

TERRITORIAL RE-EXISTENCES OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE ANDEAN-AMAZON REGION *REEXISTENCIAS TERRITORIALES DE MOVIMIENTOS INDÍGENAS EN LA REGIÓN ANDINO-AMAZÓNICA*

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Abstract

Movements by indigenous peoples against neoliberal extractivist processes in Latin America have traditionally employed strategies focused on territorial recognition of their identity and culture. The issue under investigation is the recent resurgence of post-extractivist territorial-based social movements that are using strategies based on innovative economic models and creative development. The objective is to study these territorial social movements and socio-ecological conflicts by analyzing cases in the Andean-Amazonian region in Bolivia and Colombia. The methodology is qualitative and ethnographic, based on interviews and documentary analysis. In the case of the Rositas River in Bolivia, indigenous communities and producers have organized to oppose the construction of a dam and hydroelectric project. In the Colombian region of Cauca, the dispute is over 20,000 hectares of sugarcane monoculture where the local community is fighting to grow corn, beans and yucca. The common characteristics of these movements are ecofeminist involvement, autonomous forms of collective action and political experimentation, new languages, and patterns of struggle and mobilization including the deployment of international alliances

Keywords: indigenous communities, socio-ecological conflicts, extractivism, Bolivia, Colombia, collective action, economic development

Resumen

Los movimientos de los pueblos indígenas contra los procesos extractivistas neoliberales en América Latina han empleado tradicionalmente estrategias centradas en el reconocimiento territorial de su identidad y cultura. El tema que se investiga es el reciente resurgimiento de movimientos sociales de base territorial post-extractivista que están utilizando estrategias basadas en modelos económicos innovadores y en el desarrollo creativo. El objetivo es estudiar estos movimientos sociales territoriales y los conflictos socio-ecológicos analizando casos en la región andino-amazónica en Bolivia y Colombia. La metodología es cualitativa y etnográfica, basada en entrevistas y análisis documental. En el caso del río Rositas en Bolivia, comunidades indígenas y productores se han organizado para oponerse a la construcción de una represa y un proyecto hidroeléctrico. En la región colombiana del Cauca, la disputa es por 20.000 hectáreas de monocultivo de caña de azúcar, donde la comunidad local lucha por cultivar maíz, frijoles y yuca. Las características comunes de estos movimientos son la implicación ecofeminista, formas autónomas de acción colectiva y experimentación política, nuevos lenguajes y patrones de lucha y movilización que incluyen el despliegue de alianzas internacionales.

Palabras Clave: comunidades indígenas, conflictos socio-ecológicos, extractivismo, Bolivia, Colombia; acción colectiva; desarrollo económico

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1. Introduction

Since before the COVID-19 pandemic, South America has experienced many symptoms of a generalized crisis, particularly of a socio-political character, visible in social rebellions from 2019 to the present that exploded from as far and wide as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. In this region, over the past two decades, the modalities of appropriation and exploitation of nature have been directly related to the changes and reconfigurations of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation expanding mainly from the consolidation and generalization of development models and state policies based on neoextractivism¹ (Svampa, 2019). Thus, processes of appropriation, commodification, and destruction of nature have been accentuated, as well as the dynamics of alteration/affectation of the natural cycles of reproduction of life to subject them to the demands of the capital accumulation processes (Leff, 2018). Those dynamics have led to a double process of pain and resistance since these multiple crises have had disproportionate social, economic, territorial, and cultural impacts on more vulnerable territories or social groups. However, the activation of social protest, the multiplication of socio-ecological movements, and the increase of autonomic movements and processes in response to the intensification of extractivism have situated Latin America as an important site of socio-ecological movements, as well as ontological and epistemological struggle (Escobar 2018).

A starting point, this paper reflects on the current socio-ecological crisis (Svampa & Viale, 2020) is part of a crisis of the hegemonic civilizational pattern (Lander, 2018), based on the episteme of modernity and the paradigm of development and progress without end, and that in short it can be characterized as anthropocentric, capitalist, developmentist, patriarchal, classist, racist and terricida (ecocide), as some of its main features on a global scale. As an unprecedented socio-ecological crisis and emergency, of anthropic origins with effects on all forms of life on the planet, which undoubtedly has been accelerated by the historical parameters of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, which presents various manifestations, depending on the geography and particularly context. In the context that interests us here, this socio-ecological dimension of the crisis presents characteristics and dynamics in South America, where in the last two decades the modalities of appropriation and exploitation of nature and the processes accentuate multiple forms of dispossession, directly related to the changes and reconfigurations of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, were expanding and/or intensifying, mainly from the consolidation and generalization of development models and state policies based on enclaves and neo-extractivist enterprises.

In recent years, socio-environmental conflicts and socio-territorial movements in Latin America have unmasked the discrepancy between dependence on the conventional neo-extractivist development model and the aspirations to decolonize and democratize society-nature relationships and reconstruct a socio-territorial identity. This represents an “eco-territorial turn” of struggles and social movements in the region (Svampa,

1 Extractivism refers to the intensive exploitation and exportation of nature in primary commodity form, which remains at the core of Latin American development models (Gudynas, 2018; 2015). The term neoextractivism has been used to highlight commonalities and novel dimensions of extractivist regimes from across the political spectrum. Likewise, the neo-extractivism concept is used by some authors, notably Gudynas (2018, 2015), to refer exclusively to leftist or progressive extractivist governments. However, I adopt Svampa's (2019) broader definition in order to highlight common drivers, dynamics and socio-territorial responses across politically diverse extractivist regimes.

2015; 2019). This is associated with the defense of collective territorial rights as a base where peoples produce and recreate their identity, structure their claims and demands, and from where collective action is organized. This turn is comprised of a multiplicity of socio-territorial resistances, and socio-community movements through which struggles for territory and environmental justice are taking place, all of which are evidence of territorialities in dispute. In this sense, a new language of valuation of commons (Svampa, 2016) and processes of societal re-existence (Leff and Porto-Gonçalves, 2015) has emerged, with a focus on community logic, the autonomous management of the territory and/or production in harmony with nature. Some of these social actors are recovering community knowledge, recreating practices, and developing ecologically sustainable production forms and territorial processes alternative to conventional development, which have the potential not only to galvanize the resilience of a community fabric but also the possibility of recovery and socio-ecology “healing” of life’s territories (Escobar, 2014). These emergent modalities of territorial struggle, together with ecological urban collectives, movements for environmental justice, and women’s movements, are modifying the regional context.

Across the region, the state has exhausted its responses to socio-territorial and socio-ecological movements, with repression, the criminalization of social protest, and demobilization/bureaucratization of social organizations unable to stem the growing wave of resistance to neo-extractivism. New social challenges have also catalyzed community, ethnic, racial, and feminist movements. This article contends that there is a need to reflect, problematize, and discuss the processes of reorganization of collective action and the political expression that Latin America as part of the Global South is experiencing, against the persistence and/or intensification of forms of socio-environmental injustice. As such, it tries to address the following questions: What are the changes of social movements in Latin America today? What are their new languages and horizons of meaning and what are the new expectations and forms of dispute? How are politics and collective action reorganized against the advance of the (neo)extractivist frontier?

This article specifically analyzes the tensions and disputes of territorialities and of the processes of societal re-existence contained in the current experiences and processes of socio-territorial and community re-existence in the Andean-Amazon region, particularly in Bolivia and Colombia, and the extractive models and multiple dispossession processes they confront (Navarro, 2018), from the analysis of the tension and disputes of territorialities and of the processes of societal re-existence (Leff and Porto-Gonçalves, 2016). We argue that entire territories have been transformed into “sacrificed territories” (Svampa and Viale, 2020) in these countries. In Bolivia, somewhere with an important community organization tradition of an ethno-territorial nature, extractive policies have been directly affecting or threatening Indigenous territories and recognized collective rights, and affected areas ecologically in the last decade. Through these processes, specifically indigenous social movements have been reactivated in parts of the Bolivian Amazon region in order to defend their territories and other forms of agroforestry production against an extractive territoriality. Colombia, despite recent peace agreements, continues to present a scenario of violence against communitarian territories and murders of social and environmental leaders, particularly in the North Cauca region, where communities of the Nasa Indigenous people are developing a process called *liberación de la Madre Tierra* (liberation of Mother Earth). Analysis of these socio-environmental conflicts illuminates the possibility of community and socio-ecological alternatives formed through disputed territorialities; as social emancipation and post-extractive horizons.

This article is the result of research with a qualitative methodology and multi-method, including case study, socio-historical method, and ethnographic research. For the construction of empirical information, based on interviews and documentary analysis, a combined schema was used of the following tools: multi-situated and multi-scale ethnography (Marcus, 1995) and social cartography (Tetamanti, 2014). These strategies and methodological tools were implemented predominantly in community territories and with key social actors in the two countries where the study was carried out.

2. Context and Theoretical Framework: Ecological Inflection, Societal Movements and Territorial Re-Existences

The ecological current crisis has been intensified by the entrenchment of the neo-liberal economic model and neo-extractivism (Svampa and Viale, 2020), which has led to a dispute over common goods. In this sense, the deep social and environmental crisis in Latin America constitutes two dimensions of a broader and multiple crises at the global level. The dimensions of this crisis have deepened during the last two decades in South America thanks to development models based on the extraction and exportation of natural resources (Svampa, 2016). This has been accompanied by the intensification of the commodification and appropriation of the natural dynamics sustaining the reproduction of life, cultural practices, and ontologies of different peoples (Escobar, 2019), subordinating them to the demands of capitalist accumulation and accentuating socio-environmental injustices in already vulnerable territories (Lander, 2019).

The current expansive extractive dynamics in and to territories, including multiple dispossessions in much of Latin America (Navarro, 2018), have generated a multiplicity of reactions in the form of socio-territorial resistances, socio-community movements and struggles for territory (Leff and Porto Gonçalves, 2015), social mobilization and a phenomenon of reconstruction of a socio-territorial identity, this is an “eco-territorial turn” of the struggles and social movements in the region (Svampa, 2015). Understanding the eco-territorial shift as a trend means that it is necessary to analyze the struggle processes on a case-by-case basis to see what forms eco-territorial struggles assume. The different aspects of the eco-territorial turn form an account of the emergence of a new grammar of social struggles, of the dissemination of an alternative language with strong resonance within Latin American politics, of a new framework of meanings that articulates Indigenous and territorial rights, but also ecological and feminist activism, in clear opposition to the dominant model (Svampa, 2019), whether in a language of defense of the territory and common goods, of the *Derechos de la Naturaleza* (rights of nature), the demand points to democratization of decisions, in the face of projects that seriously affect living conditions in the territories.

Those territorialities in dispute show a new political ecology as well as new languages of valuation and processes of true societal re-existence (López and Betancourt, 2021; Svampa and Viale, 2020).² Some social groups not only resist dispossession and de-territorialization (Haesbaert, 2011), they redefine their forms of existence through emancipatory movements and the reinvention of their identities, their ways of thinking,

2 Some social actors emerge from their resistance to being absorbed (de-territorialized) by globalization and their claims to redefine their environments and their cultural identities in order to build their sustainable worlds. In this perspective, these resistance processes turn to be movements of re-existence. These populations do not only resist against dispossession and de-territorialization: they redefine their forms of existence through emancipation movements, by reinventing their identities, their ways of thinking, their modes of production and their livelihoods.

and their modes of production and livelihood (Leff and Porto-Gonçalves, 2015). At the same time, some of these community-based socio-territorial actors, beyond their demands and contestation, are recovering knowledge, recreating practices, and developing ecologically sustainable production experiences and/or socio-territorial forms alternative to conventional development. These experiences, in some cases, focus on community logic, on the autonomous management of the territory, and/or on production in harmony with nature: such as agro-ecology, Indigenous or community forestry, *minga* (communitarian work), or simply the defense of ancestral forms of production and reproduction.

In this sense, Routledge (2016) labels the places of contestation in the context of the multiplicity of relations between power and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, between forces and relationships of domination, submission, exploitation, and resistance 'places of resistance'. This approach allows us to understand how social movements challenge state-centered political territorial and power conceptions and their attendant extractivist development models, whether in physical spaces or discourses and narratives. In this context, movements endow their demands with countless meanings, simultaneously unifying the environmental contestation, of gender or ethnic claims (Routledge, 2016). It is necessary to identify the specific expressions of each movement and its languages about forms of socio-environmental injustice for evaluating concrete forms of discontent, as well as the production of alternative knowledge and practices. Although localized, experiences of resistance are increasingly regional and international in their objectives, forms of organization, as well as the interaction between local and global struggles and processes, characteristic scholars have coined as 'glocal' (Dietz and Engels, 2020).

From this perspective, a territorialized reading of social movements which re-emerge in the region allows us to conceptualize the dynamics of dispossession and forms of socio-environmental injustice as an effect of certain state policies, particularly in movements with claims based on the defense of their territoriality. Enrique Leff (2018) frames these emergent territorialities as 'worlds of life', understood both as a collective right and as a condition for the reproduction of their ways of life. For these social movements, territory appears as a space of resistance, gradually becoming a place of re-signification and creation of new social relations and new political and cultural identities (Svampa, 2016). It is then possible identify how socio-territorial movements in Latin America are constituted as political actors in resistance and deploy their repertoire of mobilization and territorialized collective action, in the face of de-territorialization processes deployed by activities of extraction of natural resources in their territories.

Thus, territorial spaces of extractivist exploitation and dynamics of dispossession configure so-called sacrifice zones (Bolados and Sanchez, 2017), denying the social, ecological, economic, and productive activities already existent within historically constructed territories that contain a set of collective identities, and social relations and cultural practices. They threaten the ecological web of territories, as well as their social and material conditions for the reproduction of life (Svampa, 2016). This has led to increasing and sometimes violent confrontations between local communities, companies, and governments, and to a rising number of socio-ecological conflicts.

Likewise, there is ample evidence on how social movements can lead to environmental policy changes that promote greener and fairer governance (Bullard and Johnson, 2002) and strengthen the governance of local commons (Villamayor & García López, 2017). A part of the problematic nucleus in this work refers, precisely, to the relationship

of certain types of social movements to their inscription in the territory – what have been called socio-territorial movements (Fernandes, 2005). The territorialization of some social movements would appear as a displacement that challenges the consolidation of an externally imposed ‘territoriality of domination’.

In the last three decades in Latin America, a plethora of demands by social actors have developed and materialized through processes of socio-territorial re-existence (Leff and Porto-Gonçalves, 2015). Several of these societal processes simply manifest through experiences in which social actors not only activate specific, spatially situated forms of resilience in the face of the new scenarios of multiple dispossession and modalities of socio-environmental injustice (Navarro, 2019), but also through forms and strategies that allow them to construct or reconstruct socio-territorial relations of their collective life. Thus, the theme of territoriality represents the center of many social imaginaries and dynamics of collective action.

In this sense, Svampa (2016) proposes some dimensions that allow us to characterize social movements in Latin America: territoriality, disruptive direct action, the demand for autonomy, and the development of direct democracy mechanisms as the main forms of organization. These characteristics, which we can update with the formation of global protest organization networks (Pleyers, 2019) and the observation of the different counter-hegemonic experiences through racial, gender, and class intersectionality within the framework of power relations that give the region its particularity (Crenshaw, 2019). This points to the need to conceptualize territories as spaces of social construction, amid disputes of domination and resistance, between antagonistic actors that give meaning and re-signify space. Thus, territories are formed as material and symbolic spaces, crossed by tensions and conflicts, which are not only dimensioned as a substance that contains natural resources and a population.

Following Porto-Gonçalves (2010), the territory is not only a substance that contains natural resources and population, but a dense sociological and geographical category that ‘presupposes a process of appropriation/territorialization which conform territorialized identities, that is to say, “territoriality”, and a determined order, a social topology’ (Porto-Gonçalves, 2010: 230). These conceptions allow us to characterize and explain the multiplicity of ways in which socio-territorial movements interact with their spatiality, constituting disputed territories, creating practices and ways of thinking, territorializing their lives, and social reproduction in political terms. Processes of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization continually take place, which entail transformations in the territory as well as in the social actors that inhabit it (Haesbaert, 2011).

Thus, many social movements revolve around defending, constructing, and gaining autonomous control over territory, therefore of socio-environmental justice, which points to the territorial anchor of social actors. In that context, the territory is discussed as a space of social construction and a basis for the reproduction of collective life (Porto-Gonçalves 2010). In this sense, for example, the Indigenous and peasant movements constitute an incomparable case of socio-territorial movements, as their traditions are rooted in the defense of territory and the multiple relations with land. Also, the concept of territoriality has served as an instrument of resistance against the expropriation of natural resources, unequal power relations, and the various modalities of socio-environmental injustice, as well as, against economic territoriality that is being imposed by the state and extractive companies. That way, many socio-environmental conflicts address the preservation of territoriality that is not submitted to the logic of capital and challenge the consolidation of a territoriality of domination

(Martinez Alier and Walter, 2016). These processes of socio-territorial construction and recreation are open and not definitive processes that potentially configure alternative forms of social-environmental relations. As such, they are experiences marked by uncertainty and contingency, as processes constructing these experiences anchored in the territory are themselves constantly transforming.

Moreover, Tapia (2008) proposes consideration of societal movement configuration where collective action begins to overflow the stable places of politics, both within society and the state. Thus, in multi-societal countries, like in the Andean-Amazon region there are configurations of social and political mobilization that have a denser character than that of a classical social movement. In this sense, it is a 'societal movement' since it would be social and political forms of non-modern origin that mobilize against the expropriation of their territory and destroyers of their communities caused by modern processes of exploitation of nature and people, proposing another socio-political horizon (Tapia, 2008).

3. Methodology

This article is part of a recently conducted research through an articulated and dialogical combination of macro and micro-social perspectives that problematizes the socio-territorial processes under study. It analyzes the macro-social characteristics of the socio-political settings of the economically dependent societies Bolivia and Colombia. It also develops an analysis of the social actors' perspectives: namely, the perceptions and visions of the social subjects. These subjects are conceptualized and evaluated as collective political actors by using a micro-social analysis focusing on the inter-subjective relationships of individual social actors and the meaning that they grant to territory and collective action. These collective actors are studied through a predominantly qualitative and horizontal methodological strategy that develops a socio-historical analysis, building the macro-social level of the socio-political context from micro-social analysis (Noiriél, 2011). At the micro-social level, a theoretical and methodological approach based on the "actor perspective" is used (Long, 2007). Thus, the study also focused on the meaning of the actions of diverse social actors in the field of conflicts. In this sense, the methodological strategy was multi-method, including case study, socio-historical method, and documentary analysis.

Regarding data collection work, it used two collection and analysis techniques: interviews and documentary analysis. Firstly, it was specifically used in-depth interviews to obtain information on the different social and political actors. Also, it was carrying out a review of primary and secondary sources, which includes a review of official documents (laws, projects, etc.). Methodologically, the research was innovative not only in the use of different techniques but also in their combined use.

4. Results: Some experiences of re-existence and alternatives in the Andean-Amazon region.

4.1. The *Rositas* case: Indigenous organization and communities in the Bolivia Lowland

During the previous decade, the lowland region in Bolivia witnessed a period marked by the articulation of a counter-hegemonic horizon (Tapia, 2011, Thwaites and Ouviaña, 2019). In this case, some of the components of that counter-hegemonic horizon

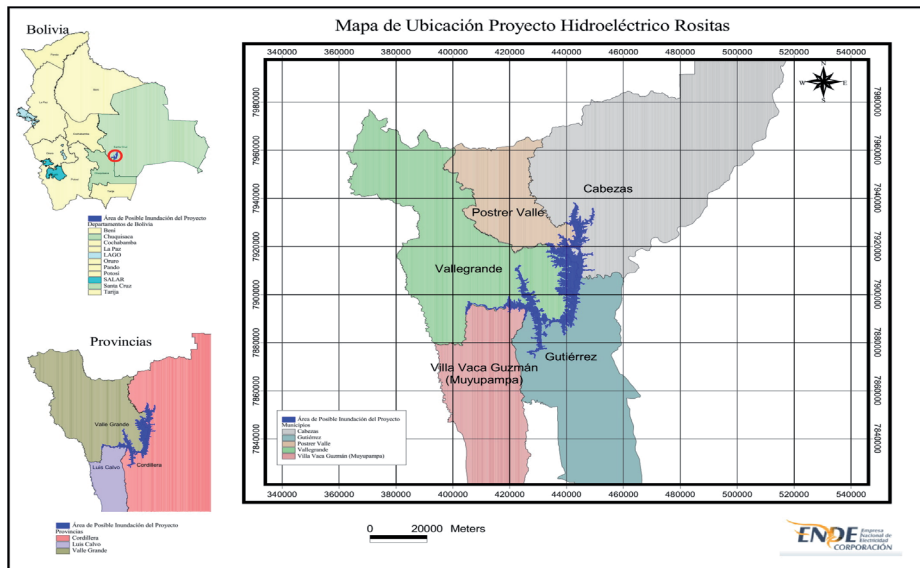
included: the possibility of a plurinational state; decolonization of state structures; and recognition of Indigenous autonomy in community territories. The transition to a plurinational state with autonomies (specifically of an ethnic-original type) implied breaking with the monopoly of politics present throughout the history of the state in Bolivia. It contained the promise of the establishment and development of a plurality of spaces for self-government and Indigenous autonomies, even though their definition and implementation would become ambiguous and contested in the following period (Tockman, et. al., 2015). The first half of the current decade will move from constituent processes generated by Indigenous movements to a period in which the last MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) governments (2009-2014; 2015-2019) intensified to deploy a policy of extractivist expansion over Indigenous territories (Postero, 2017). Paradoxically, it is during this time of retrenchment that a truly counter-hegemonic horizon would be fundamentally articulated around the community territorial resistance of Indigenous peoples, movements, and organizations, which manifestly demanded the defense of their territories and respect for the exercise of their collective rights of self-determination as peoples through the organizations that articulate and represent them.

Consequently, the context in Bolivia in recent years would be marked, among other aspects, by the reactivation of societal movements, mainly of a socio-territorial and Indigenous nature, in the face of dynamics and extractive activities on protected areas and/or Indigenous territories, and their consequent dynamics of dispossession. In particular, the lowlands of Bolivia has witnessed a series of socio-environmental and territorial conflicts, intensified as a result of government policies aimed at deepening and expanding exploitation/export of natural resources as commodities – most notably hydrocarbons, minerals, agribusiness, and more recently energy through hydroelectric plants – without the prior consent of Indigenous communities. This is the scenario where some socio-territorial conflicts have forcefully manifested in recent years, which account for strong tensions and disputes between the state and Indigenous movements, despite the declaration of several protected areas and/or the recognition of Indigenous lands as collective property in recent years. In this context, various Indigenous and peasant peoples and organizations are taking collective actions of resistance against the effects and impacts of extractive policies on their communities and the ecosystems of their territories, as well in the face of the persistence and accentuation of forms of socio-environmental injustice.

In 2015, the government gave a change in direction to the policies of exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons. Through three consecutive Supreme Decrees (2298, 2366, and 2400), the entry of oil activities in protected areas – which in many cases are superimposed on Indigenous territories – was allowed through the relaxation of environmental protection measures and the erosion of recognized rights of Indigenous peoples, such as the right to prior consultation. The unprecedented growth of the oil frontier, the agrarian measures that favor deforestation and the large soy agro-industry, as well as the execution of the first phases of construction of mega-dams such as El Bala-Chepete and Rositas in the Bolivian regions of the Amazon and the Chaco (lowlands), began a time of confrontation of the Indigenous communities with the state. The main contradictions exploded around the different projects, promoted by the MAS government, such as building a hydro-electrical dam along the Rositas River which would flood a big part of the territory of Gutiérrez municipality and directly affect the communities of Tatarenda and Yumao. The project of constructing a hydroelectric dam along the Rositas River is part of a bigger plan that seeks to dam the Rio Grande, part of the Amazon basin: originating in the Andes mountains, this river crosses Santa Cruz and joins with the Rositas River (CEDIB, 2017).

In 2012, the Bolivian government restored the Rositas project, justifying the will to construct a hydroelectric power station to make Bolivia the “energetic heart of the continent”, but this project was the result of the increasing Chinese influence on the country, and of the extractives processes it conveys to pursue a reprimarization of Bolivian economy functional to transnational neoliberal market (CEDIB, 2017). The plan is extensive and complex but, for the aims of my analysis, I will now focus on the little data we have about the dam on the Rosita’s River, as it is this dam that will directly affect the territory of the municipality of Gutiérrez (Fundación Solón, 2019). This project will then destroy the environment and the biodiversity of the Chaco and put at risk 570 species of fauna and 2.415 species of flora, revealing the inconsistencies at the heart of the Bolivian government rhetoric of *vivir bien* (“living well”). The treatment of organizations and people who oppose mega projects like Rositas as “enemies” by MAS officials is central to understanding territorial disputes here. It is part of government discourse, which justifies the government’s confrontation with popular Indigenous resistance in recent years through the notion of national development. However, opposition to the Rositas hydroelectric plant does not come from “enemies of development”, but from Indigenous communities and producers, as well as other organizations, which were not consulted about the dispossession of their lands and territories, nor informed about the hydroelectric plant and its consequences. These facts are reproduced when these types of projects are executed. The floods caused by the reservoir of the dam would damage productive areas of several communities.

Figure 1: Location map of the Rositas Hydroelectric Project;



Source: ENDE Corporation

The communities of Tatarenda and Yumao then asked their leaders to speak about the hydroelectrical project and to create a firm union to contrast the entrance of the industries in their territory and to enforce their right of consulta previa following Indigenous norms and not as promoted by the government. The formal leaders (mburuvichas or captains) of Gutiérrez, not only refused to accomplish the requests of the population but, together with APG leaders, signed an agreement to give them access to the territory to start the studies for the hydroelectrical project, without

informing the communities, violating the 2009 Constitution, and without holding an Indigenous assembly to ask to the other mburuvichas their opinion about this agreement. Following this betrayal from their representatives and lacking the possibility of articulating their demands under the Guaraní leadership, the population of Tatarenda and Yumao began to organize the resistance together with the other peasant communities affected by the project, forming the Comité Defensa de Tierra y Territorio (Land and Territory Defense Committee). Through this new organization, they then succeeded in articulating a strong oppositional movement, to confront both the central government and the Guaraní leaders who betrayed them (De Ambroggi, 2019). Subsequently, thanks to the help of different activists and in some cases NGOs, they spread information about the Rositas project to all the communities of the territory but also on a national level, where they find allies in other communities affected by the extractivist agenda of the MAS. Finally, they started to form international alliances, contacting other Latin American and world communities who are suffering the consequences of the implementation of a hydroelectrical power station in their territory.

Figure 2: Manifestation against the Rositas project



Source: Camilla D'Ambroggi, 2020

Nonetheless, this context has conveyed a new form of political opposition and a re-articulation of social movements. The Committee in Defense of the Land and Territory case I analyze here demonstrates how the ones who are fighting against the always stronger deployment of neoliberal extractivist processes in Bolivia today do not base their strategy on identity or cultural recognition, as Indigenous movements had done in the past, but are deploying national and international alliances to globally tackle the structure of contemporary transnational capitalism. However, essentialisms are hard to avoid, and this new global form of resistance is sometimes still conceived and explained deploying essentializations and naturalizations of the subjects involved, especially women.

In Bolivia, women have historically played a game fundamental role, sometimes invisible, in the Bolivian social struggles, which is reflected today in the struggles against extractive projects. Because the lack of information about the projects is a state strategy that seeks to generate uncertainty and weaken resistance, the affected communities organize to obtain information and be able to make informed decisions and be better able to demand respect for their collective rights. An important component of the struggle for women is participation in spaces that allow them to train, create alliances with other women, and claim their autonomy. For the president of the Organization of Guaraní Indigenous Women of Bolivia (OMIGB) of the Committee in Defense of the Land and Territory, Lourdes Miranda, belonging to this organization allows women to be autonomous and assert their rights. The words of Lourdes Miranda, the mburuvicha of Tatarenda, can help us to grasp how the situation is far more complex than this idealized narrative:

“Con el tema de la resistencia al proyecto Rositas, hemos podido conocer muchas personas y ha crecido nuestra fuerza gracias a la articulación con otros movimientos de afectados por proyectos extractivos. Y allí me he dado cuenta de que nos faltaba organizarnos como mujeres, y así hemos hecho una alianza entre mujeres afectadas de procesos extractivos, y los hombres nos apoyaron porque es importante que estemos unidos en la batalla en contra de la explotación de nuestros territorios. Y de allí salen muchos eventos organizados por ONGs, activistas e intelectuales en los que nos invitan a exponer nuestras problemáticas: nos invitan como mujeres indígenas en resistencia, pero yo siempre aprovecho para informar las personas sobre lo que está pasando con Rositas, porque yo tengo la suerte de haber estudiado y entonces tengo bastante conocimiento y capacidad de acción política” (Lourdes Miranda, interview, 01/11/2019).

Figure 3: Women of Tatarenda's community



Source: Camilla D'Ambroggi, 2019

The participation in these spaces, in addition to consolidating the resurgence of a Bolivian movement that responds to the development policies of the government of Movement to Socialism (MAS), has allowed many Women who defend the territory have a platform to make the Bolivian situation known abroad. A transcendental exercise in a Latin American context is still seduced by the discourse of the so-called progressive governments that (consciously or not) continue to obscure and hide the extractive policies that consolidated the MAS government and, mainly, the violation of rights.

“Ahora, el problema adentro de las comunidades indígenas es diferente, porque aquí estos proyectos extractivos afectan más a las mujeres porque ellas son las que cuidan la familia, pero eso es un problema de la comunidad adonde los varones no se encargan de cuidar a los hijos. Entonces a causa de este rol impuesto a las mujeres, ellas siempre han sido más preocupadas de los hombres sobre el tema del territorio; pero como esta sociedad patriarcal les hacía pensar que los varones son más fuertes y valiosos, siempre han relegados a ellos el rol de luchar políticamente por el territorio. Honestamente yo es desde años que insisto en que las mujeres guaraní se organicen, pero en la sociedad guaraní es muy difícil hacerlo, ya que el varón tiene un poder tan dominante; por eso muchas mujeres guaraní apoyaron todos los hombres que ahora son mburuvichas de la APG, porque a ellas siempre se le impide organizarse políticamente” (interview with a woman leader of the Yumao community 10/11/2019).

As a result of their resistance in defending the territory, the members of the different organizations against dams, as in Rosita's case have been attacked differently by the state. In the last decade, one of the tactics used by the Bolivian state to delegitimize the defenders of the territory has struggled to label them as workers of environmental, conservative, foreign NGOs and to question their Indigenous identity. During the government of Evo Morales (2006-2019), the women were seen as a problem for the state because they demanded that he justify his actions and coherence with his international discourse on climate issues and the rights of Indigenous peoples. In this way, the demands of Indigenous and peasant women leaders constitute calls of great importance because they seek to mobilize, on the one hand, the communities affected by these projects and, on the other, Bolivian society and the international community.

4.2. The Indigenous struggles in the Colombian Cauca region: The Liberation of *Madre Tierra*

In the north of the Department of Cauca in Colombia, the process known as *Liberación de la Madre Tierra* (Liberation of Mother Earth) constitutes one of the resistance movements in the region with the greatest visibility. It realizes socio-territorial actions through struggling for land, defending territory and mounting a legal dispute (Vargas and Ariza 2020). The historically predominant economic and political model in the department of Cauca has been based on large estates, the hacienda regime and monoculture, leading to the fact that disputes between landowners, businessmen, peasants, black communities and Indigenous people have been a constant since the beginning 20th century. Currently, Cauca is the department with the largest Indigenous population, corresponding to 21% of the national total and 65% of the Nasa people. In this context, the historical trajectory of the Indigenous movement is fundamental to addressing the historical and current processes of land recovery by Nasa communities in the Colombian department of Cauca.

The social organization of Indigenous, black, and peasant communities that among their demands historically demanded a comprehensive agrarian reform in which the right to land for those who work it was a fundamental premise. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Indigenous movement gave rise to the emergence of organizations such as the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) in 1971 and later the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) in 1985 (Lemaitre, 2009). This trajectory of struggle and resistance against the traditional model of land tenure has been maintained until today, sustaining other demands by the Indigenous movement through the defense of Mother Earth. Indigenous peoples here are confronted with the capitalist model of production and logic that exploits, pollutes and destroys the very nature that is the material, spiritual and cultural sustenance of their communities.

Disputed lands are equivalent to approximately 20,000 hectares, occupied with sugar cane monocultures by sugar mills. These hectares are strategic in agro-industrial production since they are located in the most fertile flat areas of the inter-Andean valleys of Cauca. Faced with this accumulation of land, the collective process of Liberation of Mother Earth has mobilized about 8000 Indigenous people through the *minga* (communitarian work) among the Indigenous communities of Corintio, Caloto, and Toribío with the support of the CRIC and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN). The actions within this process are occupying the land, cutting the sugarcane, burning it, and later planting crops of corn, beans, and cassava for the community. In addition, protest and social movements have a transcendental identity and cultural character for Indigenous peoples, since, as has been evident in this case, social action through mobilization is a constitutive element of resistance and the political platform of Indigenous organizations (Lemaitre, 2009). This type of action also generates a mode of social integration based on collective identity traits in the face of the modern-capitalist project, forging these communities as subjects in resistance with projects and emancipatory political positions that challenge the capitalist logic based on the exploitation of nature, industrialization, inequality and the accumulation of wealth (CRIC, on-line).

Although the land reclamation process was the precursor to the liberation process of Mother Earth, the name change given by the communities that participated in it was not in vain. This new way of naming the liberation strategy implies a change and adaptation of the actions to the mandates of the CRIC: a) recover the land of the reservations and carry out the defense of ancestral territory and the living spaces of the Indigenous communities; b) recover, defend and protect living spaces in harmony and balance with Mother Earth (CRIC, on-line). Another reason why the Indigenous movement continues in the process of liberation of Mother Earth is to demand the right to exercise its government and be able to apply its justice, as well as implement its economic forms based on respect for Mother Earth, aspects that are consolidated in the first objective that the CRIC raises in its fight platform: "Recover the land from the reservations and defend the ancestral territory and the living spaces of the communities Indigenous peoples" (CRIC, [online]). In this sense, it is pertinent to consider that this mechanism of de facto exercise of rights by the Nasa people is illegal (from the state perspective), it is also legitimate, valid, and effective, in response to the cultural, political, and legal conditions that historically they have denied or subordinated the rights of Indigenous communities to the hegemonic state right. The expectation of Nasa people when liberating Mother Earth constitutes a space for vindication due to the scourges since the conquest, colony, through the republic, and the constitution of the new state / Capital form and its processes of dispossession. Thus, they have five important reasons for Mother Earth's Liberation:

“a.) The first is that she has been seized for extraction and sugarcane estates, a production model that poisons and destroys, destroying human beings bit by bit; b) The second reason is for the ancestral rights to reclaim their territories and for restitution on behalf of the state; c) The third reason is that the government and the state together (above all the Colombian Institute for Rural Development [INCODER]) have methods of titling and distributing lands that will never resolve the problem; d) The fourth reason is because the government entangles in INCODER’s bureaucratic procedures as they deny the land titling they already have and prefer to leave them in the hands of the National Agrarian Fund, as all of this happens the sugarcane industry advances like a plague through the flat lands that are the ancestral property of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples; e) The fifth reason is all of the armed actors are appropriating the lands to defend this model of displacement indicated and to position themselves if things should change if eventually end this conflict” (Solidarity Collective, 2015)³.

5. Discussion of Results: the new political languages of social movements in Latin America

Since the beginning of this 21st century, strong waves of social mobilization in Latin America have marked and reconfigured the general context. These waves of social mobilization have been characterized by the protagonist role of social movements mainly of an Indigenous-peasant character, their popular or community matrix. The presented cases concern social movements with a cultural and community matrix and a rural territorial base that have been questioning and challenging the models of development of a capitalist nature and with an extractivist base, as well as political-territorial arrangements designed and implemented by nation-states with a direct impact on historically constructed community territorialities and their environments of coexistence with ecosystems and forms of life.

Within the pluriverse of alternative visions (Escobar, 2018), there exists an integral environmental perspective, linked to the notion of strong sustainability and post-development; an Indigenous perspective, with emphasis on the territory and Buen Vivir; but also an eco-feminist perspective, associated with the ethics of care and depatriarchalization; an eco-territorial perspective, linked to social movements the criticizing “bad development” and emphasizing the concept of territoriality and the defense of common goods. Beyond the differences, all these perspectives are based on a critique of extractivism (Svampa, 2016: 371). As Svampa (2016) points out, the eco-territorial shift is not exclusive to countries with a presence of Indigenous or native peoples, but it rather covers a large part of Latin America, where peasant-Indigenous resistance and socio-territorial and environmental movements have been multiplying, resulting in an organizational framework. This plurality of actors opens the doors to dialogue and valorization of different knowledge and accounts for an articulation of languages and alternative concepts. Women have been central actors, playing a crucial role both in large organizational structures and in small collectives (Svampa, 2016: 374).

Further, the criticism of extractivism is linked to the eco-territorial shift, visible in the emergence of common frameworks of collective action, which function as schemes of global interpretation and as producers of an alternative collective subjectivity. At the

3 <https://www.solidaritycollective.org/post/mother-earth-s-liberation-the-end-of-the-armed-conflict-and-peace-building>

same time, the critique seeks to place what Svampa (2016) calls horizon categories into debates, among them, common goods, eco-feminism, ethics of care, Buen Vivir (good living), and rights of nature and Madre Tierra (mother earth) (Svampa, 2016); whether in a language of defense of territory and common goods, of the collective rights of native peoples, of the rights of nature, the action of the mobilized populations is inscribed in the horizon of a participatory democracy, which includes the democratization of decisions.

Likewise, in the last decade the multiplication of resistances shows an increase in ancestral struggles for land and territory, mainly by peasant and Indigenous movements, as well as the emergence of new forms of mobilization and citizen participation, centered on the defense of natural environments (as common goods), biodiversity and the territory. It is precisely the activation of other languages of valuation of territories of life (Escobar, 2014) that gave rise to the eco-territorial turn of social movements (Svampa, 2013) and to a common grammar that illustrates the connection between an Indigenous-community matrix, defense of the territory and environmentalist discourse. In this scenario, the struggles for self-determination and the processes of autonomy in all Latin America assume vital importance since they constitute, in turn, as Porto-Gonçalves & Leff (2016) underscore, territorial resistances and re-existences in the face of the expansion and deepening of multiple forms of dispossession, hyper-marketing and destruction of nature (Navarro, 2019).

In turn, in some countries of the region, socio-territorial movements managed to install demands and proposals in the social imaginaries and political agendas that challenged and disrupted the very character of the nation-state as a modern-eurocentric-colonial matrix construction, largely alien to the multi-societal realities (Tapia, 2002), as on Bolivia and Colombia. These questions and responses by territorialized social movements (Porto-Gonçalves, 2010) are largely manifested either through social rebellions or claiming and building autonomy, both locally, within and outside the frameworks and logics of the state (Esteva, 2011) sometimes manifested through forms of socio-territorial re-existence or as forms of Indigenous self-government. Several of these societal processes, manifest themselves as processes of socio-territorial re-existence, that is, through experiences in which social actors not only activate specific, spatially situated forms of resilience in the face of the new scenarios of multiple dispossession and territorial reconfiguration (territorialisation/deterritorialization/reterritorialization of capitalism) in their living environments and material bases of social reproduction but also through forms and strategies that allow them to construct or reconstruct socio-territorial relations of their collective life. Their great majority are also processes that are historically presented as modes of organization of collective life, in some cases, as pre-existing forms of capitalism as a civilizing order that persists, resists, and is continually recreated.

Within this perspective, these processes of resistance become movements for re-existence. These groups not only resist dispossession and de-territorialization, they redefine their forms of existence through emancipatory movements and the reinvention of their identities, their ways of thinking, and their modes of production and sustenance (Leff and Porto-Gonçalves, 2015). Thus, these processes of re-existence display a diversity and plurality of cases in Latin America. They are presented, for example, in the experiences of community agro-ecology practiced by peasant or Indigenous communities, in certain forms of community management of the territory, Indigenous agroforestry and integrated management of recognized community territories, ancestral forms of forest protection (guardians of the river in the Bolivian Amazon or guardians of the forest in the Brazilian Amazon) and management of the commons.

Further experiences are socio-community re-appropriation of land for collective work, such as the case of the liberators of Mother Earth in the Cauca region of Colombia and the peasant and agro-ecological cooperatives present throughout Latin America, among other socio-territorial experiences and societal processes.

6. Conclusions

In Latin America, during these last years, the processes of appropriation, commodification, subjugation, and destruction of nature have been particularly accentuated, altering/affecting of the natural cycles of reproduction of life to subject them to the demands of the capital accumulation processes in the region. Therefore, a comprehensive, contextual, and temporal analysis framework was carried out, contextual and temporal analysis, based on current approaches and discussions, mainly from or about Latin America, linked to the interdependent relationship between neo-extractivist processes and the political regimes with socio-ecological conflicts. Those within the framework of the current processes of capital accumulation in the territories, which in this work is identified as the neo-extractivist face of the current socio-ecological crisis in the region.

This text analyzed and problematized how socio-ecological conflicts, which are inherent to those accumulation processes and their consequences, manifest as phenomena that converge, diverse actors, some of these in open tension and opposition. From a critical perspective, this multi-actor perspective of the conflicts allows a more complex reading of the multiple relationships and the different visions and interests compatible or contrasted between different actors, but also the diverse imaginaries, discourses, strategies, and political and societal horizons of these actors. This, on the one hand, allows us to account for the different perspectives, interpretations, and responses around the current socio-ecological crisis. On the other hand, this multi-actor reading of conflicts is interesting when analyzing the probable scenarios, trends, and possible horizons about the alternatives of a societal nature that are proposed, built, defended, or currently disputed in the region. The actors involved vary in their positions, orientations and actions, their interests, their greater or lesser roles, agency modalities, and commitments. Also, it was considered that to account for socio-environmental conflicts, mainly located in specific territorial enclaves, it is necessary to link processes on a local, national/regional, and global scale (glocal conflicts).

The socio-ecological movements have a key role, complex, contentious, and sometimes contradictory, manifested in struggles but also negotiation and tensions with the other three mentioned actors, mainly with the state and extractive companies. Therefore, also in light of the current crisis, the dimension that stands out highlighted the most from the cases studied is the role of the socio-ecological actors and their capacity for resistance, proactive and prefigurative re-existence of alternative horizons to the current neo-extractivism in the region. In sum, a more detailed problematization of the interrelationship between these three roles that were explored may allow a greater understanding of the complexity of the current context in which the socio-ecological crisis unfolds in the region.

Thus, this work presented the way that in recent years in Latin America socio-environmental conflicts and struggles to re-conquer territories have proliferated. It has been argued how socio-ecological movements show the discrepancy of societies between dependence on the conventional (neo) extractivist development model

and the aspirations to decolonize and democratize society-nature relationships and reconstruct a socio-territorial identity. It represents an “eco-territorial turn” (Svampa 2013) of struggles and social movements in the region. It is associated with the defense of territories as a base where peoples produce and recreate their identity, structure their claims and demands, and from where collective action is organized, a multiplicity of socio-territorial resistances, socio-community movements and struggles for life territories and environmental justice are taking place, which allows accounting of territorialities in dispute. Precisely, account was given of how the socio-ecological dimension of the crisis, the current phase of neo-extractivism in much of South America, the processes of multiple dispossession that it generates, and the socio-territorial conflicts that are manifested, are not only interrelated but are inherent to each other.

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