

Extraction, entanglements, and (im)materialities: Reflections on the methods and methodologies of natural resource industries fieldwork

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Abstract

This multi-authored collection of papers examines the complex realities of research on natural resource industries, including the messy entanglements of extraction, materiality, and everyday social life this research entails. Of central importance to the contributors is how scholars confront fieldwork challenges ethically, methodologically, and corporeally. The collection has two key objectives. First, it expands our understanding of extractive industry by bringing together work on resources conventionally understood as extractive (e.g. oil and minerals) alongside resource-intensive industries not typically examined through an extractive lens, for instance fisheries, agricultural monocultures, water, and tourism. As such, it considers the historical and current conditions that facilitate the extraction of resources in parallel, cyclical, and reproducing forms. Second, the collection examines scholarly positionalities, methodologies, and dilemmas that arise when studying nature-intensive industries, including the extractive dimensions associated with social research itself. Together, the pieces argue that research concerning extractive industries entails multiple scholarly positions—positions problematically inflected with colonialism and always shaped by power relations. Contributors to the section draw largely from feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist, and historical materialist insights to frame and problematize the corporeal and representational concerns arising from their scholarship on nature-intensive industries, including personal dilemmas that they have encountered in their work. Overall, the collection is driven by the realization that research, and the analyses it entails, may serve as a tool for emancipatory intervention yet also reproduce inequality. The futures of the people and ecosystems at the center of our studies impel constant reflection so that our work, and that of the next generation of scholars, may offer critical analysis that contributes to transforming—rather than reinforcing—oppressive relations associated with extractive sectors and industries.

Keywords

Extraction, feminist political ecology, research methods and methodologies, engagement

Introduction to special section

Scholars studying the industries of oil, gas, agriculture, and other ecologically intensive sectors have written a host of inspiring analyses concerning the geographies of extraction. This work has examined the modes of exploitation and social relations surrounding the removal, production, and distribution of resources, as well as resistance against these activities enacted by communities both near and at a distance from extractive sites (Ahlers and Zwartveen, 2009; Anthias, 2018; Bebbington et al., 2013; Bridge, 2009; Curley, 2020; Eaton and Kinchy, 2016; Himley, 2013; Huber, 2013; Kama, 2019; Kenney-Lazar, 2012; Lu et al., 2016; Mingorría, 2018; Valdivia, 2008). While such scholarship, including that by the authors included in this collection, has provided crucial analyses concerning the extraction and exportation of nature by state and non-state actors, this section is animated by the view that as researchers we must constantly reflect upon the fieldwork we undertake concerning contentious industrial processes (and the sites in which these processes occur). Crucially, we need to amplify and foster critical interrogation of the methodological realities and ethical dilemmas specific to studying extractive, nature-intensive industries in the field. We aim to examine the uneven power relations that facilitate both the extraction of resources and the appropriation of community knowledge—the latter at times the result of the researcher's involvement. As such, this special section has two key objectives. First, we seek to critically

reflect upon and expand our understanding of extractive industry to encompass non-conventional nature-intensive and nature-exporting activities. In turn, the varied materialities of these industries necessarily shape our methodological choices and fieldwork experiences. Second, we reflect upon our scholarly positionalities and methodologies when studying nature-intensive industries, including the extractive dimensions associated with the practice of social research itself.

The contributions in this collection are informed in various ways by critical feminist, critical race, and decolonial lenses (see Billo and Hiemstra, 2013; Daigle and Ramírez, 2019; Katz, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994; Mollett and Faria, 2013; Moss, 2002; Mullings, 1999; Smith, 2013 [1999]; Sultana, 2007; Sundberg, 2003,2014), which call for close attention to questions of positionality and researcher standpoint in the field, including a problematization of “the field” itself. Foundational to this collection are insights from feminist political ecology (FPE), which examines the multi-scalar ways in which gender, race, and class shape struggles of access over environmental resources (Harris, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2011; Nightingale, 2006; Rocheleau et al., 1996). FPE is concerned with how intersectional identity markers and other axes of power articulate through environmental formations (Mollett and Faria, 2013; Nightingale, 2011), and the forms in which colonial legacies and capitalist relations of nature shape environmental power dynamics, including highly gendered and racialized outcomes (Hawkins et al., 2011; Sundberg, 2004).

In studying the logics and contradictions of environmental resource projects, many feminist political ecologists employ a relational approach to research where positionality and privilege are forefronted along with dilemmas, emotions, and ethical problems in the field. (Pulido, 2002; Sultana, 2007; Sundberg, 2003). While we draw significantly from the work of present-day feminist geographers, the contemporary literature associated with FPE in the contemporary Northern academy was preceded and shaped by feminist literature of the global South (e.g. Mohanty, 1991, 1997; Spivak, 1999) and anti-racist feminism (e.g. Davis, 1981). Furthermore, FPE is informed by anti-colonial insights coming from well beyond geography circles, such as feminist critical development studies (e.g. Kothari, 2002,2006; Smith, 1989), and we recognize that scholarship motivated by attention to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), the sexual division of labor (Mies, 1986), and decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2013 [1999]) is essential to understanding the power relations embedded in sites of extraction. Too often, these intellectual debts have not been adequately acknowledged within the FPE literature.

Due to the often contentious and highly charged nature of social conflict in extractive sites, our multi-authored collection argues that field research concerning extractive industries requires an approach attuned to the multiple positionings of scholars. These positions—given the frequent distance between the work and residence of scholars and the field—are frequently inflected with colonial resonances and always shaped by classed, raced, and gendered power relations. Our varied, individual locations, captured in our divergent scholarly accounts, enable and/or constrain researcher access and alliance building. In some cases, this may result in close interactions with resource owners or controllers (i.e. State agencies or firms), or with communities opposed to, or experiencing the negative socio-ecological effects arising from, the extraction of highly valued materials in their midst. Together, the contributions in the section complicate scholarship on extractive industries by bringing attention to the uneven and sometimes oppressive relationships that shape the work of academics (despite commitments to employing liberal or anti-oppressive approaches). The collective insights offered by contributors acknowledge that research in extractive sites requires sensitivity to the power relations shaping access to the field, and a

recognition that we should continually address the implications of these power relations through scholarly, collective reflection.

This introduction and the subsequent set of contributions are each organized in two parts. Section one begins with the contributions by Mollett, Sultana, Havice, and Johnson who study industries that have been less typically examined through the lens of extraction—residential tourism, water use, fisheries, palm oil—but which nonetheless entail intensive extraction, exportation from, and/or enclosure of, nature at sites and human settlements where they are located. The immediately subsequent piece, by Osborne, offers a bridge to the second section in that it examines efforts, from a scholar-activist standpoint, to promote climate justice in areas threatened by hydrocarbon extraction. The second sub-section contains pieces by authors Valdivia and Lu, Billo, and Zalik. These discuss fieldwork on industries that are frequently understood as extractive—oil, mining, and gas—with particular attention to their own positionality and/or the power relations shaping their access to field.

We organize this introduction in a form that reflects these two sub-sections and mirrors the section's key objectives. First, we discuss our broader conceptualization of extraction beyond minerals and hydrocarbons; second, we turn to questions of positionality and representation in the field. Below, we proceed with our discussion of the section's contributions, beginning with the extension of the conception of extraction to additional resource-intensive industries, which is then followed with a discussion, informed by the methodologies of FPE, concerning researcher positionality and engagements in the field.

Conceptualizing extraction

The sites and industries discussed by the contributors share certain key material and historical attributes: (i) resource-intensivity in the extractive process and (ii) literal or metaphorical exportation of nature and transfer of metabolism via sedimented relations which have unfolded through histories of colonialism and imperialism. Extraction involves an assemblage of physical and social processes that facilitate the removal of more-than-human nature, transforming it into marketable resources that produce nature as commodity. Following recent scholarship that seeks to expand conceptualizations of extraction and extractivism (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017; Killoran-McKibbin and Zalik, 2016), we understand extraction to extend beyond physical harvesting processes to include sedimented oppressive power relations and logics (local but also global) which explicitly and/or implicitly maintain and secure the exploitative arrangements under which nature is appropriated, altered, or removed over time.

Each of the industries discussed here has specific materialities, associated with and driving socio-spatial and physical infrastructures that have shifted over the course of their human/technological histories. But these materialities are very much historically constituted. Indeed, globally, and in the sites discussed in the contributions in this special section, the use and relocation of more-than-human resources have co-existed with one another in decidedly cyclical and reproducing forms. Water, oil palm, and hydrocarbons have been both prerequisite to build infrastructure and/or have propelled extraction and production of other resources and water is extensively used and polluted in mineral extraction. The relations that constituted hydrocarbons as extractive resources also produce contemporary economies and geographies of tourism, and are clearly the drivers of climate change. Accordingly, rather than “cases” of extraction we understand the research and reflections offered by our colleagues in this section to reveal varied world-historical and world-ecological transformations associated with colonization, racialization, class formation, and gender hierarchies. In addition, these industries have been fomented through the

work of particular corporations, with national, regional, and/or global roots in specific fractions of capital (Girvan, 2017 [1976]). Yet despite the parallel consequences that shape a range of large-scale, nature-intensive and nature-exporting industries, they have quite distinct material dimensions. The varied materialities, for instance, of different minerals, hydrocarbons, and “natural resources” such as forests or water—let alone large-scale tourism or mobile fisheries—in turn have significant bearing on our methodological options and choices in the field.

Various contributions herein examine social relations attendant to the removal and commodification of resources typically understood as “extracted” in part due to their relative non-renewability from the perspective of geological time scale—notably minerals and hydrocarbons (see Osborne, Valdivia and Lu, Billo, Zalik). But crucially Sultana underlines that water is the extracted resource with the longest history and most pervasive influence; this is notable in the role of water in shaping social reproduction and constituting agricultural civilizations and imperialist developments over the *longue-durée* of world history. Considering extraction as a global historical process, Mollett’s contribution is particularly provocative in its attention to the dynamics undergirding residential tourism. The “coastal spatial ontology” of the Bocas region of Panama helps elucidate how historical relations of colonialism, crucially tied to the transatlantic slave trade and pillaging of land, resources, and sexual exploitation, were fundamentally extractive (Galeano, 1997; Rodney, 2018 [1972]). Mollett demonstrates that, as historically crucial components in an unfolding set of social relations, contemporary residential tourism complexes cannot be understood apart from the fundamentally extractive relations shaping Bocas’ present, including the racialization and sexual violence with which it was mutually constituted.

Contributors Havice and Johnson theorize extracted resources that may be understood as “renewable”—palm plantations and fisheries—but whose contemporary manifestations in capitalist production and global commodity chains have clear ecological consequences. They involve spatial transfers of metabolism, including the provision of industrial gear, to harness mobile resources such as fish; they are also dependent on the availability of human labor and capital and offer a nuanced understanding of the ways in which extractive relations and productive relations are co-constitutive in the lives of workers, in this case fishers and smallholders. Osborne’s piece centers upon climate change and its contemporary manifestation, the result of various centuries of hydrocarbon dependent industrialization, sometimes referred to as “fossil capitalism,” and the crucial work currently undertaken by activists and critical scholars to confront its contemporary dangerous legacy. Hydrocarbons, however, were preceded by and made possible as a result of the yoking of timber and water as energy sources in global markets (Bunker and Ciccantell, 2005), with forests central to Osborne’s (2011, 2015) scholarship as well. Thus, we argue, a broader “ontology of extraction” that draws from the insights of generations of critical and Marxist historians is prefigured by both intensive use of the more-than-human environment—through the harnessing of successive global energy forms; the sedimentation of gender, racial, and class hierarchies (Amadiume, 1987; Federici, 2004); and spatial transfers of nature (Braudel, 1992 [1979]; Bunker and Ciccantell, 2005; Frank, 1967; Mies, 1986; Moore, 2003).

Entanglements, engagements, and extraction

Many of the authors touch on the methodological difficulties of studying extractive, nature-intensive industries and the associated entanglements of social relations, emotional encounters, and lived realities; these simultaneously shape how research communities carve out their livelihoods and how researchers choose to engage (or not) with industry-involved

actors (see Mollett, Sultana Osborne, Billo). For example, contributors Valdivia and Lu present us with the term, “uncomfortable witnessings” to describe how they negotiate and deal with their unease concerning how some of their research participants negotiate daily livelihoods in the context of extractive industry, while also being aware of the privileges that may propel them to cast judgement. They find it important to “witness and listen” in order to lend support to the communities they research. Johnson experiences “uncomfortable witnessing” from another vantage point in working alongside “oppositional” corporate actors, or research participants whose expressed political perspectives run counter to those of the researchers’. Navigating political difference using critical reflexive research techniques has helped reinforce Johnson’s (2017) view of corporate plantation expansion as a main driver of land conflicts, yet has shifted her interpretation of the role of smallholders in the transmission of palm plant diseases. Both Valdivia and Lu and Johnson’s experiences underscore the complicated lived realities of researchers studying extractive industries in the field, including their negotiation of positionality and personal viewpoints.

Other authors in this collection address the entanglements of historical processes and materiality and examine how current extractive relations are not new but rather express processes and social arrangements crystallized under earlier rounds of formal colonization. This finding has implications for research methods and approach. For example, Mollett relies on historical excavations and enduring problematic narratives—with sexist and racist overtones—to assess the current degrading conditions under which Panamanian women’s employment has been naturalized. She observes that job opportunities as domestic workers available to women, alongside their separation from land, are outcomes of contemporary colonial influences linked to tourism-related land purchases by Northern, white foreigners. Havice’s research examines the geoeconomic relations involved in the global tuna fishery and how countries in the global North have influenced the fishing industry to their benefit by excluding Pacific claims on returns, a relationship dating back to formal colonialism. The mobile materiality of tuna as resource has also shaped her methodology—orienting her toward studying the sector as a regional/global industry, rather than at particular sites. Thus, she has adopted methods that enable and require movement in and out of sites, entailing fieldwork in numerous countries (Havice, 2013).

In addition to history and materiality, contributors throughout this special section demonstrate how researchers’ intersectional identit(ies) shape their engagements in the field and the specific form their research interventions may assume in sites of extraction. Such self-reflexivity is less apparent in studies of resource governance that do not adopt a feminist stance—whether in sociology, anthropology, or geography. For Sultana her embodied, affective approach to the extraction of water in Bangladesh foregrounds critical reflexivity. This has helped her navigate the juxtapositions of her insider–outsider identity, one characterized by commonalities with those whose circumstances she studies, in terms of gender, race, nationality, and religion, while also inflected with class difference. Sultana’s contribution also reminds us that research in extractive sectors requires *physical* access: one’s physical body and abilities facilitate or restrict the kind of data that may be collected. Billo too discusses her affective feminist identity but in relation to the extractive politics of oil in Ecuador. Her identity as a critical feminist scholar in fact triggered the state to dismiss her research intentions; consequently and ironically, this dismissal ultimately strengthened her solidarities with communities *and* resistance to state power. Zalik’s piece touches on racial and geographical privilege and discusses how her whiteness and “Northernness” offered her protection from violence surrounding the oil industry in divergent research sites, including Nigeria. These contributions and others leave us with unresolved yet productive insights

into the complexities involved in building solidarities with those who live in the midst of extractive industries.

Conclusion

The messy reality of studying nature-intensive industries—including the forms through which scholars encounter and challenge these industries ethically, methodologically, and corporeally—is a long-standing preoccupation for many of the authors in this special section (as evidenced by the previous contributions some have made to the fields of FPE and critical resource geography). This section is the outcome of an interdisciplinary collaborative workshop held at York University in December 2017 where we shared and discussed our experiences conducting field research involving large-scale, nature-intensive extractive industries. Collectively, the contributors herein were of the view that joint reflection, and a focused effort to confront the lived realities of fieldwork, is continuously and persistently necessary. But perhaps unsurprisingly, putting our accounts to paper and naming our personal experiences and sentiments in the field was less straightforward. The discomfort we faced in writing ourselves into our narratives is reflective of an overall uneasiness that many political ecologists have in sharing personal experiences in scholarly journals. Given the critical and reflexive demands of the feminist and anti-colonial scholarship that informs our work, this uneasiness is a salient feature of our positionality. Based on our discussions and the insights offered by our colleagues in this section, we call for continual, collective efforts to reflect upon, rethink, and recalibrate how fieldwork is carried out in spaces impacted by large-scale resource extraction. We are driven by the realization that research can act both as a tool for emancipatory intervention but also continued inequality, where researchers' careers are advanced, yet communities continue to experience deteriorating living conditions. The futures of the people and ecosystems at the center of our studies make this reflection imperative so that our own work, and that of the next generation of scholars, may offer critical analysis that contributes to transforming, rather than reinforcing, oppressive relations arising from extraction.

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Tourism as extraction: Unearthing coastal ontologies in the Panamanian Caribbean

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Everyone says that I could work for a *gringo* . . . that I can be a maid. But that means dirty work. And not just when I work as a maid . . . even when I worked as a personal assistant for an artist

from Florida . . . she wanted me to clean up the *mierda* from the dog's ass. It was humiliating. (Melanie, Interview, Old Bank Bastimentos Island, 2012)

The Bocas del Toro archipelago is located on the western Caribbean coast of Panama. This cluster of islands is homeland to indigenous¹ Ngäbe peoples who share the coast with multiple generations of Afro-Antilleans since the late 1800s (Bourgois, 1989). In the 1990s, Bocas emerges as a priority site for tourism development, which relies upon a persistent flow of affluent migrants from mostly Europe and North America. Foreign nationals or “expats” own a growing share of land in Bocas made possible through a variety of permanent and semi-permanent tourism related land investments facilitated by Panamanian law. Such a process is referred to as residential tourism (Mollett fieldnotes, 2011; Thampy, 2013; Van Noorloos, 2013). The Panamanian state promises foreign investors a secure land market and offers assurances to domestic residents that these investments will direct employment and financial benefits their way (Mollett fieldnotes, 2012; Guerrón Montero, 2014). Yet, while many local people desire work in tourism, promises of employment remain largely unfulfilled (Guerrón Montero, 2014; Mollett, 2017). In Bocas, Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean discontent and widespread cynicism over the lack of dignified employment and precarious job contracts intensify with mounting land tenure insecurities, growing social inequality, and an atmosphere of everyday challenges to local people's lands, waterways, and cultural practices (Guerrero-Montero, 2015; Thampy, 2013).

However, contemporary social tensions have a past. Indeed, the injustices embedded in 21st century residential tourism development are constitutive of the *longue duree* of foreign land settlement on the Panamanian Caribbean coast. As Schein (2011) writes,

we are to an extent freed from the dangers of presentism and charges of teleological story telling when we acknowledge historical geographic legacies as part of the contemporary landscape palimpsest rather than involving the past as inevitable precursor to present concerns about land and life. (15)

Such “buried epistemologies” are unearthed through historical inquiry and reveal the ways, in the case of Bocas, Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean women become naturalized as maids, particularly through place specific racial and gendered logics and narratives imbued in the coast's colonial spatial formations, both then and now (Stoler, 2016; Willems-Braun, 1997).

In this paper, I reflect on how history is important to my methodological approach to understanding land and livelihood struggles in the context of residential tourism development on the Panamanian Caribbean Coast. In so doing, I draw insights from postcolonial feminist historian Ann Stoler (2016) and the concept of recursion. “Recursive analytics” illuminate how histories are marked by more than rupture and continuity and rather are informed by “processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations” (Stoler, 2016: 27). Attention to an enduring “colonial presence” in Bocas del Toro acknowledges that even when the colonial forms and actors are dissimilar to the past, the “tactics of instantiating difference” and identifying an “internal enemy” have contemporary colonial resonances (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016; Stoler, 2016). Thus in this article, I make visible how such resonances are entwined in the racial and patriarchal logics that operate, at once, as mutually constituted constellations and multi-temporal relations on the coast of Panama. The temporality and spatiality of racial and gendered power shape people, place, and work in such a way that the past, present, and future are co-constitutive of residential tourism development. Such messy temporalities are methodologically salient and contribute significantly to the tracing of spatially relevant histories of racial and

gendered injustice and, as such, help carve a path toward just, embodied and emancipatory political ecologies (see also Sultana, this collection) in Bocas.

Sedimented racial and gendered histories are part of the fabric of everyday life in Bocas. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork, Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean participants “knew” that I was not a local. In contrast, affluent migrants, mostly Canadians and Americans, often expressed shock and surprise that I was not Panamanian. As an African-Canadian woman, many questioned whether I was in fact Canadian, and explained their doubts by the assumption that “dark skinned tourists are rare in the islands” (Mollett fieldnotes, 2011). Through prior research experiences in Central America, I am now accustomed to my body opening dialogue about race and gender in the field (Faria and Mollett, 2016). However, the repetitive use of the words “nigger” and “indian” by European and North American “expatriates” in reference to Afro-Antillean and Ngäbe residents astonished me. The explicitly racist and sexist narratives (along with implicit ones) employed by expatriates to explain local peoples’ poverty, Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean women’s sexuality, and the “false” land complaints and *denuncias* filed against them by local people were ubiquitous in expatriate spaces. The way this lexicon freely circulated was summarized by Manuel, a Panamanian, US-trained doctor who insists that “with *gringos* comes Jim Crow, we’ve seen this before.” In addition to a set of racially differentiated gender narratives about Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean women, Bocas is a place where the colonial fantasies of expatriates swirl without the worry of “the political correctness police” in countries of origin (Mollett fieldnotes, 2011; Mollett, 2017).

Manuel’s reflection refers to the early 1900s when many Afro-Antillean and Ngäbe people labored for the United Fruit Company. For much of this period, social life was shaped by Jim Crow policies instituted by the UFC’s American executives who lived in “white zones” (Mollett, 2017). The comment is instructive. Reading the continuities and discontinuities of foreign land control over time unearths how a set of assumptions about domestic populations accompany Euro-American land ownership. Such racial and gendered spatial imaginaries afford *different degrees of rule* over certain kinds of bodies, and simultaneously fasten particular kinds of work to the domain of specific kinds of people (see Billo, Havice, Johnson, Sultana, this collection). To illustrate, I offer a brief background to contemporary land conflicts in the archipelago. In particular, I show how placing history in conversation with ethnographic testimony helps complicate the discursive naturalization of black women as “maids.”² Finally, I reflect on how residential tourism *is* extraction. This is not simply a symbolic claim, but such a notion is material. Latin American development builds upon a Euro-American historical-extractivist thirst to control land and peoples, often in racialized and carnal ways. This enduring logic of extraction is embedded in the making of residential tourism space in Bocas.

Entanglements: Land displacement and domestic service in Bocas

In 1994, the Panamanian government passed Law 8, the Tourism Law (Gaceta Nacional de Panama, 1994). Since then, successive governments have introduced additional neoliberal legal mechanisms to facilitate foreign investment in tourism related land development. According to both state and private investment representatives, foreign land sales generate a “robust” and “speculative” coastal land market, which bolster the economy through the construction of luxury homes, hotels, and leisure spaces, such as Red Frog Beach Island Resort and Spa (Mollett fieldnotes, 2011). The loss of historical relations to land and customary forms of land control for local Ngäbe and Afro-Antillean people intensify with the resort’s ongoing expansion (Guerrón Montero, 2014; Mollett, 2017; Thampy, 2013).

For Afro-Antillean women, limited employment opportunities outside domestic service reflect an enduring colonial stereotype that continues to shape black women's subjectivity as "inextricable from brute labor," sexually dangerous, and less-than-human (Morgan, 2004: 12). Within Latin American scholarly history, the hypervisibility of black women in domestic service is partially explained as a remnant of colonial slavery (De Santana Pinho, 2015; Goldstein, 2003; Wade, 2013). The repetitive way black women serve as "*criadas*" (maids) in the homes and businesses of elites and *mestizo* families embodies a collective geographic imaginary that assumes certain kinds of labor tasks such as "cleaning" and "cooking" are meant to be done by certain kinds of bodies. In the words of Brazilian scholar Jose Lins do Rego (1932/1966), "[t]he custom of seeing every day these people in their degradation habituated me to their wretchedness" (cited in De Santana Pinho, 2015: 103; Perry, 2013). Such alignments between blackness and wretchedness are pervasive in Bocas as evidenced by the opening quotation from Melanie (above), and dismissed by "expats" with a shrug of the shoulders and mumbles of "This is Bocas," as if their complicity in this colonial racial landscape is neither of their choosing nor to their benefit (author's fieldnotes, 2011, 2012). Afro-Antillean women actively contest such presuppositions. And while "grateful" for "some" employment in local tourism related businesses, they repeatedly lament about the lack of jobs outside of domestic service (i.e. housekeeping, laundry services, nannying, and cooking) (author's fieldnotes, 2011, 2012). These contestations question expatriate land control in Bocas and leave me to ponder if "This is Bocas," real or imagined, how is this so?

As a spatial formation, residential tourism reflects the *longue duree* of the coasts ontological becoming. Through archival data collection at the *Archivo General de las Indias* (General Archive of the Indies, thereafter Archive), in Seville, Spain, stories of settler travel to the Americas populate the archive (see Zalik in this collection for another archival encounter). Because Seville was "a town that became, as a result of the opening of the New World, the most famous and important city in Spain" (Pike, 1967), it was a key city from where settlers and free and unfree servants and laborers sought permission to travel to the Americas from the Crown and their representatives in the *Casa de Contratacion*. Settlers needed *licencias* to travel with people and property, of whom many took African descended slaves, who were in high numbers in Seville in the 16th century (Pike, 1967). The examination of *protocolos* and *licencias* in both the *Archivo* and the *Archivo provincial de Andalucía* (Provincial Archive of Andalucía) read alongside Latin American/Spanish American historiographies (1492–1700s) affirms that free and unfree people of African descent were integral to Spanish settlement in the Americas (Ireton, 2017; Wheat, 2016). *Negros y mulatos* travelled as *criados*. According to historian Chloe Ireton, the term *criado* included all kinds of contractual (male and female) labor arrangements employed in royal travel license applications (Ireton, 2017). In addition, crossing the Atlantic as a slave could secure freedom for unfree *criados* willing to assist "owners" in the voyage; and for free blacks, a *criado* contract meant escaping precarious poverty, a condition that did not change with emancipation (Pike, 1967).

The multiple forms of emancipatory freedom and autonomy among *negro* and *mulato criados* in early Spanish America complicate colonial spatial imaginaries linking blackness and "wretchedness" in the "afterlife" of slavery (Hartman, 2016; Ireton, 2017; Mollett, in preparation). Contemporaneously, these histories are absent from state and elite imaginations and concomitant labor arrangements reflecting a particular temporal reading of slavery that closes off other imaginations and spaces of freedom within master–slave relations, ignoring Bocas' historical-geographical realities. Indeed, historian Herman Bennett problematizes the way that the emblem of plantation "slavery invokes images of structural continuity and cultural stasis" in a way that reinforces North American expatriate

imaginaries that tend to limit black women's futures and their place in domestic service (author's fieldnotes, 2012; Bennett, 2007). Such a spatial notion as "This is Bocas" emerges from a particular *reading of the past that enshrines foreign white control over land and people, as a "natural" and the "only" way of being.*

Final thoughts: Tourism as extraction

Residential tourism in Bocas is constitutive of a coastal spatial ontology that relies on Euro-American appropriation and the extraction of indigenous and Afro-descendant lands and people. Caribbean place making in 21st century Panama shares logics of power that extend from 16th century encounters sanctioned by Spain's quest for wealth pursued through extraction (Galeano, 1997). These wealth expeditions did not only dispossess indigenous peoples from their land in the Americas, but forced them to work on these lands (i.e. *encomiendas*) producing food and services under a violent system of tribute on behalf of elites and royal officials. Furthermore, extractive practices of conquest in the Americas also include the pillage of African lands and indigenous Africans through forced migration as part of the transatlantic slave trade. Dehumanized in the imaginaries of settlers and explorers, indigenous Africans were forced to endure the violence of slavery through a variety of racist, carnal, and gendered practices in the name of Euro-American wealth creation and civilization (Kelley, 2017). These geographies of indigenous and black slavery and land dispossession are part of the coast's ontologies in Panama. As such, tourism development unfolds in this violent colonial past present, making (residential) tourism an extractive industry. Like the "sacrificial zones of 'progressive' extraction in Andean Latin America" (Valdivia, 2015: 246), residential tourism in Bocas reflects sedimented histories of land and labor that link past and present in material and symbolic ways. Mapping such active space making by weaving ethnography with historical inquiry unearths the enduring saliency of colonial violence AND the imagined possibilities of more *just* forms of inclusion for Ngäbe and Afro-Panamanian peoples and their lands in the context of residential tourism development on the Panamanian coast.

Embodied emotionalities of field research

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My work on environment and development issues generally engages in intersectional FPE but employs more specifically the framework of emotional political ecology, where emotions, embodiments, politics, power relations, spatiality, and ecological change are imbricated simultaneously (Sultana, 2011, 2015). My approach in carrying out field research is informed not only through academic training and experience in ethnographic research, but also my trajectory as a researcher of and from the global South, as well as my research experience on the most contested resource on earth: water. Water is the oldest extractive resource as both surface and groundwater have historically provided the world's drinking and irrigation water as well as been essential for industrial production. This means that

water is not just an extractive resource for the market, but central to the reproduction of households and human bodies, and thus part of gendered reproductive labor. Water is the very stuff of life itself and this makes water the most critical natural resource, as it is a biologically necessary and non-substitutable entity, while being vital for all other human activities. There is thus competing demands for water everywhere. Commodification, diversion, and misuse of water have exacerbated the ongoing dispossession of nearly a billion people from having access to safe clean water daily (Sultana and Loftus, 2012). Water's role in human society is simultaneously cross-scalar, historical, political, and intersectionally gendered/classed/racialized. Researching drinking water crises and injustices necessitates field research with communities suffering from a lack of water and facing concomitant crises. My politics is thus aligned with those who lack access to this basic right and my ethnographic fieldwork with marginalized communities also involves working with various powerful actors in water governance and policies (such as the state, non-government organizations, international donors, and various water providers).

In this essay, I detail how attention to embodied emotionalities contributes to existing feminist scholarship on fieldwork. While there is a growing scholarship on the emotional embodiments of the field (e.g. Davies and Spencer, 2010; Ellingson, 2017; Moss, 2005; Nairn, 1999; Sundberg, 2005), there is still less attention to this in contexts of contentious or controversial resource extraction. Such contexts are often marked by colonial violence, subjugation, international power brokers, formidable players, and scalar injustices. Thus, carrying out fieldwork that integrates ethics, empathy, and embodied emotionalities of the fieldwork process can take on particular meanings, bringing forth different kinds of dilemmas and offering opportunities for more nuanced research engagements and insights. In thinking through embodied emotionalities, I follow Ahmed (2004) in asking what emotions *do* instead of asking about emotions per se. Emotions are always embodied, social, contextual, and relational (Ahmed, 2004). The sociality of emotions is important in feminist field research, and definitely when dealing with something as critically important as drinking water among vulnerable populations: because water insecurity plays a critical role in daily instances of illness, health, distress, flourishing, or death (see also Sultana, 2011; Wutich and Ragsdale, 2008). Furthermore, I am also informed by research on bodily geographies, how embodied subjectivities are negotiated over time and place, and how bodies are read/marked differently (e.g. Longhurst et al., 2008; Moss, 2005).

The emotional embodiments of the research process are ever-present, existing before, during, or after fieldwork. In grappling with the embodied emotionalities of field research on water injustices and water contamination, I have had to confront issues that are visceral, political, personal, and embodied, as well as address challenges and limitations that arise across these. The materiality of water and its centrality to daily life shapes the emotional geographies of fieldwork. Being critically reflexive in engaging with marginalized communities where I am simultaneously insider-outsider (cf. Mullings, 1999) and occupy spaces of betweenness (Mohammad, 2001; Nast, 1994), and on an issue such as the daily need of drinking water, requires humility and empathy throughout the research process, being fundamentally conscious and conscientious about one's questions, engagements, relationships, and power structures, as well as being open to novel ways of knowing and being in the world. I believe it is imperative that all scholars venturing to the global South be trained on research ethics and feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial methodologies to account for the ways embodied subjectivities, historical power relations, global geopolitics, and reflexivity are fundamental to meaningful and careful research. My work is informed and shaped by feminist scholars who have argued for critical reflexivity about their research practices, interventions, disruptions, and impacts (e.g. England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994;

Moss, 2002; Rose, 1997; Wolf, 1996). Indeed, I had argued in the past for the importance of accounting for reflexivity, positionality, geopolitical relations, and embodiment as part of research ethics and knowledge production processes (Sultana, 2007). This was part of a collection that critically engaged with issues around participatory research ethics (Cahill et al., 2007). I add to those contributions here to further demonstrate how embodied emotionalities are important.

In my field research with communities that lack access to secure water sources and face numerous marginalizations daily in trying to procure domestic water, navigating multiple relationalities that exist in tension has to be confronted. For instance, shared emotional embodiments (in being a local person who had struggled with water insecurity growing up) are juxtaposed with irreconcilable differences (being currently based in the West and enjoying regular running water). Guilt and gratitude saturate the water I drink daily as I am reminded of and viscerally connected to the millions who do not have this luxury that is often taken for granted by others. My class difference places me as an outsider, despite commonalities of gender, race, nationality, religion, language, and (in some cases) disability, that place me as an insider with the vast majority of the women in poor neighborhoods of a mega-city where I work. At the same time, being a local woman in a patriarchal society positions me as different from state and local NGO officials, who are predominantly men, and certainly the (often) white international donor/NGO officials. But being a scholar based in the West gives me relatively better access to some powerful people and institutions, where I also have to navigate various intersections of differences and commonalities. While Western scholars often benefit from whiteness or foreignness in having better access or privileges in a postcolonial context (cf. Faria and Mollett, 2016), I do not. Thus, being critically reflexive about my variously situated and relational embodied positionalities across time and space, and remaining committed to ethical research that enacts solidarity with marginalized communities, requires continuous attention to various power relations that can both privilege and marginalize me as well as being careful and diligent to ensure that knowledge co-produced with research participants are as truthful to existing realities as possible.

All this requires emotional labor.³ Emotional labor is involved in navigating intersectionalities of differences across gender, race, age, education, religion, geopolitical location, institutional privileges, and bodily abilities. Such factors influence what relationships are formed or possible, what “data” are produced or collected, as well as what failures or uncertainties arise. Embodied intersectionalities that are navigated and negotiated require understanding how bodies are read, related to, rejected, or celebrated. This is imbricated in how my corporeal, lived, female body is often read as being out of place in public spaces or improper in asking challenging questions to men (as white or foreign people are generally allowed such privileges in racialized postcolonial contexts), and in the interpretations of body language and social norms of acceptability in various spaces, and thus influences the production of intersubjectivities through the research process. For instance, whether a researcher’s gender, race, corporeality, and clothing are deemed socio-culturally acceptable influences research encounters in patriarchal contexts, how the body comports (or not) can create relational emotions of (dis)connections or becomes subject to respectability politics, as well as refracting various relations of power that impacts field experiences. Furthermore, what the researcher’s own body allows (e.g. disability, illness) also plays a critical role in the research process, in how relationships are crafted or maintained, how data are gathered, and what becomes revealed or repressed (cf. Garland-Thompson, 2011). In ableist academia, the realities of our own embodied subjectivities are often not taken into account in how that can inspire, frame, influence, or limit our field research (e.g. Moss and Teghtsoonian, 2008).

Such challenges are daily lived realities that require additional attention in resolving emotionalities of the field, while occupying such an embodied subject position can result in unexpected possibilities and alliances. For instance, my health does not permit me to haul containers of water with the women I work with, who have to do this every day as part of their gendered reproductive labor, yet shared experiences of daily bodily pain create inter-subjective empathies and commonalities despite differences. Nonetheless, my relational privilege is ever-present, embodied, and visible to all. It is thus paramount to recognize and respect the embodied emotionalities of research participants, especially those who take on burdens and risks in engaging with researchers. Thus, relational emotional embodiments are important to acknowledge throughout the research process as it can foster greater insights as well as reciprocal connections with people we research with.

In addition to this, researchers also need to investigate the impacts of their presence and research process on local communities and contexts not just while they are carrying out fieldwork but thereafter (Moss, 2002). There are often unforeseen outcomes or consequences of the research process irrespective of ethical commitments of the researcher. The desires to do no harm are often confounded by unintended effects of one's research interactions, relationships, as well as outputs. In spaces of resource extraction where daily survival is challenging and unjust spaces are reproduced by several factors and actors, carrying out field research requires investigating the impacts of one's presence, interventions, and relationships. There has to be reciprocity built into any engaged or long-term engagements. This means being cognizant of how a researcher can use their privileges toward reciprocity, situated solidarities, and radical vulnerabilities (Nagar and Shirazi, 2019). There are several ways one can do this collaboratively or with permission, such as: being a conduit of grievances of marginalized peoples to public officials and international donors who otherwise may not listen to the issues from them but are more likely to listen to a senior or foreign-based researcher, opening up channels of communication when possible, shedding light on injustices by co-authoring or writing for a wider audience outside of academia, helping to collectivize or support a social movement, enhancing networking or skills training for those who society neglects, helping to access funding or other support that is needed, or identifying powerful actors responsible (and holding them accountable). Such actions must be enacted in consultation with research communities/participants and ideally not cause further damage or be deleterious. Addressing issues as they arise is important as false promises are unethical and can cause harm. The challenges of taking on solidarity-based roles involve the emotional burden of being read as someone who can possibly bring about change or improvements, which can lead to the researcher feeling guilty, useless, being an imposter, or futile. It can also result in ruined relationships and failed long-term engagements. Thereby, one should be aware of the limitations of desires for positive impacts or how one's abilities may be constrained. Impacts of research outputs depend on the identity and capacity of the researcher too, as well as how one's research travels after it is written and spoken about. The impacts are always-already happening, in both directions, thereby necessitating careful and cautious engagement that has built-in feedback mechanisms for reflections and corrections.

Despite the challenges involved, using one's relative privileges to draw attention to issues as well as working to address them in different ways are what many scholar-activist academics do. For instance, viscerally engaging with the embodied emotionalities of accessing water from distant or insecure locations that women and girls face daily in marginalized communities enabled me to use my educational and West-based privileges to more forcefully argue for the human right to water to local public officials, international donors, elites, as well as to academia more broadly. Nonetheless, commitments to engaged scholarship are

not without challenges. These can arise or be inhibited by institutional/university demands on our time, funding sources and cycles, career trajectories, academic rules of what “counts,” receptiveness of the researcher by the host community or country, the pertinence of the research findings, and time and availability of already-exhausted research participants as well as our own embodied challenges of ethnographic work. Any commitment requires keen awareness and acceptance of the emotional, intellectual, and physical labor involved while being willing to engage as much as possible despite limitations and challenges, and understanding that embodied emotional labor can take a toll over time. Thus, while attention to embodied emotionalities of fieldwork can offer possibilities of alliances and solidarities that are fruitful and rewarding, in other instances there may be rejections, silences, failed relationships, and thwarted fieldwork. Negotiating these embodied subjectivities of empirical feminist research call for attention to the ways that research processes are generally not in our control and never fully go as planned. How “the field” stays with us can inform and improve our ongoing academic work and future endeavors only if we carefully learn from each endeavor. Learning from mistakes and practicing radical listening are central to this process.

By engaging with embodied emotionalities of field research, especially in spaces of extractive resources and concomitant injustices, researchers can recognize, acknowledge, and address the limitations and possibilities of their research in greater detail and with more nuance, which can assist with enacting more ethical and transformative research. We are not disembodied academics who are solely intellectual beings, but are situated in intersectionally marked bodies that both have matter and come to matter in different ways depending on the context. Emotions do powerful work in how we inhabit our bodies, relate to other bodies and situations, occupy space, experience and enact power relations, the labor we are willing to carry out, and how we impact those not just around us but beyond us, through our research processes, our writing, our activism, and our legacies. I posit that an embodied emotionalities framework can foster more meaningful research, pedagogy, and scholar-activism.

Methods and mobility in extractive tuna fisheries

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Extraction

Examining industrial tuna extraction is a starting point for studies of the ecological, social, and political-economic relations shaped via the production and marketing of canned tuna and fresh/frozen tuna products. These products are commonly sold around the world and are, respectively, some of the lowest- and highest-priced animal proteins available for human consumption. “Extraction” plays out in this sector in at least two related forms,

each of which requires unique methodological consideration given its centrality to the socio-ecological relations and outcomes of the industry.

The first form relates to the materialities and mobilities associated with firms tracking and hunting fish as they move through the water column, removing them from the seas with industrial gear, and storing them in freezer containers in preparation for their movement through global markets. Fishing firms invest in technological innovations (e.g. fishing gear, sonar and helicopter spotting, fish aggregating devices, and “sustainable” gear improvements) to remove fish from the oceans and efficiently insert them into the global food system. The practice of hunting fish through the seas challenges the philosophical understanding of materiality as “finished,” non-lively, and grounded (Ingold, 2012).

The second relates to extractive geopolitical and geoeconomic relations in the unequal system of states upon which this industry was founded. Historically, and building from colonial legacies, states and firms in the “global North” have turned to international aid, fisheries management, and fishing practices to influence the terms of fishing to their own political and economic benefit. These terms have generally been designed to exploit coastal and island states’ resources while excluding the resource owner from returns associated with participation in the global value chains that start in their waters and with their fish. For instance, in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean—the source of roughly 60% of global tuna supply—most fish are extracted inside of Pacific Island countries’ 200-mile exclusive economic zones. As former colonies, most Pacific Island countries have long been integrated into the global economy and global geopolitical relations, despite the fact that they are geographically remote and some of the smallest economies in the world. Contemporary relations of extraction stem from these histories: foreign firms from around the world catch these fish in Pacific Island countries’ waters. Once extracted, fish are transshipped to industrial manufacturing centers for processing (e.g. Thailand and Ecuador) or directly to consumer markets (primarily Europe, Japan, and the United States). As such, the industry “touches down” in the Pacific primarily (though not exclusively) through fisheries policy and fishing licensing fees. Recently, Pacific Island countries have used property rights to reconfigure extractive practices and relations in their favor (see Havice 2018), though many challenges associated with gaining power in the highly competitive global food economy – that has long exploited raw materials from the ‘Global South’ – remain.

This piece contributes to the aims of this special section by illustrating and arguing that these intersecting meanings of extraction demand methodological approaches alert to the ways that material forces and mobility are harnessed politically, economically (Cresswell, 2010; Peters et al., 2018), and culturally (Bestor, 2000). At the point of production, tuna and the vessels hunting them through the seas are out-of-sight and in motion for weeks, if not months, at a time. Mobility extends beyond the seas: nature, turned resource, turned commodity, is also in motion throughout the value chains that link the oceans, competing firms and states, and consumers throughout the world.

Mobility and methods

A central methodological challenge for research on these two intersecting forms of extraction in fisheries, then, is how to identify and analyze the range of mobilities that make the sector, and its socio-economic relations and outcomes. Methodological frameworks that emphasize multi-sitedness and/or strategies for understanding geographically dispersed relations offer possibilities. Global value chain or global production chain analysis unites method and theory to examine how things move from the realm of extraction and into the sphere of circulation (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994). Feminist and critical approaches

in this literature emphasize tracing and quantifying inter-firm relations and the uneven power relations that defy national boundaries as a theory of contemporary global capitalism, emphasizing that value chains are not only constituted by what is included in them, but what, who, and which places are excluded or expelled from them (Bair and Werner, 2011). Innovations such as multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2011), institutional ethnography (Billo and Mountz, 2016), and event ethnography (Campbell et al., 2014) are tactics for observing and making sense of global connections. However, these methods—particularly the global value chain method—have been applied sparsely to conceptualize extraction and industrial and corporate dynamics in these industries (for more on this argument, see Baglioni and Campling, 2017, for exceptions, see Bridge, 2008; Bunker, 1988; Ciccantell and Smith, 2009; Gellert, 2003; Havice and Campling, 2017; Kaplinsky and Morris, 2016). Further, there are few reflections on how scholars do the work of tracing extractive resource relations that span the globe, and what priorities they juggle in the process, even when the researcher inserts herself into the story of commodity-based global connections (e.g. Tsing, 2015; West, 2012).

Capturing mobility with multi-sited approaches raises ethical and practical questions (see, e.g. Katz, 1994). For instance, in prioritizing the study of global connections and tracing tuna from extraction through the value chain, I focus empirically on market dynamics, corporations as units of analysis (see also Johnson, Zalik, this collection), and state–firm relations. Even in parts of my work on tuna-based development in Pacific Island countries, I have examined how the politics of resource management and the economics of global market dynamics shape the jobs and production practices in the industry (Havice and Reed, 2012). That is, my analyses prioritize political–economic dynamics over giving voice to workers and activists that live the extractive experience (see Billo, this collection, Marcus, 1995, Mollett, this collection, Valdivia and Lu, this collection).

Practically speaking, capturing mobility with multi-sited work requires *being* mobile: the embodied privilege of access to, and movement through, vastly different social worlds linked in extractive value chains. Methods attentive to mobility and movement in extractive sectors require access to high level government officials and industry representatives who are generally uninterested in disclosing commercially valuable information on profit margins, raw material sourcing strategies, and responsiveness to sustainability and labor concerns to academic researchers. For my dissertation, I gathered data and conducted interviews in 14 countries to draw diverse processes (ranging from power politics in World Trade Organizations negotiations to industrial organization in fish processing plants and everything in between) together in explanations of how, where, and to what effect firms and states govern resource extraction. As frequently as I interviewed fishers and vessel owners in gritty and bustling port zones or observed working conditions in the tuna processing plants dulled by the clattering of cans moving along the assembly line, I have conducted interviews and observation in frigid air-conditioned government and aid offices and corporate boardrooms. Zalik (this collection) describes this as the privilege of whiteness and “Northerness,” and notes the ways an embodiment can grant access, as well as protect the privileged researcher from forms of violence and intimidation that accompany everyday life in and around extractive sectors (see also Valdivia and Lu, this collection).

Where then does a multi-sited research approach place me on a positionality spectrum often characterized by selection between (1) engaging with institutionalized industrial activity as a means to understand it, or (2) working alongside those resisting such industrial activity, which overtime will restrict or disallow access to formal corporate activities and/or firm representatives (see also Sultana, 2007)? My research has involved engagement at both points, but has been shaped and mediated by detailed study of and collaboration with “the

state', which in the case of fisheries and other extractives, is the 'resource owner'. States play a constitute role in extractive sectors generally, though the role of the state varies along with material variation in distinct industries. In the tuna industry, state bodies govern access to the fish. As such, state bodies are the gateways between two mobile processes: extracting a resource in motion in the sphere of extraction, and dictating initial terms through which it enters into the sphere of circulation in global value chains. The state not only sits between "uocorporate, private industry" seeking access and profits and "resistance" groups striving for more equal distribution of returns or more sustainable practices; as resource owner, state bodies themselves also occupy these position and enact them via resource management.

Positionality and engaged scholarship in research on extractives

At the time I initiated my dissertation research, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), an inter-governmental organization that coordinates fisheries governance initiatives among its 17 sovereign member states, was beginning to commission ongoing analysis of trade, market, and industry dynamics in the tuna industry. The organization was established in the 1970s as coastal and island states were declaring sovereignty over what came to be known as the 200-mile exclusive economic zone. The FFA formed part of an effort on the part of the Pacific Island states to begin to claim tuna as theirs and charge fees to foreign fishing fleets. From those origins, FFA had long focused on building regional cooperation around issues "on the water" such as fisheries management and foreign fishing licensing and access fees. In the early 2000s, the organization sought to build member countries' expertise on how power and market dynamics throughout the chain shaped practices and possibilities related to fisheries management. Here, FFA's policy interests and my research interests met.

In 2005, FFA hired me as part of team of researchers illuminating the trade and market dynamics of the global tuna industry (for examples of this work, see Hamilton et al., 2011, Havice and Campling, 2018). All interest groups across the tuna value chain—foreign government officials overseeing oceans governance and trade relations, vessel owners, processing firms, branded manufacturers, and even procurement officers at large retail outlets and environmental advocacy organizations—are centrally concerned with the tuna in FFA member countries' waters. Since Pacific Island countries own and manage the fish that foreign firms and states want and advocacy groups want to conserve, when Pacific Island countries request that those firms meet with a researcher for a study, the firms comply. As such, my work for FFA has granted me access to people, places, and data that enables globally scaled political-economic analysis of extractive practices and relations (i.e. extraction in both senses defined above).

In working for FFA, I engage with, rather than contra-to, either the industrial activity or state-led resource management practices that combine to make the sector. This methodological approach reflects the resource materiality and historical geopolitical and geoeconomic relations in the sector and requires interpreting data from government and corporate actors with overlapping, but distinct, political-economic interests, and making decisions about short-term and long-term research goals and alliances.

Is work in this capacity "neutral"? Does the applied dimension of my research make me a scholar-activist? I have made an explicit decision to work *for* the Pacific Island governments as they launch their own initiatives to strengthen their sovereignty over resource extraction and ocean space more broadly, and in turn over foreign fleets and capital that have benefited economically from extraction for decades. While I strive for "objective" and rigorous data analysis, reporting and in-region trainings, this work is explicitly aimed at identifying and confronting the history of extractive geopolitical relations. It is a process of revealing

and identifying the linkages between small, remote island states and global power dynamics, as well as the possibility of reconfiguring extractive relations. It involves attention not only to power dynamics between Pacific Island countries and “foreign” firms and state, but also to the diverse economies, resource endowments, cultures, and development aspirations of FFA member countries. The mobile tuna resources being hunted through the seas intertwine the FFA member countries with a web of global states, firms, and interests groups, and in turn require the FFA to balance national and regional interests (Havice, 2018). In the process of this work, I have witnessed an historical moment in which some of the smallest states in the world—long dominated by foreign powers, colonial legacies, and the violence of global economic integration—are using resource sovereignty and knowledge about tuna value chains to reconfigure extractive relations. In rolling out a collaborative approach to managing tuna access, they have exerted power over some of the largest and most powerful states in the world; that said, this project does not impact all FFA member countries in the same ways.

In the midst of the engagements, how do I navigate the relationship between “applied” and academic research? My work for FFA at times runs parallel to academic work, but at other times it intersects with, and informs, my academic work directly. I now make my applied work visible to the academy, including research reports and related workshops and training activities in annual reports, documenting it on my CV and discussing it with collaborators and students. Managing the boundary between the two has become an opportunity for coupling academic work on mobile and transboundary extractive practices and relations with a long-range commitment to engaged scholarship.

Engaged research with “oppositional” corporate actors

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Introduction

What does “engaged research” look like alongside “oppositional” research participants and what sorts of productive interventions are possible with such actors? These questions are relevant to the study of natural resource sectors where one’s research may be situated alongside “oppositional” actors. In critical geography research, “oppositional” actors are characterized by those who hold views that are deeply problematic, conflicting, and/or outright oppositional to the researcher’s own perspectives, and are often responsible for exploitative or oppressive relations (Thiem and Robertson, 2010). Using my personal experiences researching Ecuadorian palm oil companies—actors whom I deemed oppositional due to their ill treatment of smallholders and support of violent palm oil industry expansion—I argue that a more explicit engagement with the feminist approach of critical reflexivity assists academics in navigating research obstacles and shifts in critical perspectives when confronted with political difference via reflection. A case for the creation of a

broad conceptualization of engaged research is made as social and political constraints associated with this work may cause “engagement” to resemble a more modest approach. Finally, it is recognized that while oppositional research is a worthwhile endeavor, it is also a privileged form of research that is limited to those whose intersectional identities are seen as “neutral” or non-threatening by the entity they are studying. Overall, this piece contributes to ongoing dialogue in feminist geography and FPE on the importance of reflexive research approaches and further expands these conversations to address how researchers navigate power and privilege in sites of oppositional power dynamics.

Engaged research is concerned with power inequality and injustice and seeks to make constructive interventions in politics for the purposes of empowering marginalized groups and transforming our world in a positive way (McGuirk and O’Neill, 2012). An important observation arising from engaged research on extraction sectors is that it is often pursued alongside, and sometimes with the support of, the very same marginalized groups its outcomes are intended for (cf. Kirsch, 2018; Sawyer, 2004). Although all research has its challenges, working alongside participants whose political views align with the researcher facilitates working relationships and trust, making the research endeavor a smoother process. But what if the political views of the researcher do not align with the group or entity that is the main focus of their study? In these complicated situations, is the pursuit of an engaged research agenda still possible? And what form may it take?

Reflexivity and “ethnographic limbo”

Inspired by feminist geography research on methods and methodology, this piece sheds light on the negotiation of one’s identity when interacting with (corporate) oppositional actors in a research capacity (England, 2002; Mullings, 1999; Thiem and Robertson, 2010). As many feminist geographers argue, researchers never remain an objective party in the research process and therefore should employ an introspective or *reflexive* approach to understand the power relations and shifting identities (of both the researcher and participants) involved in data collection and interpretation (Billo and Hiemstra, 2013; England, 1994; Hanson, 1997; Katz, 1994; Mullings, 1999; Sultana, 2007; this collection). Our subjective positionalities, informed by intersections of gender, class, and race, shape the research experience by influencing research methods, knowledge generation techniques, and (in)access to research communities (Faria and Mollett, 2016; Nightingale, 2011; Smith, 2013 [1999]; Sultana, 2007). Documenting our reflexive research endeavors moves us away from “tidy” reflections of research experiences and forces us to grapple with the complexities and contradictions of everyday life (Katz, 1994) while acknowledging emotion and corporeality that undergird textured social research accounts (Bondi, 2002; Dyck, 1993; see Sultana, Valdivia, and Lu, this collection). Approaches to conceptualizing and conducting long-term research in oppositional spaces such as companies, which are informed by feminist insights such as those mentioned above, are thus extremely helpful as they encourage researchers to embrace their “ethnographic limbo” (Bobrow-Strain, 2007) characterized by being unable to fully support the politics of corporations but simultaneously driven to comprehend their motivations and logics (see Valdivia and Lu, this collection for a related discussion). Ultimately, feminist methodology complements and reinforces the goals of engaged research, which is to challenge power structures in order to improve life circumstances.

Feminist approaches grounded in reflexivity and reflection (e.g. Chacko, 2004; Sultana, 2007; Sundberg, 2014) have assisted me in coming to terms with the ambiguity and complexity I face (and continue to face) while in the field. My dissertation project examined the emergence of a multi-stakeholder industry-led certification program for the creation of

sustainable palm oil. The initiative is called the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and is globally known for creating global production standards by which palm oil producers (companies and the smallholders they buy fruit from) voluntarily abide. The goal of my research was to develop a nuanced and textured account of all actors involved in the RSPO and their perspectives. However, given the desires of smallholders (further explained below), my research required me to spend much time interrogating the practices, actions, and logics of corporate actors. Rather than simply relying on company websites, document databases, and online chat rooms for company information (similar to Warnaars, 2012), I spent several weeks alongside corporate actors during boardroom meetings, tradeshow fairs, and long rides back to the city to gather information and experience the geographies of corporate spaces myself.

My dissertation findings were based on personal experiences with company employees to whom I initially imagined myself to be opposed because of their beliefs surrounding smallholder palm oil production. For almost 10 years, I have worked alongside smallholders and have studied their politics in both Ecuador and Indonesia. In these contexts, smallholders are often noted as being marginalized in industry decision-making, particularly in RSPO activities (Cheyns, 2014; Johnson, 2019). In Ecuador, smallholders (who own less than 50 hectares of palm production) account for approximately 87% of the country's producers and experience major power imbalances with palm oil companies. Many companies, who buy palm fruit from smallholders and often supply them with equipment (through loans) and technical assistance, are accused of offering low prices for high quality fruit to increase their profits, or blaming smallholders for the spread of plant diseases due to their "archaic" cultivation practices (Johnson, 2017). Practices such as these further add to the perceived and material strong-hold companies have over smallholders.

Power and privilege in oppositional spaces

My privileged research position and a collective desire (together with smallholders) to leverage that privilege in a way that could possibly improve smallholder experiences informed my decision to study a palm oil company from the inside. This desire was driven by the large frustration many smallholders experienced when it came to interactions with companies. For them, setting up meetings with higher up personnel or getting "straight" answers from managers about the pricing of fruit proved extremely difficult. These experiences stood in complete contrast to my own interactions with the same upper-level personnel who swiftly opened up their offices to me and were more than willing to speak about their work or market dynamics (see, in contrast, Billo, this collection). There is little doubt that these remarkably different experiences were shaped and determined by the power relations surrounding race, class, and gender identity (Abbott, 2006; Mullings, 1999; see Zalik, this collection). As a Canadian, white-presenting female scholar I was read as a neutral foreigner (and perhaps a "harmless" one due to my femaleness) (see, in contrast, Billo, this collection) who had minimal knowledge about the local context and specifically the grievances that smallholders had against the company. This was quite different from the experiences of the mostly male *colonos* or local non-indigenous farmers who were seen by the company as biased and disruptive since they had a stake in the conflict and often gave loud, unsolicited opinions. Company employees took much time to explain to me the intricacies of the palm oil market and the work of the company. I suspect this was because my US-based PhD education prompted company personnel to interpret me as someone who had the "capacity" to "understand" and "value" the purpose of their work on a higher level. Again, this contrasted heavily with the common experiences of smallholders whose disagreements

with the palm oil company were often read as a symptom of them not fully understanding the functionings of the company and the market due to their limited political–economic knowledge. The ease through which my “non-threatening” identity facilitated “insider” access to the company made me acutely aware of my positional privilege (England, 2006; Faria and Mollett, 2016; Fisher, 2015; Katz, 1994; Sultana, 2007)—privilege that ultimately allowed me to conceptualize and execute my research project, and position myself among oppositional company actors in the first place. Upon reflection, I’ve realized that the enterprise of oppositional research is an approach not available to all.

Shifting identities, shifting perspectives

My commitment to approaching research in a flexible and critically reflexive way proved helpful, sometimes in unexpected ways. First, when controversial topics such as land conflicts came up in many of the conversations I had with company representatives, they minimized the direct social and environmental impacts that the sector had on surrounding ecosystems and communities. In these situations, I suppressed the urge to speak out and correct these unfair and problematic depictions, and I would remind myself that the goal of my research was to learn about the logics of corporate actors, their intersubjectivities, and specifically what was motivating their beliefs and actions in the palm oil industry. This “tactical withholding” (Bobrow-Strain, 2007) worked to the benefit of my research in the long-run, in that it made company employees more likely to “open up” and facilitated more candid, casual conversations during which they gave less staged, PR-type responses.

Second, I found that although my “open” research approach helped me strengthen the opinions I had on some topics, it also worked to complicate and even shift my opinions on others. An example illustrating this relates to the role that smallholders play in the transmission of palm oil plant diseases. At the beginning of my research, I assumed that palm oil companies were the primary vectors of the disease since they control the largest plantations in the country. However, after speaking to several scientists and technicians, I learned that smallholders too play a significant role in the transmission of diseases as many of them share equipment with fellow farmers. Cross-contamination occurs through the sharing of equipment such as boots, fertilizer spray tanks, or *malayas* (cutters), which increases the rate of new infections. To reduce transmission, the company offered smallholders trainings on preventative sanitation practices and physical treatments to quell the disease. Smallholders were often ambivalent about these offerings (perhaps suspicious of the company’s motivations), and many refused to invest in measures that could potentially protect their plantations from new infections. In these moments, I found myself frustrated by my new knowledge of the crucial role smallholders play in spreading disease *and* their refusal to engage in disease prevention measures. Surprisingly, I realized that my perspectives on smallholder disease prevention and management became more “open” to the views of companies. Initially, I was uneasy about this change of opinion as I felt I was “siding” with the company; however, I recalled the feminist understanding that neither the researcher or the researched have fixed subject positions (England, 2002) and that such dilemmas of conflict and confusion are expected outcomes of embodied research. I would add that shifts in personal perspectives and opinions (particularly in an oppositional context) indicate thorough data collection and thoughtful reflection, which are all components of robust research.

The vast majority of smallholders included in my study supported a reformist perspective rather than advocating for a complete “take down” of the company or industry as a whole. This reformist view, along with my desire to maintain long-term contact with the company for future research purposes, shaped the type of engaged intervention I could produce. In

practical terms, this has meant producing written reports (similar to Havige, this collection) to be submitted to both the palm oil company and the RSPO that outline recommendations on how smallholders can be better represented in corporate and stakeholder activities. Analyzed beside grand gestures of “ethnography as activism” such as “acting as lawyers” for marginalized communities (Kirsch, 2018) or engaging in protests supporting community members (Sawyer, 2004), these efforts may seem small and less significant. However, I argue that they are important as a form of political engagement and advocacy sought by those less empowered, in this context, the smallholders. Furthermore, they offer tools directed toward negotiation to improve the material conditions of small producers, which is exactly what many smallholders in Ecuador seek.

Concluding thoughts

Ultimately, research that engages both “sides” in extractive spaces characterized by opposition between corporate actors and small producers is a much-needed form of study. In the process of undertaking such work, researchers must consider how to design constructive interventions that will contribute to, or enact, meaningful transformations in the communities where they work. However, the ability to actually carry out such research is highly contingent on the intersectional identity of the researcher being congruous with the racial, gender, and class structures that constitute and maintain the organization being studied. Having a perceived “neutral” or “non-threatening” identity (often characterized by the embodiment of whiteness, “Northernness,” and higher education) facilitates access to oppositional spaces while simultaneously reinforcing the colonial, hierarchical underpinnings of these spaces. This ultimately reproduces unequal access, which in turn limits the enterprise of engaged research with oppositional actors to the privileged few.

Decolonizing methodologies for climate justice research

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My research is concerned with the political ecology of climate change mitigation. This has included studies of forest conservation and the role of Indigenous Peoples as well as work that supports the global strategy of designating certain forms of carbon “unburnable,” which entails keeping fossil fuels underground. These areas of research fall within the realm of climate justice, which refers to both a discourse and social movement emphasizing the ethical and political economic dimensions of climate change. While the immediate causes of climate change are the combustion of fossil fuels and unsustainable land use, particularly deforestation and forest degradation, political ecologists have linked these activities to underlying systems of power that have historically played out through colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization. Critical scholars have also shown how mainstream research approaches focused on the economic dimensions of climate change reproduce highly

exclusionary, reductionist, and extractive modes of knowledge production. In this short intervention, I make a case for using decolonizing methodologies for climate justice research in the context of these deep-rooted systems of inequity through the example of the Climate Alliance Mapping Project (CAMP).⁴ CAMP is a collaborative effort of academics, environmental organizations, and Indigenous groups working toward an equitable response to climate change through research, maps, and digital storytelling.

Launched in 2015, CAMP has been coordinated by myself and a team of researchers⁵ committed to climate justice. It takes as a starting point the science on carbon budgets in relation to existing fossil fuel reserves. If we are to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C, 83% of known and economically accessible fossil fuels must remain unextracted, unburned, and underground (Benedikter et al., 2016), so-called unburnable carbon. Analyses of unburnable carbon tend to emphasize the financial dimensions of stranded assets, investor confidence, and potential impacts on the stock market, as well as calculations of fossil fuel reserves to remain unexploited (Benedikter et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2015; McGlade and Ekins, 2015). One highly cited study draws on results of an integrative economic model to determine the quantities and geographic location for keeping fossil fuels underground. McGlade and Ekins (2015) argue that if the world is to limit global temperature increase to 2°C, a third of oil reserves, half of gas reserves and over 80% of known coal reserves must remain unused from 2010 to 2050. Due to high costs of production in particular geographic areas, they determine that the majority of fossil fuel reserves in the U. S., Canada, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union should remain unexploited. While these arguments for unburnable carbon make an important case for keeping fossil fuels in the ground, such economic approaches ignore social, cultural, and ecological values, which are the purview of climate justice and the basis for the CAMP.

Following the calls for climate justice articulated by many environmental and Indigenous groups, CAMP identifies, maps, and shares information about the ecologically and culturally sensitive places that should be priority areas for avoiding fossil fuel extraction. The project includes research, mapping, digital stories, and data visualization, all of which are housed on an evolving, interactive website (climatealliancemap.org). CAMP emerged through conversations with the leadership team at Amazon Watch, an organization dedicated to protecting the Amazon rainforest and the climate by supporting the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

CAMP is inspired by decolonizing methodologies, a more horizontal approach that challenges conventional research, which to date has privileged Western knowledge, marginalized other worldviews, and been aligned with an imperialist and colonial history (Smith, 2013 [1999]). Western science and its associated research methods, themselves a type of extractive industry, have long taken place in the service of industrialization and economic development, which in turn has resulted in social and ecological violence, human rights abuses, the dispossession of Indigenous lands, and ecological degradation across multiple scales (Gaudry, 2011; Smith, 2013 [1999]; Steinhauer, 2002). Considering how research itself is extractive and political, decolonizing approaches are an essential starting point for research aligned with social justice (Smith, 2013 [1999]). Inspired by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work, the remainder of this article lays out four key features of decolonizing methods that have informed CAMP and are aligned with the objectives of climate justice research more generally. My purpose is to offer a methodological starting point for scholar-activists working for climate justice (see also Sultana, this collection).

Participatory Action Research (PAR): Scholar-activists of climate justice often employ PAR, an approach that challenges traditional forms of research seen as hierarchical and extractive. PAR attempts to democratize data collection, choice of questions, and analysis

by working collaboratively with non-academic partners in the co-production of knowledge (Kendon et al., 2009; Pain et al., 2013). PAR is largely distinguished from other approaches in that its goal is not only to study and analyze the world, but to advance social justice goals as identified by marginalized stakeholders (Cahill, 2007). CAMP emerged from collaboration with environmental organizations and Indigenous groups that articulated a desire for maps with particular layers of concern. Our first map of the Amazon basin located priority areas for keeping fossil fuels underground based on criteria identified by partner organizations: places where existing and proposed fossil fuel leases overlap with culturally and ecologically important zones, represented by Indigenous land and conservation areas.⁶ These maps support activist campaigns to keep fossil fuels underground in culturally and ecologically important areas, adding an important justice-based geographical specificity to the science on unburnable carbon as a climate change mitigation strategy.

Alliance building: Networking, collaboration, and alliance building are central to the climate justice movement. The movement includes Indigenous Peoples, environmental NGOs, civil society groups, journalists, economically marginalized communities, faith-based groups, concerned citizens, sustainable business owners, philanthropists, and academics who have combined their strengths in research, policy, education, analysis, organizing, production, and fundraising toward shared goals (Osborne, 2017). These groups collaborate in ways that amplify outcomes beyond what would be possible by individuals and smaller groups alone. A central goal of CAMP has been alliance building—among and between Indigenous communities and organizations, climate justice NGOs, and research scholars. We do this through an ongoing and iterative process including formal meetings, informal conversations, workshops, conferences, and collaborative research. While the demands of academia differ substantially from those of activism, there is tremendous power in building strategic alliances and a community of praxis (theoretically informed practice) committed to an equitable response to climate change (Osborne, 2017).

Storytelling: Stories are a core tool of decolonizing methodologies, which emphasize that stories must be told accurately and within their historical and geographical place-based contexts (Smith, 2013 [1999]). In an increasingly interconnected world, digital storytelling has become a growing movement to democratize media by providing ordinary people with the skills needed to share stories about issues important to their lives (Couldry, 2008). Digital storytelling has also played a critical role in climate justice work by sharing the experiences of marginalized and front-line communities most impacted by climate injustices. Information about the socio-ecological implications and local experiences of fossil fuel extraction, transport, and finance is often obscured, and our CAMP partners identified story mapping as an important strategy for making these features more transparent and visible on the landscape. The aim of these story maps is to support activist campaigns, build broad-based alliances, increase public awareness, and move climate policy toward justice. The CAMP team is in the process of developing the storytelling component of the project in collaboration with partner organizations.

Dissemination of research: Sharing research results is central to public scholarship. Published mainly in academic journals locked behind high paywalls, research rarely reaches broader publics (Tennant et al., 2016). As an antidote, scholars are increasingly publishing in open access journals and using forms of digital and social media including blogs, social networks, and photo and video sharing to reach wider audiences (Kitchin et al., 2013). These dissemination methods are aligned with some of the media used by social movements for organizing and mobilization while challenging academics to think differently about how we pose research questions (Juris, 2012). Although unequal access and representation is always of concern, if social media is employed in critically reflexive ways it can provide an important

digital space for collaboration, alliance building, and engagement—key elements for work in the realm of climate justice (Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Sui and Goodchild, 2011). The CAMP website, with its maps and digital stories, provides an important space in which climate justice information can be disseminated to broader publics.

While there is power in making visible climate injustice through data, maps, and stories, there are also potential dangers. Maps can identify the location of economically valuable resources that could be exploited, or of sacred sites that could be violated by extractors. Also given the increased violence toward environmental leaders globally, stories about highly political issues such as oil development could pose serious threats. We recognize trust as being essential to alliance building which we foster through authentic relationships, ongoing conversations, and clear data sharing agreements. For example, certain information such as sacred sites will not be made publicly visible on maps. In some cases, digital stories will remain anonymous without revealing images of the storyteller as a way to protect front-line community leaders. While the project follows standard institutionalized research ethics and practices, this type of collaborative and engaged scholarship will require precautions and ethical practices that go far beyond Institutional Review Board guidelines (Glass and Newman, 2015).

The urgency of climate change demands a broad range of research approaches and methods. As a public political ecologist, I am committed to employing decolonizing methodologies and designing research questions in collaboration with activist and community partners. The robust analysis produced from this type of engaged scholarship aims to meet the needs of activist/community partners, have broader policy relevance, and also forward theoretical debates and academic scholarship (Derickson and Routledge, 2015). While this work is certainly challenging, the urgency of climate change and the weak international commitments of country governments have been key motivating factors in my decision to join a growing community of scholar-activists using decolonizing methodologies toward a just response to climate change. This work reflects the nature of climate justice as both a discourse and social movement, which is increasingly co-produced between researchers and activists in new and innovative ways.

Extractive entanglements: Environmental justice and the realpolitik of life-with-oil

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In this essay, we reflect on our approach to studying life-with-oil in the coastal city of Esmeraldas, a key infrastructural site of the Ecuadorian state-owned oil industry. Oil exports account for about 30% of the nation's total export income and close to 30% of its public sector revenue. Esmeraldas, with approximately 160,000 people, is home to the

end of the pipelines carrying oil from oilfields in the Amazon; the state-owned *Refinería Estatal Esmeraldas*; and the maritime terminal Balao, which exports oil to international markets. “Life-with-oil” is our short-hand for the entanglements between possibilities for political existence, social reproduction—activities for “caring” that make life possible and meaningful (Fraser, 2016; Katz, 2001; Koffman and Raghuram, 2015)—and oil industry-related activities.

We start from the premise that when social reproduction is degraded and/or threatened by ruinous environmental conditions (such as contamination), people often organize in resistance and opposition. Therefore, we expected to hear from residents about how they denounce environmental harms caused by the oil industry in Esmeraldas. However, in a study of 137 households we conducted in Esmeraldas in 2014, we found that residents do not always mobilize against oil. In fact, residents in neighborhoods adjacent to the refinery often referred to it as a “good neighbor” (see, in contrast, Osborne, this collection) that sponsors compensation programs, even as toxic exposure continues to routinely manifest in headaches, inflammatory diseases, and chronic respiratory, digestive, and skin ailments (Valdivia and Lu, 2016). Moreover, Esmeraldas is no stranger to political resistance; its history reflects legacies of organized black struggle against colonial powers, national incorporation, and plantation capitalism (see Mollett, this collection). Why then, have residents not overwhelmingly organized against the injustices associated with oil activities?

The short answer is that while the oil industry degrades life in Esmeraldas, how residents relate to it is entangled with structural poverty and devaluation that exceed the oil industry itself. Recognizing this entanglement confronted our intellectual and advocacy approaches as scholars of environmental justice, complicating our own understandings on how extractive industries tend to stick around even when they are associated with harm and premature death. These complications led to discomfort in our scholarship; we felt as if the commonly used explanations of capital-centered domination and oppression were poised on a shifting terrain of truth regimes. We recognize that our own positionalities and privileges inflect our reading of, and discomfort with, the choices made by those we met in the field. This essay is an effort to engage more intentionally with these moments of discomfort in our research *about* and *with* life-with-oil, with the aim to continue developing scholarship and advocacy that is vigilant about how, and on what grounds, we connect across difference and build solidarity with others (see also Osborne, Zalik, this collection). To illustrate this point, we focus on the affective dimensions (see also Billo, Johnson, Sultana) of our data collection in one neighborhood in Esmeraldas. Witnessing events entangled with the oil economy pushed us to recognize that the impasse we sensed regarding political resistance is not only in the worlds we study but also in how we study them (see also Havice, Sultana, this collection). Next, we focus on a series of events in 50 Casas, a fenceline neighborhood of Esmeraldas, to illustrate this point.

50 Casas

Between 2014 and 2018, our team carried out interviews in the neighborhood “50 Casas,” located along the Teaone River and directly affected by the activities of the oil industry, which can be sensed in the air, the water, the skin, the lungs, and the digestive system. Women and children regularly use the river banks as a space of social gathering and to wash clothes. Many have developed skin rashes after bathing in the river. Since 2010, 50 Casas has received state-sponsored health centers, schools, paved roads, and water infrastructure in compensation for the refinery’s environmental externalities.

In July 2015, we arrived around 10 am on a Sunday to conduct follow-up interviews. We were greeted by loud music booming from large speakers installed on the street and crowds gathered outside, drinking and dancing. On the way to meet our scheduled interviewees, a loud argument between a woman and a man started nearby. From what we gathered, they were a couple; he had come to the party to take her home but she refused. A second man approached them and told the first man to back off. An argument ensued. A knife was pulled as a loud mob gathered around them, and then someone was stabbed. We sought cover in the homes of our interviewees.

In one household, a woman was more interested in discussing income insecurity and risk—often referred to as *jugarse la vida* or “wagering life”—than the violence in the street or the impacts of the refinery. Her husband goes to fish for days, returning for one day or two, and leaving again for several days. Fishermen can earn about US \$30 in a three-day trip, sleeping out at sea in their *pangas* (small boats). Many in 50 Casas continue to fish but struggle to make a livelihood. Declining ocean productivity associated with climate change is exacerbated by regular oil spills that affect equipment, forcing fishermen to go further out to sea, where they face dangerous fishing conditions far from shore, and hazards from the illegal traffic of vessels and gas toward Colombia associated with the drug trade.

She also was excited to discuss her social reproduction repertoire. She washed clothes on the Teaone River and admitted to cleaning off her skin with gasoline to avoid river-related ailments. With her mother, she sold *corviches*—deep-fried, cooked and raw plantain dough stuffed with seafood and peanut paste—in an alley next to the nearby school. On a good day, they make about USD \$5. Her son was present during the interview, doing homework on a nearby table. “He does not hang out with the wrong kids,” she proudly stated, “and is not involved in drugs, a big problem in schools.”

In another household, a woman was more forthcoming with information on the party: it had started the previous afternoon and she had been there all night. “People want to have fun, enjoy life.” Her make-up was still on, one set of fake eyelashes missing. The party celebrated the return of a neighbor to the community (“*se dio una vuelta*” or he “went on a round trip”). He had invited all neighbors, sponsoring a band, a stage, and alcohol. Later, we found out that “*darse la vuelta*” is short-hand for participating in the illicit transport of drugs from Colombia to Central America. Limited by access to resources, scant labor opportunities, and environmental degradation, many fishermen are recruited to transport drugs in their *pangas*.

Individuals who succeed in *darse una vuelta* sometimes use the money to purchase a car, store, or house—something that enhances opportunities for wellbeing. Some decide to transport drugs only once, yet others do it regularly, in which case they can amass great fortunes. Regardless, the money they earn is then “laundered” in the city, which circulates through entertainment enterprises, including night clubs, restaurants, and prostitution. Sometimes they get paid with a brick of cocaine, which they can then resell to distributors for local consumption.

Uncomfortable witnessings

While we looked for resistance to the oil industry, we met multi-sited struggles to organize life *within* institutional assemblages of dehumanization, not against them. This distance between what we were trained to see and what actually confronted us required a reassessment of our field experiences. We initially looked for what our liberal training taught us to recognize: “resistance” as legible, intentional, and autonomous strategies and tactics that denounce wrongdoings, such as opposition to degradation by extractive industries.

Yet ethnographic discomfort signaled an important insight. It was not that people did not understand the grid of dehumanization, but that we misrecognized how livelihood-enabling risky activities were ways of *existing with* the very devaluation of life that we sought to capture (see also Mollett, this collection). What we observed was political responsiveness exceeding our existing vocabulary of “resistance.” Part of this equivocation (cf. De la Cadena, 2015) is due to our own limits as environmental justice scholars: we looked for “evidence” of wrongdoing, i.e. events, positions, and metrics that define intention and orient our understanding of responsibility. Our analytical lens was narrowed down by our take on intersectionality as a “gridlock” of discrimination defined by the classificatory simplicity of race, gender, and class, which subsumes and subordinates the political ontologies of personhood to the known (Western) universe (Lozano, 2010: 13). What we did not grasp was this: there is not a single universal experience of the gridlock of dehumanization and, perhaps, not even an ontological singular and fixed gridlock to be experienced. In our effort to find and represent resistance as-we-know-it, we negated the diversity in conception, form, and practice of what constitutes humanity and care among those whom we met in Esmeraldas. A Marxist feminist analysis, in addition, allows to see these dynamics within the frame of social reproduction.

A former fisherman now taxi driver from 50 Casas offered a much clearer analogy of this point of entangled struggles: Esmeraldas, home to one of the most important infrastructures of the Ecuadorian oil industry and a socially and environmentally toxic place, is “where people look for the chance to wager a life.” This is the realpolitik of life-with-oil, a world of pragmatic choices, tempting payoffs, and risky wagers not directly related to oil but constitutive of how life-with-oil unfolds. No interviewee talked about a direct relationship between drug–money flow and oil flow, but their narratives illustrate how these are entangled in the social fabric of marginalized Esmeraldas. Running into (and away from) stories about the drug economy, while looking for stories about oil as an extractive industry, allowed us to witness a sample of the myriad other preoccupations that traverse everyday life-with-oil: drugs in school, keeping the family safe and on a good path, precarious livelihoods, criminality, desire for opportunities to make a living (sometimes at high social cost).

These field moments also raised questions about how to represent the effects of extractive industries on everyday life (see also Zalik, this collection). We carried out “normal” interviews while knowing that someone was stabbed, asking ourselves: do we know this person? Did they survive? We didn’t get involved, a decision based on our assessment of the safety of our interview team and taking cues from our interviewees. We felt discomfort with decisions that some of our informants made, such as bathing children in the Teaone River, celebrating a successful drug delivery, or knowingly participating in money laundering schemes, prostitution, and drug sales. We did not contradict or minimize their positions either; witnessing and listening, even in discomfort and disagreement, became our way of politically coexisting in this oil city. At the time, this position gave us a glimpse of care and survival under conditions of harm and exhaustion. It felt disingenuous to evaluate their actions from our safety as outsiders who can leave, or to assume that our experience of political existence—i.e. to oppose freely that which wrongs us—is universally shared or morally desirable.

Our uncomfortable witnessing is mediated by our positionality as environmental justice scholars who look for stories of activism in sites of socio-environmental devaluation related to resource extraction. Initially, we did not recognize the stories that met us in 50 Casas as politically significant: they seemed accidental, even a nuisance, because we did not see their connections to oil. Yet they revealed dimensions of the realpolitik of life-with-oil, and are closer to how we experienced it than a simplified story of consent or opposition to oil.

Thinking with and against these field moments was a chance to “make strange” our own liberal conceptions of resistance to extractive industry activities, which is colonized by, and narrowed down to, notions of agency, intentionality, and rationality. Strategies and tactics of endurance and reproduction that appear incommensurable to our advocacy commitments must not be brushed away as situational and anecdotal (see also Osborne, this collection). As Richa Nagar (2014) reminds us, these ethical encounters require our full attention; the moments when we recognize our failures in translation are some of the most important moments of political alliance building.

As academics, we can choose to leave out controversial events in order to strengthen the narrative of how the oil economy dehumanizes and to avoid ambiguities that slow down coalition-building. Whether creating narratives without “uncomfortable witnessings” or treating these difficult moments as the milieu of political existence, we need to ask ourselves: what kinds of worlds are we writing, how do we write ourselves into these, and whom are we writing them for?

Building solidarity: Methodological dilemmas and progressive politics in Intag, Ecuador

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In this paper, I examine the forms through which my researcher positionality was politicized and the role of subjectivities in shaping my fieldwork, when studying state-led extractivism in Intag, Ecuador. As a feminist researcher from the US, Ecuadorian state mining officials, largely from the elite, used my embodied presence to discredit and delegitimize my research. Officials would often suggest that my research was politically biased and, following contentious, confrontational exchanges with state officials in the region of Intag, I often asked myself: Was my role as a researcher helping to advance a progressive movement in Intag, or merely a site for expanding state power? Through a consideration of my feminist subject position, I employ these research encounters as a point of departure for exploring new ways of writing, teaching, and conducting progressive politics.

Feminist scholars employ critical self-reflexivity to examine their relationships to a research community, including how these relations are rooted in institutional structures of power (Kobayashi, 2003; Nagar, 2002). Yet, a researcher can never have complete knowledge of herself or of research subjects (Rose, 1997). Instead, scholars have argued for engaging in research from a place of between-ness in which both researcher and researched engage (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994). Risa Whitson (2017) argued that distinguishing between researcher subjectivity and positionality leads to additional ways of knowing in research. She demonstrated that positionality invites a process of self-reflexivity, but subjectivities can attune us to the emotions of research: our desires, feelings of affiliation or disaffiliation, discomfort, and so on. Attention to our “multiple and fractured subjectivities can help us better understand those with whom we work” (Whitson, 2017: 300). Brenda Parker (2017) demonstrated how subjectivities, power, and affect play fundamental roles in

research, activism, and social relations (Parker, 2017). Feminist researchers are often forced to downplay their politics in order to be able to engage a range of participants in the field (see also Johnson, this collection), while at other moments our subjectivities might be perceived as “killing joy” in progressive movements through a process of constant questioning (Ahmed, 2017; Parker, 2017). What has been less explored by feminist scholars, however, is the scrutiny and subsequent dismissal of feminist politics by certain research participants so as to justify and reinforce “apolitical,” masculine narratives of progress and modernization. Elite state officials utilized my subject position as a critical feminist scholar from North America to advance an anti-imperialist politics of neo-extraction. They did so by asserting to myself and other residents of the community in which I resided that I failed to perform the role of a masculine, neutral, objective researcher. This paper examines how I grappled with this politicization of my researcher positionality and subjectivities, reclaiming and resituating my feminist politics in private, home spaces of research participants (see also Sultana, this collection).

Embodiment and situated presences in Intag

Over the last decade in Latin America social and environmental progress has become increasingly linked to state-controlled extraction, making the region an important geographical space to examine the “fragile, contingent geography of state power” (Pearson and Crane, 2017: 188). However, as we witness the potential collapse or implosion of these so-called progressive, pink tide governments, Pearson and Crane (2017) argue that we must examine “everyday practices of social reproduction” as potential sites to understand the operation of power. Moreover, Fabricant and Gustafson (2015a,2015b) demonstrate that left-leaning, progressive discourses obscure more complex arguments about the social relationships of neo-extraction.

As a researcher critically investigating the relationship between subterranean resources and the Ecuadorian state, I was already positioned in particular ways prior to entering Intag in 2013. Ecuadorian state mining company, ENAMI, and its partner, Chilean state company, CODELCO, have operated the mining concession in Intag known as Llurimagua since 2013. During Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa’s tenure (2007–2017), foreign and Ecuadorian researchers, citizens, and activists were criminalized for supposedly inciting tension between community residents and state-led resource extraction in Intag (Billo and Zukowski, 2015).

Residents of Intag illustrate a bi-furcation in left-leaning discourses, where industry employment has persuaded some that extraction is beneficial in the short term. Often this bi-furcation occurred within the same family. For example, some families that remained critical of the industry still had a relative who chose to work for the company, while others refused this employment. Throughout my field research (seven months between 2013 and 2018), any attempt to interview residents of Intag employed by CODELCO and elite state officials was met with silence. These employed residents and state mining officials were unwilling to discuss the company, details of mining work, their perceptions of the state, or any opinions regarding company presence (see in contrast, Johnson, this section). Local residents employed by the company were also, however, fearful of losing their jobs should they reveal any shortcomings related to employment or state actions. State discourse was carefully controlled and monitored, limiting my access to those “bio-politically managed by the institution” (Billo and Mountz, 2016: 209).

I relied on participant observation to uncover state practices and discourses, attending community meetings with state and company officials. In these spaces, state officials strove

to convince researchers and community members alike of the benefits of mining operations. On occasion they advanced their arguments by utilizing my researcher positionality. In community meetings, the state called on my embodied white privilege associated with my residence in North America to argue that Ecuador should have the same opportunities for development, in this case mining, as the US. Officials also dismissed community knowledge of water pollution linked to mining when residents referenced the results of community-led water testing for heavy metals. The potential for this water to be tested in foreign labs (it is not), where officials highlighted the participation of myself and other foreign researchers in the collection of water samples, was used to suggest the results were tainted and invalid.

I often became frustrated during and after these meetings and found myself in verbal exchanges with elite state mining officials that resulted in condescension toward my credentials and research project. Company officials would use my frustration to turn to residents, asking if I “really wanted to talk to them like that.” Officials suggested that my emotional outbursts were inappropriate, contradicting the expectation that I perform the role of the “neutral, masculine” researcher. When my presence challenged state constructions of the “rational expert” these emotional encounters were used to perpetuate and justify state claims to apolitical mining discourse.

At the same time as state and company officials tried to discredit me, they also tried to connect with me concerning our shared “outsider” status. In informal encounters in communities they questioned how I could spend so long in the region. “Wasn’t it ‘boring?’” officials asked, and “Did I drink the water?” because, according to officials, Intag did not have potable water. Indeed, Intag does have access to potable water in underground aquifers, but longitudinal community-led water monitoring suggests that exploratory mining has potential to impact these sources. In these exchanges, my training as a US-based researcher invited elite state officials to seek out commonalities through our shared privilege. These encounters called into question my own subjectivities as an activist-scholar conducting research in a place different from my own everyday realities in the US. Here, again, state officials, on the basis of privileged subjectivities I held, demonstrated that my positionality warranted politicization. Yet, in this case, state comments also illustrated the assumptions officials held about Intag as “not modern” justifying the pursuit of extraction.

Reclaiming and resituating feminist subjectivities

Following several encounters with state officials, I realized that my situated presence in these public spaces was not furthering my own commitments to feminist politics. Even as I had come into communities through activist and researcher networks, living with families and returning each year to build relationships with community members, I did not fully consider, nor could I know, how my positionality and subjectivities would become politicized. As I removed myself from these more public confrontations with officials, I deepened caring relationships with residents who refused employment opportunities in the mining industry.

I was often invited into homes where women cared for their households. In my fieldnotes I documented these private conversations, where my role was to listen (Ratnam, 2019). I came to realize that these were spaces where politics were also negotiated. These informal conversations often began with state politics, but quickly turned to catching each other up on family and community. Overtime, these research relationships became friendships. Trust led to emotional connections, where we shared our fears, desires, hopes, and laughter with each other. In these spaces, my positionality as an outsider was more useful: residents told me they felt they could confide in me, something that was more difficult to do with friends and family in a small community.

Campesinas told me about histories of mobilization, ongoing familial struggles, gendered negotiations in daily lives, desire for steady work, and hopes for their children's futures. Women outlined how gendered norms of their families and communities situated them in particular ways. They were expected to take care of the household and to stay at home, even as they pushed against these ideals. Other women lamented how health care and education were still missing in rural Ecuador, worried about opportunities for their children and the distance they had to travel to go to school. Collectively, they highlighted patriarchal state relations challenging frameworks of progress and modernization outlined in official state discourse of extraction. At the same time, residents enacted solidarity and support for each other, whether in confrontations with state officials or as they sought out ways to work outside of the confines of extractivism. A politics of care in community members' relationships to each other underpinned the more public struggles of extractive relationships.

Conclusion

In this paper, I reflected on how I resituated my researcher subjectivities to more precisely consider my privilege and responsibility as a feminist researcher (see also Sultana, this collection). I came to understand my feminist researcher subjectivities in the space of Intag, not solely as confronting power in public spaces, but also, and perhaps more meaningfully, as listening and caring in more private spaces (Lawson, 2007; Ratnam, 2019). I examined how my researcher subjectivities included emotional solidarity with residents' pursuit of progressive politics, one that hinged on revealing patriarchal, masculine state relations. Analysis of women's everyday relationships allowed me to ask whose bodies the state was protecting, in whose interests it operated, and to whom was it accountable (Hyndman, 2001). Our conversations blurred the boundary of the state, moving institutional analysis of the state from elite, public discourses to everyday social relationships (Mountz, 2004,2010). Research encounters in Intag informed and emboldened the feminist subjectivities through which I write, think, and teach ideas of progressive politics and actually existing state formation.

A politics of representation for extractive industry research?

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Since 2001, I have conducted fieldwork on social contestation surrounding the oil and gas industry in regions frequently depicted as violent or conflict prone—in particular the Niger Delta of Nigeria; the Gulf Coast of Mexico; and to a lesser extent, Northern Alberta, Canada. My research has explored how historical, colonial rule has shaped industrial development and community engagement practices surrounding extractive industry. When completing my dissertation, critical studies of extractive industry were a relatively new arena of work in development studies, geography, sociology, and anthropology, but the past decade has seen an explosion of scholarship dealing with this subject matter, including the

emergence of new journals focusing on these questions, as per *Extractive Industries and Society* and *Energy Research and Social Science*.

My own experiences conducting field research have been shaped by the privileges of whiteness and “Northerness,” providing me with advantages and access to space within affected communities and corporate operations, and cushioning me in various ways from violent encounters that I have witnessed in the field. They have undoubtedly protected me from more extreme versions of the subtle or overt intimidation researchers face from industrial representatives and private or state security operatives. Over the years I have struggled considerably with how to discuss and write about these fieldwork experiences in a form that would not contribute to sensationalism, to superficial depictions of violence in regions depicted as hazardous, or could be viewed as largely seeking to grant “street cred” to my fieldwork—a form of coloniality in action.

In part due to these concerns, as well as the sense that my research might be more forthright and involve less objectification of interviewees and informants as a consequence, I have generally adopted the industrial firm or corporation as the unit of analysis (see Johnson, this collection), rather than that of the social movements that may oppose or negotiate with corporate activities. With this piece I draw from a few examples to consider the crux of my uncertainty about a suitable representational politics in scholarly-writing and advocacy on large-scale extractive industry. In recounting these research experiences I raise some reservations concerning my attempt to adopt—and the scholar-activist goal that promotes—a position alongside, or in support of, those critiquing the corporation or advocating against extractive industry (see Osborne, Valdivia and Lu, Billo). After almost two decades of research in this area I ask whether, and in what ways, it is possible to make our research complementary to broader projects of social transformation? If it is indeed possible to do so, can I—as researcher—remain attentive to the always-partial, and frequently privileged element of my personal representations of field experiences and the academic narratives they produce?

Some of my writing examines how industry and state agents represent protest-as-violent as a means to delegitimize social movements: Industry has sought to distinguish between licit and illicit activity around contested industries so as to discredit various form of “direct claims” (including small scale oil “theft” via pipeline tapping) and calls for local “resource control” of fossil fuels whose status as either privately-held or state-regulated is contested. Blockades are typically understood by social justice movements as non-violent, civil disobedience. Yet, in both Nigeria and Canada, any form of blockade against industry—what many would understand as non-violent—is interpreted by industry, government, and local authorities as not only illegal but also as “violent” resistance. Thus, the distinction between popular resistance movements and those involved in larger scale contraband trade in oil resources is blurred, as is the distinction between regional movements for resource sovereignty and local militias or armed youth whose connections to powerful cartels provide some benefits via clientelistic redistribution of profits. Proponents of small scale “oil bunkering” in the Niger Deltan context (incorporating both legal and nominally illegal “oil theft”) may be understood as exercising direct resource control over the hydrocarbons in their land, although this action exists in parallel, and at time intersects, with activities conducted through the collaboration, and/or to the benefit, of state and corporate elites (Ikanone et al., 2014). In contrast, the upswing in oil theft in Mexico over the past decade is imbricated in the inter-relationship between members of State agencies—including security forces—and organized crime, and offers a pretext for the state security agencies’ impunity for their role in human rights violations. Yet in Mexico, historically, protests against the oil industry were tolerated by the state as part of broader corporatist dynamics. Here, state

government would employ compensation and clientelist payments to quell opposition. In Canada increasing cases of “sabotage” against industry have on occasion been deliberately staged by security agencies to entrap local industrial opponents,⁷ but have received limited global and national attention (Zalik, 2011), except in the context of national “counter-terrorism.”

In all three cases, industry has benefited from a wider context of limited economic investment in non-hydrocarbon activities; greater development of other productive industries would ultimately increase the amount of compensation required in case of spills and accidents. Small scale and subsistence-oriented fishing and some agriculture, however, has co-existed with the oil and gas industry but its relationship with that industry has over-time developed various forms of co-dependency. For instance, seasonal agrarian occupations and “local security contracts” from the oil industry sometimes subsidize one another, creating relationships that make critique of the ecological impacts on rural livelihoods locally complex and contested (see Havice, this collection).⁸ In particular, the relationship between the oil industry and physical violence has shifted over time, yet the “enclave nature” of oil industry operations has allowed its extractive operations to exist even in conflict zones (see Valdivia and Lu, this collection). Indeed, such violence may have become functional to the oil industry in that reports of violence near sources of supply prompt increases in oil prices on global markets (Nitzan and Bichler, 2004; Zalik, 2004).

In 2004, I published an article that cited directly from formerly classified correspondence between the British High Commission in Luanda, Angola and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London concerning Shell’s complicity in gun-running to the Biafran army during the Nigerian civil war. Such sales should have been forbidden by Shell and the British government who supported the Nigerian federal forces; their complicity in this action exemplified war profiteering on the ground (Zalik, 2004). Upon return to the UK Kew Archives two years later, I found the original files disorganized and no longer searchable by key word, which seemed deliberate. When I inquired at the archivist’s desk, I was told to use the box number I had located in my previous research to trace the files since the files had been de-indexed. My colleague Ike Okonta indicated that he had found all the civil war files in disorder during a visit in the same period. Upon explaining to a senior archivist that certain files pertaining to Shell’s activities during the Nigerian civil war appeared to have been de-indexed, that archivist asked me for information on their contents. I explained that the documents revealed Shell and the British government’s complicity in gun-running to the forces they opposed during the Biafran war. The archivist said to me “I suggest you go back upstairs and make a copy of every piece of paper in that box.” Naively, I asked: “you mean you don’t think this is a coincidence?”. “Oh no, I don’t think it’s a coincidence.” I inquired further: “This has happened before?”. She replied “oh yes dear, during the Falklands war.” With regard to representation of the oil industry’s role, this archival “gap,” or direct occlusion of archival material (see Mollett, this collection), influences subsequent studies of the Nigerian civil war and interpretations of the relationship between that war, the oil industry and broader imperial relations. Yet despite various witnessings of violence and/or the availability of arms, I have sought to largely downplay violence as a feature of my experience in the field because of its implications for representational politics, in particular for sensationalizing the region and my fieldwork.

On a 2006 trip to the Niger Delta, while a post-doctoral fellow, I was in a community in Southern Ijaw, Bayelsa Niger Delta State during an armed incursion. This event did not lead to serious injuries in the community, but did prompt a large-scale evacuation in which I was caught-up. In the subsequent year, I wrote an early draft of an article on Shell’s Scenarios publications that departed from this event, as the affected communities—and many others

which experience similar occurrences—were Shell-impacted locations (some of them designated as Shell “host communities” in the parlance of the time⁹). And, as previously mentioned, oil producers may benefit from upswings in oil prices associated with media coverage of violence and/or shutdowns at industrial facilities (Zalik, 2004). A year later, upon a research visit to the Niger Delta during the Nigerian elections, an individual claiming to be a Canadian freelance journalist—who had, in fact, reached out to me and used my name as a referral when speaking to a Nigerian activist—threatened me; I have yet to find a single journalistic article by this individual. Shortly thereafter, following a research trip I took to Northern Alberta and prior to the upsurge in global activism against Canadian tar sands extraction, I received a phone message from the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS), purportedly with an invitation to speak in their academic outreach program concerning my research in Nigeria; yet Canada had no substantial oil interests in Nigeria at the time. The CSIS officer who contacted me indicated she was unable to “remember” who had referred her to me; clearly I declined this invitation. In 2009, days after the early view of an article I wrote on the Shell’s Scenarios publication was posted to the *Geoforum* website (Zalik, 2010), a former Shell staff member sent me an extensive email taking exception to my suggestion that Shell’s scenarios publications could be read as influencing oil and gas futures markets. I could only surmise that he was concerned it implied possible market interference or insider trading. In 2012, my colleague Isaac Asume Osuoka (former Coordinator of Oilwatch Africa) and I submitted an intervention to a Canadian environmental tribunal on a Shell project on the territory of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in Northern Alberta, the Jackpine Mine Expansion. Shell’s Calgary lawyer tried, unsuccessfully, to block the Greenpeace Climate Campaigner, Keith Stewart, and ourselves from participating in the review hearings. While each of these incidents could perhaps have been the basis for a scholarly intervention or analysis, I have largely left them out of my writing or they served only as a footnote or vignette in articles pivoting around the critical political economy of the firm and broader oil and gas industry.

Currently many transnational oil companies, among them Canadian pipeline companies and Shell, are pursuing entry or dominance into the restructured Mexican energy sector. Mentors active in anti-imperialist movements surrounding Mexican energy, including the late Alfredo Penalosa of the *Centro Nacional de Estudios de la Energia in Tabasco*, have taught me that studying this industrial restructuring and the further transfer of capital from global South to North is part of my scholarly responsibility (Galeano, 1997; Girvan 2017/1976). Indeed, in Canada, attention to what some conceptualize as Canadian imperialism (Deneault et al., 2008; Gordon and Webber, 2016), or which may alternatively be framed as the collusion of Canadian capital with extractive projects that benefit transnational and local capitalist actors (Garrod and MacDonald, 2016; Tijerina, 2017) has grown in recent years. Yet despite this sense of responsibility, in conducting field research on this topic, I am confronted with the stark contrast between my ability to travel, and relative comfort in doing so, and the living conditions facing leaders and members of a community organization in Southern Veracruz with whom I have worked with since 2004. Such dynamics create conditions in which making claims for the communities can operate as a form of appropriation. Consequently, representing the communities themselves is something I have avoided. Rather, I have sought to analyze the activities of the firms or capital blocks whose activities may be outright dangerous for those who reside within the affected or fenceline community, and who are in some cases employed by industry, to critique (creating risks for local residents and their families should they speak out).

Learning from colleagues examining extractive mega-projects via the lens of critical legal theory and indigenous resurgence (Coulthard, 2014; Dafnos, 2013; Hernandez Cervantes,

2015; Pasternak, 2015) has pushed me further toward a representational approach to industry informed by a sociology of the crimes of the powerful (Bittle, 2012; Nolin and Stephens, 2011; Pearce and Snider, 1995). I have at times wondered about the position of critical academia in relation to these crimes. In discussing incidents of corporate impunity as crime, can the basic inequality upon which many academic research relations rest (see Sultana, this collection), often involving extractive dimensions due to the colonial dynamic at play in most academic work, be countervailed by counter-hegemonic intent? Taking this concern further, crucial readings of the way colonial and racial ontologies are reproduced (Faria and Mollett, 2016; Mollett and Faria, 2013) and parallel knowledges are appropriated or left unacknowledged, point toward the problematic ways in which Western/Modernist, nominally critical accounts of imperial relations may rush to speak without sufficient acknowledgement of the indeterminacy and complexity of social relations; on this problem Cameron (2015) and Todd (2016) have made important contributions. Thinking about these contributions and reviewing my own writing impels me toward deeper and constant reflection on specific dilemmas that arise during, and as an outcome of, fieldwork in sites distant from where I reside. My reflections and experience in the Canadian, Mexican, and Nigerian settings suggest that one of the contributions critical scholars of extraction may offer is to extend both analytic and personal connections between research sites and cases. This requires scholarly work that underlines the parallels between the activities of private capital and specific corporations in geographically quite distant locations, pointing out the contradictions and spatial fixes that capital pursues when exploiting spatially and socially divergent regulatory and social contexts. Through reflection and experience across regions, I have learned the value of fostering direct connections between groups and individuals one encounters in the field, connections that persist beyond the researcher's mediation. Indeed, rather than researcher claiming expertise or acting as gatekeeper, a sometimes problematic behavior among scholar activists, these connections may flourish and build solidarity precisely when they become *autonomous* from academic, and the individual researcher's, demands and activities.

Highlights

- The outcome of a workshop in December 2017, this special section offers reflections on the dilemmas, challenges, and quandaries that scholars broadly within the field of FPE have faced conducting field research on large-scale extractive/nature-intensive industry.
- The contributions argue that effective research in and of extractive industries requires multiple positionalities—positionalities that are problematically inflected with colonial resonances and always shaped by power relations.
- Informed by a range of methodologies including critical feminist geography and anti/postcolonial theory, the authors offer insight into the methodological choices they have made and experiences they have confronted.
- In an effort to emphasize the global political economic connections and similarities surrounding the metabolism of nature in different forms, we bring together work on “traditional” resources thought of as extractive (e.g. oil) along with non-traditional resources and their extractive dimensions, such as fishery, agricultural monocultures, water, and tourism.

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Notes

1. The term "indigenous" is spelled in both capitalized and non-capitalized form in this collection to reflect the individual choices of the authors and their preferred spelling.
2. Ngäbe women are also commonly imagined as "maids" in Bocas. For space limits they are not discussed (see author, 2017)
3. I use the term emotional labor as the mental labor required to manage anxieties and suffering, not in the sense of paid labor to manage emotions, such as that necessary of service industry workers.
4. CAMP emerged out of the Americas-wide Initiative to Advance Climate Equity, an alliance of over 50 organizations across the Americas that have campaigns challenging fossil fuel extraction within culturally and ecologically important areas. This project was funded by the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation Leadership Grant.
5. The CAMP team includes Remington Franklin, Jamie A. Lee, and Megan Mills-Novoa at the University of Arizona.
6. CAMP collaborated with various organizations and country governments through data sharing agreements. The Amazon Basin map would not have been possible without extensive mapping of similar thematic data by RAISG (Amazonian Network of Georeferenced Socio-Environmental Information).
7. See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/wiebo-ludwig-injured-in-explosion-1.187895> and <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/alberta-counter-terror-unit-set-up-to-protect-the-oil-sands-by-federal-tories>.
8. See Social Action Nigeria reports from 2014 and 2016 at <http://saction.org/crude-business-oil-theft-communities-and-poverty-in-nigeria/> and <http://saction.org/nigeria-and-eus-economic-partnership-agreement-epa-economic-cooperation-or-economic-slavery-2/>
9. The host-community model was subsequently replaced by the so-called whole community model, later implemented by many multi-national in the Niger Delta under the so-called *Global Memorandum of Understanding* or GMOU.

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