based on sharing (Terreblanche 2019: 163). In the past

3 Epistemicide can be defined as the destructing, silencing, or devaluing of a particular knowledge system.

decade, a new, decolonial wave of ecofeminist movements has emerged in Latin America as a response to the neoextractivist policies. Barca (2022: 40) points out the significance of the idea of territory/body/earth (*territorio/ cuerpo/tierra*) as the “organic material unit” constricted by extractivism. Originally put forward by Cabnal (2010: 129-132), this holistic conceptualization exposes the historical and oppressive violence towards earth, bodies, and territory. In that sense, the defense of the earth is not just a matter of subsistence but a struggle to recover expropriated bodies, generate life, joy, and vitality, and construct emancipatory knowledge for decision-making. This stance advocates for a broader understanding of what Barca (2022) describes as “earthcare.” Following Mies (1986), Mellor (1993), Merchant (1996), and Salleh (1997), Barca (2022) describes “forces of reproduction” as a political subject of “earthcare labor” and “environmental reproduction.” Forces of reproduction refer to the convergence of (trans)feminist, indigenous, peasant, environmental justice, and other life-making struggles and broaden the ecofeminist struggle by including peasant and indigenous movements in their struggles for food sovereignty and the commons. Insurgent social movements, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Aliança dos Povos da Floresta in the Brazilian Amazon, have been struggling in this way and being a collective voice for humanity (Barca 2022: 40).

In this respect, the potential of Latin American ecofeminist movements for constructing a post-extractivist future depends on combining environmentalism and struggles for social justice and bridging theory and action in ecology and post-development politics. Women’s strong agency in all social movements is fundamental to organizing a unified struggle and shaping a post-extractivist transition to a just and sustainable future. Since the 1980s, Latin American women’s organizations have been developing networks to be involved in environmental politics in rural and urban contexts, joining transformative social movements and political struggles over ecological health and engaging in various actions to develop agroecological projects and protect indigenous people’s rights (Rocheleau and Nirmal 2015, 793). In the last two decades, we have witnessed an explicit shift in women’s visible presence, participation, and leadership in Latin America, from the mines of the Andes to the rain forests of the Amazon and the mountains of Mexico and Central America (Rocheleau and Nirmal 2015: 797-798).

Experiences across the region also demonstrate how women’s activism is vital in strengthening climate resilience and building alternative types of development. The Lameiro⁴ struggle in Pintadas, a very poor municipality in the state of Bahia in a semi-arid region (*sertão*) of the Brazilian Amazon affected by climate-related disasters, made a landmark in the region and set a guiding example of a new system of politics (Corral 2010: 140). In the late 1980s, hundreds of landless people occupied the land in a women-led social mobilization. During the years that followed, a group of women formed the Association of Women of Pintadas, and between 2006-2018, they contributed to the civil society-led project *Adapta Sertão*⁵ to learn better water management and attain more control over production. The inclusion of women in this project was built on their self-organization (Feitosa and Yamaoka 2020: 466). On the other hand, indigenous women, who are strongly affected by climate change, practice traditional

4 Lameiro is the name of an extensive piece of land.

5 “Adapting the *Sertão*”

specialized knowledge and develop strategies such as “intercropping and multiple cropping practices, planting crop varieties more resistant to drought or floods, finding alternative irrigation systems, and taking special care of springs, wells, and rivers through reforestation” (Tovar-Restrepo 2020: 148). In this regard, agroecology seemed to be a significant ecofeminist activism, challenging neoextractivism. Yarang⁶ Women’s Movement is another crucial agroecological project around indigenous women. The movement collects native seeds to restore degraded areas in the Xingu Basin in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon to recover the region’s watersheds and promote alternative mechanisms for territorial management (Feitosa and Yamaoka 2020: 461). It is also important to note that participation in such movements has been transforming the traditional domestic roles of women from “private nurturing” to “collective, public protest” (Campbell 1996: 28). Examining women in the rubber tappers’ defense of the forest in Xapuri, Acre and Brazil, Campbell (1996) observes that women in the Xapuri movement are slowly changing their roles and raising their voice in their homes, unions, and even national and international gatherings.

Indigenous women’s activism throughout the region constitutes an essential driving force in struggles against expropriation, dispossession, and depredation. Moreover, at the international level, indigenous women actively created a Latin American Indigenous Forum on Climate Change in 2009. Evidence of what Federici calls (2022: 557) the “feminization of resistance” is the significant number of rural and indigenous women’s collectives and networks formed in recent years struggling against ecological destruction. The formation of CONAMURI (The Rural and Indigenous Women’s Workers’ Organization) in Paraguay, Saramanta Warmikuna (*Hijas del Maíz/Daughters of Corn*) in the Ecuadorian Amazonia, and Movement in Defense of Land, Territory, for the Participation and Recognition of *Women in Decisions* (*Movimiento en Defensa de la Tierra, el Territorio, por la Participación y el Reconocimiento de las Mujeres en las Decisiones*) in Chiapas, Mexico are among the leading examples.

The new era of extractivism has led to an allyship between Amazonian and ecofeminist activists in some cases, shaping each other’s politics and uniting the emancipatory struggles. Examining the Ecuadorian case, Sempértegui (2021) observes the allyship built between urban activists and indigenous women led to the extension of both positions and contributed to the understanding of the Amazonian women’s *Kawsak Sacha* (Living Forest) and the “Body-Territory” proposal launched by the feminist collective *Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo*. Latin American women play a central role in formulating proposals and alternative models and in the mobilizations and resistance against neoextractivism. They participate through protests, promotion of awareness campaigns, petitions in the media, foundation of and participation in organizations, and articulation with other national and international movements. The emergence of ecofeminist politics in Latin America, grounded in local experience, brings an alternative, post-extractivist, ecologically just, and women-centered development perspective based on encounters between diverse social movement actors challenging systems of domination formed in the context of class, race, gender, and species.

⁶ Yarang is a species of cutting ant. It refers to women who collect seeds, like ants.

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