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Article

La Lucha Continua: A Presentist Lens on Social Protest in Ecuador

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Abstract
Ecuador has one of the most progressive constitutions in Latin America. It defines the state as plurinational and guarantees collective rights to Indigenous people and even to Nature itself. At the same time, the oil sector has been of strategic importance and "national interest" to both right- and left-wing governments for the last decades, contributing with its rents and revenues to around one-third of the state coffers. Therefore, the extractivist model remains unchallenged and still promises development—while reproducing systemic inequalities and a "continuum of violence." In June 2022, the Indigenous movement called for a nationwide strike to draw attention to the socio-economic crisis following the pandemic. The authorities harshly repressed the mobilization and a racializing media discourse demarcated the "Indigenous" agenda from the needs of "all Ecuadorians," classifying the protesters as "terrorists" and thus, a threat to the nation. Drawing on ethnographic research, this article discusses the role of extractivism in social mobilization. Exploring the future of social protest in Ecuador in the face of new pressures like climate change and the energy transition, it argues that extractivist patterns will change globally and amplify social discontent and mobilization.

Keywords
Amazon; climate change; CONAIE; energy transition; extractivism; Indigenous movement; rentier society; violence

Issue
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1. Introduction

The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) called for an indefinite national strike in June 2022 due to increased costs of living and fuel, unfair pricing of agricultural products, and plans to expand the extractive frontier, among other reasons. The 18-day-long mobilization paralyzed the country, prompting authorities to crack down on protesters, resulting in seven deaths. The tensions within Ecuadorian society were highlighted through a racializing media discourse that not only marginalized the Indigenous agenda from the needs of "all Ecuadorians" but also categorized the protesters as "terrorists" and, hence, a threat to the nation. After several failed attempts at dialogue, the government finally made concessions on some points, with the mediation of the Catholic Church. The strike ended with a peace protocol between the government and CONAIE, and a pledge to enter a 90-day dialogue process to discuss the remaining demands. However, it has also left a polarized society and resulted in over a billion dollars in losses to the Ecuadorian economy, half of which accounts for the oil sector. Half a year after the mobilizations, the roundtables of the dialogue are closed but the CONAIE and other organizations remain suspicious of the government's intentions to comply with the resulting agreements (CONAIE, 2022a). An evaluation of the implementation process will take place together with the grassroots organizations from February to April 2023 to decide if another strike is necessary.

This quick recollection of the events of June 2022 resembles those of the mobilizations in October 2019. The latter paralyzed the country for twelve days as a consequence of former President Moreno's announcement to eliminate gasoline subsidies—a political response to comply with the IMF's austerity measures. By analyzing the parallels between the two events and highlighting the resurgence of the Indigenous movement, I argue that

the protests of 2022 can be seen as a continuation of the social outburst in 2019. Furthermore, I use a presentist lens to frame the recent mobilizations rather as an analytical starting point towards the yet-to-come.

Presentism is a fruitful perspective to give the future an equal weight to the past in analysis. It sheds light on the aspirations, plans, and practices that orient our informants toward the future and actively form their present (Bryant & Knight, 2019). As Nancy Munn observes: "People operate in a present that is always infused…with pasts and futures" (Munn, 1992, p. 115). This is in line with the plea to reject historical determinism and to frame "temporalization" as a contingent and socially contested practice, highlighting the equal influence of both pasts *and* futures on the present (Ringel, 2016).

To frame my analysis, I examine, first, the fundamental tensions between the Ecuadorian state and the Indigenous movement rooted in the extractivist development model by drawing on the simultaneous histories of oil exploitation and emerging Indigenous organization in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Of course, this Indigenous movement is highly heterogeneous and has its own inherent tensions (e.g., between the Sierra and the Amazon regions or the grassroots associations and their regional representations). In addition, there exist internal disputes about resource extraction, and whether to allow or reject it in Indigenous territories (see, e.g., Eisenstadt & West, 2019; Valladares & Boelens, 2017; van Teijlingen et al., 2017). Hence, it is important to conceive "the movement" as a heterogeneous group with varying interests: "Lack of consensus within Indigenous groups disconfirms the assumption of primordial group unity of multiculturalism" (Eisenstadt & West, 2019, p. 80).

Whether welcomed or opposed, extractivism has produced and keeps re-producing a "continuum of violence" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgeois, 2004), in particular in the Amazon region. However, this deterministic view of a "continuous process of causation" resulting from inert power relations is challenged by a presentist perspective that highlights the "influence the future might have in the present" (Ringel, 2016, p. 24). My analysis frames the protests in June 2022 as a prologue to what might follow in the future. Against this background, I finally discuss the relational futures of extractivism and the Indigenous movement in Ecuador to add a different angle to previous analytical endeavors to understand and read social mobilizations. I argue that the globally induced challenges of climate change and the energy transition towards low-carbon futures will not just have a profound impact on the extractivist development model in Ecuador, but also on the Indigenous movement and social mobilization more generally.

The following analysis is informed by a four-month ethnographic fieldwork study from March to June 2022 with different Kichwa communities and organizations in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Pastaza and Orellana provinces), as well as in the capital Quito during the 18 days of social mobilization. As my research concerns planning and future-making in the Ecuadorian Amazon, I was inspired to explore the future dimensions of extractivism regarding the recent social protests. I translated all quotes from my informants from Spanish into English. Furthermore, newspaper articles and social media posts frame my analysis.

2. Ecuador: A Plurinational yet Extractivist State

Ecuador has one of the most progressive constitutions in Latin America redefining the country as an intercultural and plurinational state (Art. 1) as well as recognizing 21 collective rights for Indigenous peoples and nationalities (Art. 57), the rights of nature (Art. 71) and the idea of *sumak kawsay,* i.e., good living (Art. 14). At the same time, the oil sector has been of strategic importance and national interest for half a century, contributing with its exports to around 30% of the state coffers (author's own calculation based on Banco Central del Ecuador, 2021). In this sense, the Indigenous movement has successfully influenced the general discourse in its favor (Altmann, 2012; Whitten & Whitten, 2011). However, powerful actors constantly undermine and co-opt these constitutional gains (Schavelzon, 2015). This polyphony reflects a contradictory constitution, but also a tense relationship between state and society: The historically grown extractivist development model challenges progressive environmental protection and plurinationality confronts national interests (Gudynas, 2011).

Similar to other countries in the region, Ecuador's extractivist project stems from a developmental promise for modernization through oil exploitation. However, Alarcón (2021) suggests that the urban middle classes—and obviously the national elites—were the actual winners of Ecuador's first oil boom during the second half of the 20th century, while the Indigenous population was excluded even though the oil was exploited from their territories. Oil rent, hence, "(re-)produces social inequalities" (Alarcón & Peters, 2020, p. 256). Beyond the economic dependency generated through resource rents in the "rentier state" (Peters, 2019), oil also acts as an "ideological force" (Perreault, 2013, p. 71; see also Coronil, 1997), shaping the imaginary of the Ecuadorian oil nation and the notion of "petro-citizenship" (Valdivia, 2008). As a socio-cultural force, it shapes "mental infrastructures" around Euromodern production and consumption patterns (Peters, 2017; Welzer, 2011)—a specific constellation of rentier societies within a more general "petroculture" (Szeman, 2017).

Consequently, the extractivist logic pervading the rentier state also dissolves a meaningful distinction between neoliberal or more progressive governments. Oil "petrolizes" (Karl, 1997) Ecuadorian politics, society, and economy and redefines the country as a "petrostate" (Lu et al., 2017). A shift away from neoliberal governance by former president Rafael Correa (2007–2017) and the Montecristi Constitution of 2008 were not able to appease these inherent tensions emerging from

resource-driven development; they rather intensified them. The continuous tendering process for oil blocks (Lessmann et al., 2016) bears witness to the quite literal undermining of constitutional guarantees. The most illustrative example of this is the beginning of drilling in Tiputini in 2016 (buffer zone of the Yasuní national park) after the government's failed Yasuní-ITT initiative in 2013, and a fraudulent obstruction of a popular consultation on the matter (Yasunídos, 2021). In addition, Correa also systematically started to promote and push the expansion of large-scale mining in the Andean region with the help of Chinese investments in order to frame Ecuador as a "progressive pro-mining state" as opposed to the "neoliberal petrostate" (Davidov, 2013).

These neo-extractivist policies emerging in the 2000s promised that social development and economic diversification could be financed through a short-term increase in natural resource extraction (mineral ores and oil). This would allow the country to move forward into a "post-petroleum era" (Silveira et al., 2017, p. 83) where national development and "good living" are achieved (van Teijlingen & Hogenboom, 2016). This is a rather distorted version of an "ecologically balanced" and "community-centered" *sumak kawsay* approach. After the collapse of oil prices in 2014, these promises remain unfulfilled. This shows that the socio-economic dynamics of rentier states are embedded in the global capitalist system and are highly susceptible to volatile price developments (Coronil, 1997; Peters, 2019).

Despite the apparent "commodity consensus" (Svampa, 2015), an assessment of (neo-)extractivism reveals that rentier states face increasing opposition. Socio-environmental conflicts arising in "sacrifice zones" bear witness to the dark side of extractive activities. As extractivism molds economic, social, and political structures, economic diversification is hampered and environmental devastation continues. A shift towards more sustainable development models becomes impracticable. States might be caught in an "extractive imperative" (Arsel et al., 2016): the extractive frontier keeps expanding and intensifying in order to account for "development."

President Moreno (2017–2021), former vice-president of Correa, did not alter the neo-extractivist trajectory of the country. However, he made a 180-degree turn away from the policies of his predecessor toward a neoliberal readjustment of the economy; causing eventually the social outbursts of October 2019. Current President Lasso, a conservative ex-banker from the country's financial capital Guayaquil, currently follows this neoliberal path and even announced at the beginning of his presidency to double oil extraction. A project he needed to abandon, however, after the protests in June 2022.

2.1. Extractivism and the Continuum of Violence

It is crucial to understand that current extractivisms (e.g., oil, copper, gold, and balsa) are intrinsically linked to earlier extractivisms (e.g., rubber, cinchona) since the Spanish *conquista* (Larrea-Alcázar et al., 2021). The historical and current exploitations of nature as well as local and Indigenous communities are interconnected with each other and have shaped Ecuador's role in the global market economy. This has produced geographies—sometimes referred to by politicians like Correa as "uninhabited" (Silveira et al., 2017)—oriented toward the export of raw materials and hierarchical social relations (Galeano, 1973). As Chagnon et al. (2022, p. 760) observe: "Extractivism forms a complex of self-reinforcing practices, mentalities, and power differentials underwriting and rationalizing socio-ecologically destructive modes of organizing life through subjugation, depletion, and non-reciprocity." Noticeably, the organizational principles of Indigenous nationalities are in dialectical opposition to the extractivist modes of organizing life: parity, reciprocity, exchange, redistribution, circularity, and solidarity (Andy Alvarado et al., 2012; Grefa Andi, 2014; Simbaña Pillajo, 2020). Therefore, when analyzing the configuration of sacrifice zones like the Ecuadorian Amazon from a historical perspective, it becomes clear that they have been reconfigured through a process of "internal colonialism" (González Casanova, 1969). At the institutional, social, and subjective level, they are sustained through the "coloniality of being" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) and the "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2000) that have been perpetuated by the nation-state (see also Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Consequently, Andrew Curley suggests that resources are "just another word for colonialism" (Curley, 2021, p. 79). They are a "violent project of world-making" (p. 86) as "the idea of resources is colonial constructions consistent with genocide, displacement, exploitation, and capitalism" (p. 79).

These complex historical configurations of internal/external colonialism and extractivism reach into the present and reproduce relations of power perpetuating a "continuum of violence" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgeois, 2004). In such a "vicious violence circle" (Galtung, 1990, p. 295) different forms of violence confluence and come to play with each other, e.g., structural violence (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969), symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1979, 1991/2002), epistemic violence (Spivak, 1994; Spivak & Guha, 1988), slow violence (Davies, 2022; Nixon, 2011), axiomatic violence (Pipyrou & Sorge, 2021) and temporal violence (Schwab, in press). On a visit to different communities along the Coca and Napo rivers, which have been affected by two ruptures of the same oil pipeline in 2020 and 2022, this continuum of violence became dramatically clear. In the following, I want to share some examples to highlight these different dimensions of violence.

Many of these communities live in complex socio-economic conditions and have difficulties sustaining themselves. Life is expensive; this goes also for Indigenous people living on subsistence farming in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In Moretecocha, for example,

people explained that the (motorized) canoe to go to the next city to sell agricultural products on the market costs 20 USD to transport 50 kg of yuka. There, this yuka is sold for 25 USD (considered a fair price). This means, this person has 5 USD of revenue to spend on clothes, medicine, additional food, internet, transportation, etc. To further illustrate this situation: The children from Moretecocha need to go by canoe to the small education center in a neighboring community. The parents have to save their money to pay around 2 USD per day/child (or buy their own fuel for 4 USD/gallon). This means their whole earnings from the market would need to be spent on transportation to guarantee their children's access to formal education. In short, this is structural violence—and underlines the importance of fuel costs (and fuel subsidies) for rural communities outside the city, a perspective that is often dismissed when analyzing the connection of social protest to gasoline prices and social inequalities.

Another example is the illustrative response of the president of the community San Pablo to the question of how he sees the future of his community: "Fifteen years ago, an oil pipe broke close to Lago Agrio where my sister lives. Now, she has cancer." Another community member added: "I remember how we just started to go fishing again [after the first oil spill]. We put the fishing net and we were so happy that we caught fish there again. And then the next oil spill came." This is temporal violence, as after every oil spill or contamination episode an alternative future gets harder to imagine; the future seems predetermined, colonized, and pessimistic. In general, the extent of contamination impeding the affected communities to drink, wash, or let their children play in the river and cultivate their *chacras* (fields) falls under the category of slow violence; at first, in the case of oil, visible and after a while invisible—but not less harming. Taking into account that the territory itself is part of the community through a relational cosmovision, there is no community without a territory. Thus, it is a fundamental element of the identity and the historical continuity of the community. A dying territory translates into a dying community. Their cultural reproduction through everyday interactions with the territory, knowledge generated from it, and subsistence practices such as agriculture, hunting, or fishing are not guaranteed anymore (Altmann, 2018).

When trying to explain the extent of the contamination, many people described the *sacha* (forest) as their "market" or "pharmacy" to underline the urgency of the matter. I heard this many times, also in the context of deforestation when people tried to explain the significance of what the forest means to them as a community. This is, however, not a mere intent of cultural "translation" but a striking example of symbolic violence, as the categories used to describe the integrity of the forest are borrowed from (or rather imposed by) another set of onto-epistemological categories. Andy Alvarado et al. (2012, p. 38, author's own translation) clarify:

> The forest is not a market nor a pharmacy, but…the symbol of the balanced totality….The force, that manifests it, is *Amazanka* [owner of the *sacha*, protector of the animals], whom many Kichwas claim to have seen in the form of a person.

When hunting or taking care of the *chacra*:

> [There is] a movement of reciprocity produced, based on the respect and care of the forest…returned in abundance of resources for the conservation of human life. *Amazanka* provides what is necessary for life, but disapproves of the waste and misuse of animals, plants, and other elements of the forest (petroleum). (Andy Alvarado et al., 2012, p. 38, author's own translation)

Clearly, extractivism is rather detrimental to this continuum of give and take. As one informant, a forest ranger from a conservation foundation, put it: "It is like a machine that is hungry and eats, eats, eats—but it is never enough for it."

The reciprocal exchange with the forest to maintain balance also explains why many of my informants describe feelings of guilt or shame when they "overuse" the forest. Another brief story underlines this complex interplay of the symbolic violence, putting the *sacha* in monetary terms, and structural violence, creating the need to integrate oneself into the capitalist market in order to make money and change one's future. Once I accompanied a good friend in Arajuno to his piece of land where he was cutting down trees to make space for the cultivation of four hectares of balsa, a fast-growing tree that regenerates soils and protects new trees from pests and solar radiation—besides providing a very light wood used for wind energy generation. After the natural reserves of balsa were cut down but the balsa boom continued, people started to fell other trees to make space for balsa cultivations—for one hectare of balsa, one gets 20,000 USD in return within just three years, a quite lucrative business. While this fact made my friend excited and dream about his own tourist business with some *cabañas* along the river, he also assured me that he would not cut any further forest afterward. He explained: "You know…this is the first time I cut down my forest." When I asked him how he feels about this, he just smiled, agonized, and said: "Sad…out of necessity." In a nutshell, extractivism and its impacts shape and reproduce violent societal structures.

2.2. The Indigenous Movement as Resistance to Extractivism

Where there is violence, there is resistance (Acosta, 2015; see also Foucault, 1978/1990). Extractivism cannot be thought of without the historical Indigenous resistance; and the other way around, Indigenous resistance, in particular in the Ecuadorian Amazon, cannot

be thought of without extractivism as its counterpart. The Indigenous experience with oil explorations since the 1920s has profoundly influenced the social organization of Indigenous peoples into communities (a territorialized compound of the extended family *ayllu*), then into associations, and later into regional and national organizations (Altmann, 2018; Grefa Andi, 2014; Simbaña Pillajo, 2020; see also Pacari, 1984). When I had asked leaders of the Asociación de Comunidades Indígenas de Arajuno (ACIA), why ACIA was founded or what their mission is, I have often gotten the simple answer: The defense of the territory (*la defensa del territorio*). This underlines again the relational character of community/organization to the land they live in.

This organizational blossoming went hand in hand with the first oil boom. Many communities were founded during the 1960s and 1970s. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENAIE) was created in 1980 and, shortly after, CONAIE in 1986. The organization of an Indigenous movement brought concrete results: the *Inti Raymi* uprising in 1990, the recognition of ancestral territories in 1992, and the founding of CONAIE's political branch, the Pachakutik Movement, in 1995. During social upheavals between 1997 and 2005, the Indigenous movement was also a driving force in the destitution of three presidents. Lately, CONAIE has contributed to the reform of the guarantees of collective rights in the Ecuadorian Constitution of 1998 and 2008 (Simbaña Pillajo, 2020).

Where there is violence, there is also an alternative view of a desirable future. For the Indigenous movement, such a future "otherwise" (Povinelli, 2012) is the realization of the plurinational and intercultural state; that is to say, a political project for decolonization, Indigenous self-determination, and ethnic-territorial rights while rejecting the idea of a uni-national state, politics of multiculturalism, and neoliberalism (Altmann, 2012; Lalander & Lembke, 2018; Schavelzon, 2015). Mechanisms of resistance, besides social organization itself, have been legal trials (Sarayaku vs. Ecuador in 2012; Waorani communities vs. Ecuador in 2019; Sinangoe vs. Ecuador in 2022; Tagaeri and Taromenane vs. Ecuador in 2022), planning as a decolonial tool (Schwab, in press) and, of course, social mobilization.

It is important to emphasize that the Indigenous movement has never sought secession from the Ecuadorian state and made this clear since the mid-1980s (Altmann, 2012; Sarango, 2016; Schavelzon, 2015). When the integration of the plurinational project was discussed in the context of the new constitution in 2008, however, opponents of the idea spoke disparagingly of a possible "balkanization" to discredit the proponents of plurinationality and portray them as enemies of the nation. Territorial secession would have been particularly threatening because all the subsoil resources in Indigenous territories would no longer belong to the Ecuadorian state. However, since this has not happened, all subsoil resources—namely oil and mineral ores—are the property of the sovereign state, i.e., the property of "all Ecuadorians."

Sawyer (2004), tracing the rise of the Indigenous movement, concludes that Indigenous struggles over land titles and oil extraction in Ecuador were as much about addressing historical injustices as they were about political misrecognition *and* material redistribution. Consequently, the discourse of the Indigenous movement has combined identity aspects with a class critique—until today, as reflected in CONAIE's ten demands. This positions the Indigenous movement as an important social actor within Ecuadorian society as they successfully created a discourse beyond concrete demands with a message that potentially encompasses and represents various sectors of the society (Altmann, 2018).

2.3. The Rebellion of October 2019

The protests of June 2022 cannot be understood without a close look at "the political earthquake" three years earlier (Parodi & Sticotti, 2020, p. 11). A domino effect occurred as a result of the economic and social crises triggered by the end of the oil boom in 2014. President Moreno's government had to account for budget deficits with loans from the IMF. To comply with the austerity measures of the latter, the president did not just downsize the state apparatus, but also decided to eliminate fuel subsidies in October 2019—on the back of "the poor": "The government decided that the poorest 75% of the population, who use public transport, should pay 78% of the cost of eliminating the subsidy, while the richest 25% of the population should pay the remaining 22%" (Ospina Peralta, 2020, p. 40, author's own translation). Furthermore, a fuel price increase of 130% had an inflationary effect on transportation and goods more generally.

This imprudent decision unleashed nationwide protests. The people in the streets were angry because Moreno did not win the elections with a neoliberal program (Serrano Mancilla, 2020, p. 23):

> He [Moreno] was confident that a social outbreak was outdated and that the press would be able to impose a dominant matrix of opinion. He was wrong: the country plunged into its worst political crisis since 2005. (Oliva Pérez, 2020, p. 27, author's own translation)

The leaders of the Indigenous movement themselves were surprised by their capacity for social mobilization; they regained their representative vocation as the "voice of the people" (Stoessel & Iturriza, 2020). Hence, the insurrection of October 2019 repositioned the Indigenous movement as a relevant social actor for the demands of the society at large beyond "Indigenous interests." After the long night of *correísmo,* when the CONAIE was systematically divided and deprived of

influence by the progressive governments (De la Torre, 2010; Lalander & Ospina, 2012), they were back. This fact is exemplified by the book written by Leonidas Iza, now president of the CONAIE, in the aftermath of the October Rebellion (Iza et al., 2020)—a Marxist manifesto for the joint fight of the popular, rural, and Indigenous sectors against the capitalist system.

According to Alarcón and Peters (2020, p. 251), the reaction to the withdrawal of fuel subsidies demonstrates citizens' claim on their fair share of the oil rent, i.e., "the expression of a quasi-naturalized right derived from living in a natural resource-rich country." This interpretation is based on the idea of a rentier society with deeply rooted expectations about the distribution of resource rents (Peters, 2019). Mainstream media fostered a similar narrative about "privileges withdrawn" (Oliva Pérez, 2020). While the argumentation for a quasi-naturalized right for cheap fuels offers a new perspective on the protests in 2019, it does not sufficiently illuminate inner-societal issues of systemic inequalities in rentier societies leading to intersecting forms of violence (and during protests also to physical violence). As other authors highlight, there is dissatisfaction with more systemic issues such as socio-economic inequalities, police violence, biased media coverage, and "everything they are doing to us," as one of Puente-Izurieta's interviewees put it (2021, p. 219). From this perspective, the removal of the fuel subsidies rather seems like the last straw that broke the camel's back; the tip of the iceberg providing insight into the discontent with "the system" or, in other words, state-society relations.

3. From 2019 to 2022: A Reloaded Protest

If Ecuador's situation was bad in 2019, it was even worse in 2022. Two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recession have left their marks on Ecuadorian society. Many people have slipped into poverty: while a quarter of Ecuadorians were once considered poor, now it is one-third (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC], 2021). Not only the health crisis but also the socio-economic crisis becomes clear after considering the precarious conditions faced by people in the informal sector during lockdowns (approximately 50% of the population; INEC, 2022). In this situation, Lasso entered his presidency. His neoliberal recipe for overcoming the economic crisis was to double the oil production from half a million to a million barrels a day and to launch a mining plan to attract foreign investors.

The pandemic crisis was deepened further by the war in Ukraine. The high oil prices hurt oil revenues as Ecuador does not have a sufficient refining capacity, i.e., the country has to import most of the refined fuel from abroad at a higher cost than its crude oil was sold. Consequently, fuel subsidies get more expensive for the state—a vicious circle. This is exemplified by the fact that fuel subsidies are still a higher expense in the state's budget than healthcare or social programs that would be very much needed as well (Tapia, 2022). This highlights the crisis-prone nature of the extractivist development model. After several reforms, Lasso's government froze fuel prices in October 2021.

In this context, CONAIE called for an indefinite national strike for June 2022. It is important to mention that CONAIE had already been trying for a year to establish a dialogue with the government to discuss its demands (CONAIE, 2022b). Since these attempts failed, pressure had to increase, and the Indigenous movement announced a national strike. In retrospect, this almost seemed unavoidable considering the analysis by Iza of false "dialogue" as a governmental "tactic" to maintain the privileges of the rich and the state's power (Iza et al., 2020, p. 85).

The ten demands put forward by CONAIE reflect a systemic and anti-capitalist critique (CONAIE, 2022c). In the cry to "fight for our rights," a convergence of main concerns can be identified: Fuel prices, high prices for staple foods, low prices for agricultural products on the national market, debt release, more investment in education and health, and the extractivist frontier were particularly highlighted among my informants. Again, fuel prices are a centerpiece of the demands; however, as explained above, this demand needs to be understood beyond fuel subsidies themselves, and rather as an expression of a desperate, unequal, and violent (rentier) society not being able to loosen the firm grip of extractivism. A leader of the CONFENAIE put these demands into perspective:

> All these things not only affects the Indigenous peoples but all the Ecuadorian people….We have so many needs, so much poverty, so much inequality, so much inequity….The government does not know how to distribute the resources entering the state in an equitable way.

Adding to this, an informant from Arajuno stressed the necessity they felt to make use of their right to protest:

> Here it was not about politics, it was not about belonging to a specific social organization….If you are Kichwa or Shuar, or if you are Mestizo or Colono. Here the important thing was that it was a collective fight, of all the people who are from the lower class here in Ecuador….Because all the people, all Ecuadorians were demanding according to our needs, according to the constitution of the republic….Because we needed it!

Compared to the (pre-pandemic) protest in October 2019, however, participation had diminished in the post-pandemic, economically shaken situation of June 2022. A leader of CONFENAIE confirmed this:

> I think, for my part, in 2019 the strike was stronger, more social sectors joined. In this strike, not many

> social sectors joined….The other year the universities opened their doors to us. Now only two universities opened their doors. In addition, not all the transport workers joined the strike.…Doctors almost did not join…the businesses did not join either. So, some did not give this effort in this strike.

In fact, many non-Indigenous people supported the strike but were not actively participating in it. The reasons for this were primarily economic. Many reported their precarious situation, especially after the pandemic, and that they were unable to leave their work and join the protests. The people I have talked with (taxi drivers, vendors, and small-business owners) explained, however, that the situation in Ecuador had become unbearable in the last year and that they support CONAIE's demands. Therefore, their discontent was directed at the government rather than the protesters. Some even expressed anticipation about the possible destitution of President Lasso. In general, in both strikes, there was an overwhelming wave of solidarity supporting the Indigenous protesters in Quito, as one of my informants expressed:

> I do have some good memories about the humanitarian support of the people of the city of Quito, some institutions, and NGOs; [they] always knew how to support us in terms of food, clothing, and medicine. Therefore, I am grateful to all these people who supported us in these two strikes [where] I was, in 2019 and 2022.

3.1. From Repression to Resuming "Dialogue": The Course of the Protest 2022

On June 13, 2022, the city of Quito woke up to several roadblocks paralyzing the traffic in the capital. Mainstream media saw this as a possible interference with the right to free mobility, with the conclusion that legitimate protest is tolerated as long as it does not affect the rights of all other citizens (see Teleamazonas Ecuador, 2022). This argument ties in with President Lasso's statement the previous evening:

> The pandemic forced us to be locked down…now that we are beginning to reactivate our country…we cannot allow political groups seeking to destabilize and fish in troubled waters to paralyze the country once again….I call on CONAIE to reconsider and respect the right of the great majority who do not want chaos. (Lasso, 2022)

By discrediting CONAIE's agenda as opportunistic and political, this narrative obscures and deflects from rights and duties that are currently violated or neglected by the state. The Amazon is an emblematic example as illustrated above. Oil spills exacerbate the situation of the population: Between 2015 and 2021, about 900 oil spills were reported (Rojas Sasse, 2022). When it is dramatic enough, these contaminating events make it into the news. A leader of CONFENAIE claimed:

> The governments in power are always with their ideas of exploitation, with their ideas of consumerism, but not with the idea of how to change…their way of thinking. So, through strikes, unfortunately, with deaths, we have to achieve many things….We are the most affected of the many laws…that they create in favor of each government but [also] in favor of the destruction of nature, of the Indigenous peoples…of the abandoned peoples.

This contrasts with the defamatory tweet of Interior Minister Carrillo:

> The announced mobilization or demonstration, in practice, is a week of blocked roads and oil wells, kidnappings of police and military personnel, looting, etc. They will disguise it as a social struggle to provoke victimization. Who benefits from another protest without limits? (Carrillo, 2022)

This criminalization narrative was later continued with the accusation that the protesters were financed by drug trafficking—a ridiculous accusation, as many of my informants found. Instead of de-escalating the situation, President Lasso's government escalated the situation early on when Leonidas Iza, president of CONAIE, was illegally detained for alleged crimes of rebellion and paralyzing a public service—just 24 hours after the strike began. Some of my contacts were also criminalized for similar charges. The unlawfulness of Iza's detention was confirmed in September when the proceedings were formally annulled (CONAIE, 2022d). A day after his arrest, Iza was released. However, this led to a hardening of the fronts and provoked the mobilization of the local/regional organization to Quito. A state of emergency was declared in several provinces of the country. Meanwhile, the mainstream media was eager to show the discontent of the "average citizen" who just wanted "peace" and to be able to "go after their work and lives." On social media, comments were openly racist, insulting the Indigenous protesters, and telling them "to go back where they came from."

The rapid intensification of the conflict, the repressive measures against the protesters, and the defamation campaign fueled polarization within the population. The "Ecuadorians" were diametrically opposed to the "Indigenous" in media and government narratives, creating an irreconcilable incompatibility between the two categories. This is exacerbated by accusations of terrorism and insinuations of illegality. The "Indigenous" protest is, thus, not only racialized but also becomes an internal enemy, a danger to "the nation." To use President Lasso's words: "They intend to seize the peace of the Ecuadorians…we will not negotiate with those

who hold Ecuador hostage!" (Primicias, 2022). The police did not hesitate to apply the progressive use of force. One contact shared the following experience, which is representative of other stories:

> The police were attacking; throwing tear gas bombs into what was supposed to be a peace zone!…In one occasion, when people came to donate food…we were about 20 meters from the peace zone and two motorcycles came and shot at us, three shots, and one of those just passed my left foot. That was….I got psychologically damaged….[During the whole strike] two friends from Arajuno were wounded, another one almost lost his eye.

The anticipation felt when my informants sent videos from their journey from the Amazon to Quito, showing the solidarity of people they encountered on their way, changed into firm determination during the strike. The same contact explained:

> And they [armed forces/police] did attack, they did evict sometimes, they did drop gas bombs. Everything to [threaten us]. But the people are united. The idea was to die in the struggle because it was clearly a struggle of all of us.

This describes the war-like situation my informants experienced during the protests. One informant from Arajuno I have met during these days had tears in her eyes when she explained that she does not know if all of her friends will return from this mobilization. The fight (*la lucha*) was clearly about life and death in the eyes of my informants; or in other words, about their future. A leader from CONFENAIE asserted:

> We will always be in struggle, in resistance. We are not going to let ourselves be convinced, how can I say, easily, no? Always since [the time of] our ancestors, they have always [achieved things] through wars resulting in many of the gains that we have had, not for the Indigenous people, for everybody.

After 16 days of failing dialogue, narrowly averting a political crisis, a stalemate was reached: The government returned to the negotiating table—not the president himself, however, but his ministers, a fact that was not taken well by the protesters; they classified it as cowardice and a sign of dishonesty. The parties agreed to a 90-day dialogue in a peace protocol to discuss CONAIE's ten demands and resolve remaining disagreements. As one informant from Arajuno concluded:

> I really and sincerely am not happy…because people really were dying, it was a crisis, total chaos, and everybody was joining us. So, I think the government bought certain leaders there, I would say, or threatened them. The big ones, the leaders of the [regional/national organizations]….We are really doing worse, with more economic crisis, the fuel went down just ten [sic] cents. That hardly helps us at all. There are really no results from this strike.

He is referring to the price of gasoline, which was eventually reduced by 15 cents instead of the requested 40 cents (the government had initially proposed 10 cents). There is a general criticism that most of the government's concessions were minor, such as increasing a social program for poorer families from 50 USD to a symbolic 55 USD. Arguably, the most important agreement was a temporary moratorium on all new oil and mining concessions. This halts the country's plans to double oil production and increase mining investment for at least 12 months; or until a law on free, prior, and informed consultation (already guaranteed in the Constitution, Art. 57.7) and a comprehensive environmental law have been passed. While CONAIE generally calls for a wholesale moratorium on current oil and mining production and the cancellation of all new concessions, the agreement is a first step to prevent extractive projects from being approved without consultation of Indigenous communities. However, it also shows that a constitutional guarantee is apparently not enough for protection, and a new law will not necessarily change this situation.

Compared to the protests in 2019, the protesters did not leave the mobilization with an overall feeling of victory. My informants—exhausted from sleep deprivation, a constant mode of alertness, even in the designated safe spaces where tear gas bombs were dropped as well, and not having their own food (a deep connection to their territory) to give them the strength to keep fighting—were happy to return home to their families and communities. They were looking forward to their own food and being in their territory again. One reason for this less victorious ending of the strike is definitely the agenda of ten demands, rather than the clear claim about just fuel subsidies in 2019. This underlines the fact that this is rather a "fight for the long run." As one informant expressed: "The fight will continue [*la lucha continua*] until sometime, some government listens to the needs of our people." Thus, the episode of June 2022 can be seen rather as a cliffhanger, leaving us wondering what will happen next.

3.2. La Lucha Continua: *An Exploration of the Yet-to-Come*

If we talk about "entangled histories" (Conrad & Randeria, 2002, p. 17) in post-colonial theory, futures should be conceived as relational as well (see, e.g., Yazzie, 2018). This ties to the conceptualization of futures as open, but at the same time colonized by the past and present (van Asselt et al., 2010, p. 8). Critical futures studies consider asymmetrical power relations. However, they also underline the possibilities of a future otherwise, an alternative to the dominant status quo and the

continuum of violence. Inayatullah (2013, p. 37) concludes: "The identification of alternative futures is thus a fluid dance of structure (the weights of history) and agency (the capacity to influence the world and create desired futures)." So, what can be expected from Ecuador's adaptive and self-reproducing structures of extractivism? And how will these developments influence social protest? Or in other words: How will this "fluid dance of structure and agency" turn out?

As recently as May 2022, President Lasso announced that "now that the world is about to move away from fossil fuels, it is time for us to extract every last drop of oil we have left" (El Universo, 2022). Consequently, the oil and emerging mining industries stay the backbone of the state's coffers. The logic is obvious: Mining replaces oil, and oil rents finance the transition to a low-carbon future. This was confirmed by a representative of the sub-ministry for mining who enthusiastically calculated how much money the Ecuadorian state is projected to generate until 2030 with mining royalties, patents, and job generation from large-scale mining projects like Fruta del Norte (gold), Mirador (copper) and Cascabel (silver, gold, and copper). He assured a bright future for the mining sector in Ecuador due to the rising demands for these critical minerals for the global energy transition: "We must turn our back to the hydrocarbon sector and replace it with the mining sector."

Regarding the energy transition, one of the head planners of the Ecuadorian Decarbonization Plan commented:

> It is true that more oil may be exploited, but it will be only in the short term, to be able to finance other activities that allow us to reach this balance, the sustainability that we are looking for. I do not see it as contradictory but as part of the transition process. Part of the transition process is to fund ourselves a little bit in order to then start to fund other activities that will allow us to reach this decarbonization of the economy.

The neo-extractivist logic used by former President Correa seems to revive. This time, however, not with the promise of a post-neoliberal but a low-carbon future. Regarding the original announcement to double the oil production, the planner calls for more understanding:

> The issue of the doubling of oil exploitation, it's obvious where this exercise of empathy comes in, isn't it?…Let's say that this government's main objective is to eradicate child malnutrition—that is one of its main objectives, so obviously this has to be done with economic resources. The current economic resources in Ecuador come mostly from the oil sector.

This is a rather distorted view of how oil rents are actually distributed. In Arajuno, one of the most affected cantons by child malnutrition (Secretaría Técnica Ecuador Crece Sin Desnutrición Infantil, 2021), not many of these oil rents are arriving as there are not as many active oil blocks operating. The annual budget of the municipality is 6,800,000 USD. After paying for salaries and running costs, there is not much left, says the Mayor: "800,000 dollars to do projects—this is nothing!…We will manage [with resources from the international cooperation and NGOs]. If we wait for the state, we will not do anything."

To conclude, the reproduction of the extractivist development model—as well as the reproduction of related problems such as corruption, lack of economic diversification, and environmental degradation (Acosta & Cajas Guijarro, 2016)—is cemented under President Lasso's government. This highlights that the (neo-)extractivist development model is very adaptive to changing contexts. Even the climate crisis itself seems to be an accelerator for oil exploitation in what some authors call a "green paradox" (Sinn, 2012). In addition, governments from both left and right have pushed mining further. This is what Alarcón et al. (2022) call a "reloaded extractivism": an intensified fossil extractivism paired with a "green extractivism" to enable the energy transition towards a low-carbon future—in particular in the Global North, which is in need for critical (and cheap) minerals from the Global South for renewable energy systems. This green extractivism is, importantly, not just limited to mining, but also encompasses the deforestation of balsa used for the construction of light-weighted aerogenerators, especially in China (Bravo, 2021). This also possibly applies to the generation of green hydrogen, a much-praised future technology for which Ecuador is currently elaborating a roadmap in coordination with the Inter-American Development Bank, following the example of other countries in the region (Ministerio de Energía y Minas, 2022).

How will this influence the social mobilizations of the future? As shown by authors in the region and beyond (Knuth et al., 2022; Lehmann & Tittor, 2021; Martínez Alier, 2020; Zografos & Robbins, 2020), mining and renewable energy projects related to the "green transition" are not less controversial than other resource-related conflicts. These new projects operate in post-colonial spaces and thus, build on historical marginalizations and exclusions of rural, peasant, Black, and Indigenous populations. Therefore, an intensified conflict panorama can be expected, especially locally. Extractivism serves as a lens to understand social protest in the streets as a "hot" expression of the otherwise invisibilized, everyday violence taking place out of sight of the cities. The increased mobilizations in 2019 and 2022, as well as the probable announcement of more mobilizations for 2023 after the evaluation of the dialogue process between CONAIE and Lasso's government, can be read as a hint that a transition is on its way. Not just towards a low-carbon future, which is unavoidable, but potentially also towards a post-extractivist society model. The Indigenous movement, with its proposal of a plurinational state, Indigenous self-determination, and

ethno-territorial rights, combined with an anti-capitalist discourse, has the potential to influence the transition towards a low-carbon future and reunite different societal sectors beyond it. In the recent national referendum on security issues, democratic institutions, and extractive practices in February 2023, CONAIE was able to influence the consultation in their favor and critically inform the population about the rather confusing framing of some questions. So far, discourses on a "just transition" or a "just transformation" (see, e.g., Alarcón et al., 2022) are not used by CONAIE to frame their proposals. However, the regional and local organizations in the Amazon have used the climate change discourse in their favor to attract foreign investment for conservation and alternative, non-extractive development projects, e.g., at the Conferences of the Parties in Glasgow or more recently in Sharm el-Sheik. As the Amazon is commonly known as "the lungs of the Earth," Indigenous communities and organizations use the strategic location of their territories to lobby in their favor and against the expansion of the extractive frontier. A leader from CONFENAIE said about the protests of 2022 that this mobilization was, in fact, not just for Indigenous people or the Ecuadorian people, but also for the planet itself:

> We, the Indigenous peoples, have always been taking care of biodiversity, fauna, and water, haven't we? We, the Indigenous sector, have 20% of the fresh water in the world….We are giving air too, purifying the air of the world, of the great powers who have companies.

This underlines the relational temporalities of past and future and the interconnections of different regions in the world. It highlights issues of (climate) justice and responsibility—and in fact, that the protests in Ecuador are significant far beyond the country's borders.

4. Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from a presentist lens on the social mobilizations of 2022. First, the social protests lead by the Indigenous movement in recent years can be understood as an intent to break with the logic of the neo-colonial rentier state and thus seek a societal transformation away from the rentier society that produces insurmountable inequalities and injustices in its reproduction of coloniality. In the eyes of protesters and segments of the non-Indigenous population, this is not just a fight for Indigenous nationalities, but for all Ecuadorians, as many citizens experience the system's constraints in some way. While anti-extractive mobilizations are associated with "Indigenous issues" (Davidov, 2013), this more holistic critique and questioning of state-society relations can mobilize broader segments of society—beyond mere claims of a quasi-naturalized right to oil rents. Along with the forging of alliances, however, this transition also provokes resistance in the form of societal polarization rooted in historical patterns of exclusion, racism, and repression by the threatened rentier state itself.

Second, Ecuador has once again shown in the pandemic that the extractivist development model is not only crisis-prone but also has a detrimental effect on already vulnerable populations in these times. The coming years, marked by accelerating climate change, an inevitable energy transition, and a slowly approaching oil phase-out, will present the country with numerous challenges. On the one hand, recent governments have invested heavily in framing Ecuador as a "progressive promining state" as opposed to the "neoliberal petrostate" (Davidov, 2013). Most recently, this "green extractivism" has been reflected in a balsa deforestation boom and the development of a green hydrogen strategy. On the other hand, the climate crisis and the related energy transition could be an important impetus for the Indigenous movement. The transformation it demands coincides with the need for economic diversification when exiting oil extraction. The "oil nation" will have to redefine itself in political, social, and cultural terms. In addition to the Indigenous movement, other social groups are organizing to resist extractive projects, i.e., to actively shape an alternative imaginary of the Ecuadorian nation. One example is the current initiative of Quito Sin Minería aiming to block new mining projects in the capital's province. As of February 2023, they have collected more than the 200,000 signatures necessary to call for a referendum in the province. After an almost ten-year legal battle, the Yasunídos collective has also finally won the holding of a national referendum on the future of Yasuní National Park.

It can be concluded that "the realities of long-term extractive dependent economies" not only limits the government's room for maneuver, as path dependency hinders economic diversification, "but also fuels continued social protest" (Kohl & Farthing, 2012, p. 225). Whether these frictions in the form of social protest are productive and lead to more profound changes or whether they are stifled by socio-economic exhaustion and increasing polarization remains to be seen in the future. One thing is for sure though: *La lucha continua*.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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