

Women's organizing against extractivism: towards a decolonial multi-sited analysis

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Abstract

In Anglophone geography, proposals have called for the decolonization of geographical knowledge production to be focused on tangible and material manifestations of how dialogue is initiated and mediated among different ontologies and epistemologies. We strive to respond to this call by empirically cutting across the American continent to highlight the embodied and transnational dimensions of natural resource extraction. Across the Americas, extractive industries' water usage often brings corporations into prolonged conflicts with local communities, who mobilize to resist the initiation and/or expansion of extractive activities that they view as threatening to their health, way of life, and their families and communities' territories. Through two case studies from West Virginia (WV), USA, and Cuenca, Ecuador, we propose an analytical framework capturing how women organize against the extractive industry as a result of embodied water pollution. We do this with the aim of decolonizing geographical knowledge production, as we propose a decolonial, multi-sited analytical approach, which serves to rethink the scale of effects of extractive industry. By showing how resource extraction affects women's bodies and water while also effectively allowing us to compare and contrast embodied water relations in WV and Ecuador, we better understand how extractivism works across scales—the body, the environment, and transnationally. We contend that a multi-sited approach disrupts the North–South geographical discursive divide and furthers a decolonial geographical approach in making apparent the embodied production and lived experience of territory across various scales. In this piece, we promote debates on decoloniality within Anglophone geography by proposing that we must not only consider epistemologies and spatial ontologies outside the western canon, but engage with practices and theories occurring in different parts of the globe in a simultaneous fashion as well. We call on fellow geographers to do the same.

Keywords

Ecuador, extractivism, decoloniality, West Virginia, women

La organización de las mujeres contra el extractivismo. Hacia un análisis decolonial de múltiples ubicaciones

Resumen

En la geografía anglófona, las propuestas han pedido que la descolonización de la producción de conocimiento geográfico se centre en manifestaciones tangibles y materiales de cómo se inicia y media el diálogo entre las diferentes ontologías y epistemologías. Nos esforzamos por responder a este llamado cortando empíricamente a través del continente americano para resaltar las dimensiones encarnadas y transnacionales de la extracción de recursos naturales. En todo el continente americano, el uso del agua de las industrias extractivas a menudo lleva a las empresas a conflictos prolongados con las comunidades locales, que se movilizan para resistir el inicio y / o la expansión de actividades extractivas que consideran amenazadoras para su salud, formas de vida y sus familias y los territorios de sus comunidades. A través de dos estudios de caso de West Virginia (WV), EE. UU. y Cuenca, Ecuador, proponemos un marco analítico que

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muestra cómo las mujeres se organizan contra la industria extractiva como resultado de la contaminación del agua. Hacemos esto con el objetivo de descolonizar la producción de conocimiento geográfico, ya que proponemos un enfoque analítico descolonial y de múltiples ubicaciones, que sirve para repensar la escala de efectos de la industria extractiva. Al mostrar cómo la extracción de recursos afecta los cuerpos y el agua de las mujeres y, al mismo tiempo, comparar y contrastar de manera efectiva las relaciones hídricas incorporadas en VM y Ecuador, comprendemos mejor cómo funciona el extractivismo en diferentes escalas: el cuerpo, el medio ambiente y transnacionalmente. Sostenemos que un enfoque de múltiples ubicaciones interrumpe la división discursiva geográfica Norte-Sur y promueve un enfoque geográfico descolonial al hacer evidente la producción encarnada y la experiencia vivida del territorio a varias escalas. En este artículo, promovemos debates sobre la descolonialidad dentro de la geografía anglófona al proponer que no solo debemos considerar las epistemologías y las ontologías espaciales fuera del canon occidental, sino también involucrarnos en prácticas y teorías que ocurren en diferentes partes del mundo de manera simultánea. Hacemos un llamado a otros geógrafos para que hagan lo mismo.

Palabras clave

extractivismo, mujeres, descolonialidad, Ecuador, Virginia Occidental

Introduction

In recent years, water contamination has been a major news headline across the Americas (Langin, 2018; Rojas, 2016; Vidal, 2017). Water is not only a material resource but constitutes and shapes societal relations and practices as well, often defined as waterscapes (Budds and Hinojosa-Valencia, 2012; Sultana, 2010; Swyngedouw, 1999). However, water, and its embedded societal relations and practices are currently under threat across the American continent due to natural resource extraction, for example, mining, hydraulic fracturing, and pipeline construction (Bosworth, 2019; Finewood and Stroup, 2012; Perreault, 2013). The transnational nature of large-scale resource extraction, including similarities across case studies with North American-based companies involved in extraction on the South American continent, provides an important rationale for our multi-sited approach. None of these country contexts, we argue, can be understood in isolation from broader patterns of extraction and community resistance across the region. Increasing public awareness of the threats posed to water by industrial and extractive operations has resulted in community organizing led by economic and racially diverse groups of men, women, and indigenous people (Bell, 2013; Bosworth, 2019; Haarstad, 2012; Jenkins, 2017).

The extractive industry's effect on women's and indigenous people's lives has been studied by feminist and human geographers and queer ecologists (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2017; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Lu et al., 2017). We contribute to this literature by exploring the social and embodied components of the resource extraction economy as it plays out in distinct waterscapes across the Americas. We suggest that exploring these dynamics from a multi-sited perspective with one site in the Global North and one in the Global South questions geographical fixity. West Virginia (WV), USA, and Cuenca, Ecuador, present in fact comparable scenarios where women's groups are affected by extractive industry and from which we draw a decolonial multi-sited analysis.

After having presented the methods, we delve into the analytical framework that we propose for this paper grounded in a decolonial multi-sited approach. Following, we outline our case studies and discuss results focusing on women's organizing and the relationship between their bodies and water. Finally, we examine how the framework we propose contributes to the understanding of extraction across scales.

Methods

We are four feminist geographers who carry out research in the country where we work—United States and Ecuador—and who focus on how and why water pollution and scarcity can trigger women to organize against the extractive industry. The data presented in this article was gathered at a time when we did not know each other. Martina and Sofia met in a feminist geography conference in 2017 and progressively interacted more until they collaborated on a NSF proposal and began coediting this special issue.

In our autonomous field works, we all used qualitative methods through a case study approach.

Martina and Bethani based in WV in 2017 conducted 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews with local nonindigenous women who lead water stewardship organizations in WV through a participatory research approach (see also Caretta, Forthcoming). Following, the data was validated through a focus group with some of the previous interviewees in the fall of 2018.

Sofia and Kamila from Ecuador, through action-research, conducted 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews and a workshop with peasant women who mobilize against water contamination resulting from mining extraction in Cuenca, Ecuador, in 2018. Sofia is a mestiza decolonial feminist geographer and an activist-researcher working at a private university in Ecuador and is part of the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador, an autonomous interdisciplinary group that seeks territorial resistance through a wide range of socio-spatial geographical methodologies.

Notably, without knowing each other or of each other's work, we grounded our research projects in participatory and action-research frameworks that are geared toward supporting and advancing the cause of organizing against natural resource extraction. We have done this in different ways.

Following Martina's research in WV, women constituted a formal network under the collaborative undertaking of Martina and a few watershed organizations. After the creation of this network of support and mentoring among women water defenders, an art exhibit focusing on their relationship with water was organized at Martina's university in correspondence with Women's History Month. The exhibit, which showcased artifacts chosen by women water stewards, reflected on women's connection with water, displayed and celebrated the contribution of women in protecting WV waters, and received attention in the press indirectly (Patterson, 2019).

Following Sofia and Kamila's research in Cuenca, Ecuador, Sofia along with the other members of the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador shared with women participants (some part of the Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama) a manual on feminist geography methods for the territorial resistance against extractive industry. Women had explicitly requested this manual to be able to gather their own data to challenge the predominant discourse of the positive effects of mining on local employment. Women were particularly interested in *cuerpo-territorio* (body-territory) and *agua-territorio* (water-territory) concepts, whereby notions of body, water, and territory are intimately linked and how these could be used to gather data about their conditions. Methods presented in the manual included transect walks to facilitate data collection about the embodied sense of water and emotions triggered by extractive activities (see also Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador, 2018; Zaragocin, 2018; Zaragocin and Caretta, under review).

Accordingly, we both reflexively engage with marginalized and disenfranchised groups in coproducing knowledge while at the same time striving to hold the extractive industry accountable. These are elements which exemplify the epistemological principle of decolonization, which is examined in the following section.

A decolonial multi-sited framework

In our respective research projects, we have explored both women's lived and embodied experiences of water contamination and scarcity due to the extractive industry. We have done so by using disconnected but similar conceptual toolboxes: waterscapes and embodiment, and *agua-territorio* and *cuerpo-territorio*. In order to initiate a dialogue between concepts developed in diverse geographical places and spaces, we propose a decolonial multi-sited framework.

Waterscapes is considered by academics in the Global North as a valuable framework for understanding how relationships are socially ecologically created through water,

take place in diverse spatial and temporal scales, and shape and are shaped by power relations (e.g., Budds and Hinojosa-Valencia, 2012; Swyngedouw, 1999). Debates regarding access to and the distribution of water have been central to Latin American political ecology and critical geography (Boelens et al., 2016; Bolados, 2017; Caretta et al., 2015; Panez Pinto, 2018; Ruiz Meza, 2017), but they have been profoundly questioned by indigenous, communitarian, and social perspectives on representation, ontology, and epistemology of waterscapes (Porto-Goncalves, 2006). The understanding of relations created and mediated through water is understood by Latin American theorists through the lens of territory (Panez Pinto, 2018; Zaragocin, 2018). In part, this has to do with Latin American critical geography prioritizing the spatial identity of territory, which was recently brought into dialogue with Anglophone understandings of the term as a way to further decolonize Anglophone geography (Halvorsen, 2018). However, as decolonial Latin American feminist theorists and collectives have noted, a masculinist notion of territory has until recently dominated regional discussions on extractivism and territory (e.g., Colectiva Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2017). The concept of territory, as outlined by Latin American indigenous and communitarian feminisms (Zaragocin, 2018), has fostered an important shift within Latin American discussions on the term, specifically toward an ontological shift in understanding the production of space whereby bodies and territories are simultaneously constructed and not as two distinct relational entities, but as one (see also Halvorsen, 2018). Following this relational embodied approach to territory, theorists in Latin America refer to aquatic space (Oslender, 2002), *agua-territorio* (water-territory) (Panez Pinto, 2018), and *cuerpo-territorio* (body-territory) (Cabnal, 2010; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2017). Both *cuerpo-territorio* and *agua-territorio* point toward holistic and fluid embodied understandings of water and territory. *Cuerpo-territorio* (body-territory) is a concept and a method linking body and territory according to indigenous ontologies of space and decolonial understandings of the gendered body. Body-territory has become a central tenet of contemporary Latin American feminist theory and politics (Ulloa, 2016; Zaragocin et al., 2018). Likewise, the concept of *agua-territorio* (water-territory) proposes new ways of comprehending waterscapes as the underlying spatial ordering of the everyday along Latin American riverways (Oslender, 2002). Water-territory proposes an analytical and ontological inseparability between territory and water (Panez Pinto, 2018).

The waterscapes concept, as opposed to *cuerpo-territorio* and *agua-territorio*, centers on the material reasons of how and why people's relations with water or among themselves are formed and negotiated. However, the immaterial, emotional, and embodied motives behind people's engagement with the preservation, restoration, and management of water are not taken into account by this concept. In this sense, the concept of embodiment used by Global North academics

responds to the importance of extending the understanding of waterscapes beyond the material. In fact, in feminist geography embodiment is used to recognize the body as part of knowledge production, rejecting the idea of disembodied geography (Longhurst, 1995). Feminist geographers have proposed an analytical approach combining water and embodiment by focusing on how water is shaped by and shapes gender subjectivity and emotions (Sultana, 2011). By the same token, political ecologists have examined the ways in which resource conflicts over water are experienced as everyday emotional struggles (Dallman et al., 2013; Keremane and McKay, 2011; Sultana, 2011).

However, the embodied nature of water contamination and scarcity due to the practices of the extractive industry remains to be consistently theorized across Global North and Global South scholars. Scholars have noted how even within environmental justice, the Global North theorization has dominated the discourse on contamination and extractivism using Latin America as the case study for environmental conflicts, but rarely as the source of theory (Álvarez and Coolsaet, 2018). Latin American critical geography and political ecology have been intimately tied to social movements (Zaragocin et al., 2018) for the defense of water (Bolados, 2017). Particularly, Latin American critical geography has been shaped by these exchanges and relations with activists (Zaragocin et al., 2018).

Neither in the Global North nor in the Global South have theorists developed a framework to be able to fully capture the interrelations between water and bodies. We argue that incorporating an analysis of bodily and emotional bonds to water helps reorient a typically neoliberal economic framing of water toward one focused on the everyday and the local rescaling of such analysis (Bondi et al., 2005; Sultana, 2011). We therefore propose linking the Global North geographical concept of waterscapes with the Global South embodied notions of territory, such as body-territory and water-territory, to emphasize the linkages and scale of the body and water. This proposed framework furthers the decolonial turn already occurring in Anglophone geography which questions the dominance of Western, white, and imperialist epistemologies and spatial ontologies as the only valid frameworks for the construction of geographical knowledge (Leeuw and Hunt, 2018; Naylor et al., 2018). A shift toward engaging with indigenous epistemologies (Clement, 2019; Holmes et al., 2015) and a focus on structures that sustain forms of epistemological violence in academia (Esson et al., 2017) have been presented in Anglophone geography as the way to avoid reproducing colonial geographical practices of knowledge production. Such proposals for decolonization in Anglophone geography have called on geographical knowledge production to be focused on tangible and material manifestations of how dialogue is initiated and mediated among different ontologies and epistemologies (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Relevant for this paper is the importance that the body and the concept of embodiment have had in furthering

decolonization in Anglophone geography, particularly in the context of feminist approaches to knowledge production (Naylor et al., 2018). Yet, while geographers are now prioritizing subaltern and indigenous epistemologies and ontologies as well as the scale of the body, these reflections circulate within the Global North with little sustained dialogue with scholars and activists in other regions, of which this piece is an example. In this context, we propose a decolonial multi-sited analytical approach, which links a transnational analysis of water contamination and scarcity due to extractive industry and gendered responses. This approach furthers decolonization in Anglophone geography, in that it promotes a multi-sited analysis of extractive industry as a form of geographical accountability. By building a multi-sited analysis that disrupts the North–South divide, we are emphasizing a decolonial approach to geographical scales of the consequences of water contamination and scarcity on women’s bodies and lives across space, and we can hold the extractive industry accountable on a transnational scale. The transnational extractive industry utilizes different geographical scales to blur the possibility of being held accountable by local communities and government to the consequences of its activities at multiple scales—the environment, communities, and bodies. Hence, the emphasis on a multi-sited understanding and practice of embodiment, water, and women’s bodies, makes it particularly pertinent to engage feminist geography in geographical decolonization more broadly (see also Zaragocin and Caretta, under review). Because of this multi-sited approach to gendered extractivism, we argue that a decolonial multi-sited framework serves to rethink the scale of embodied effects of extractive industry. Such an entry point effectively allows us to compare and contrast embodied water relations in WV and Ecuador (see Figure 1), while also enlarging the scale of our analysis to account for the transnational nature of the phenomenon we are examining.

Case studies: West Virginia, USA, and Cuenca, Ecuador

WV is a state in the eastern part of the United States. It is the only state that is completely comprised by the Appalachian Mountains, which run from New York to Alabama. Appalachia has historic ties with the coal industry since the beginning of the 1900s. Appalachia and WV’s economy remains reliant on coal, and now natural gas. Historically, companies at the state, national, and international levels have benefitted from extraction and have not reinvested into education and services that could benefit residents locally (Papyrakis and Gerlagh, 2004). Given the environmentally and socially damaging externalities resulting from energy extraction, this region has been defined as a sacrifice zone (Fox, 1999). Treated as marginal yet central to the nation’s ongoing project of energy modernity, the othering of Appalachia has occurred with tactics similar to processes in the Global South by environmental

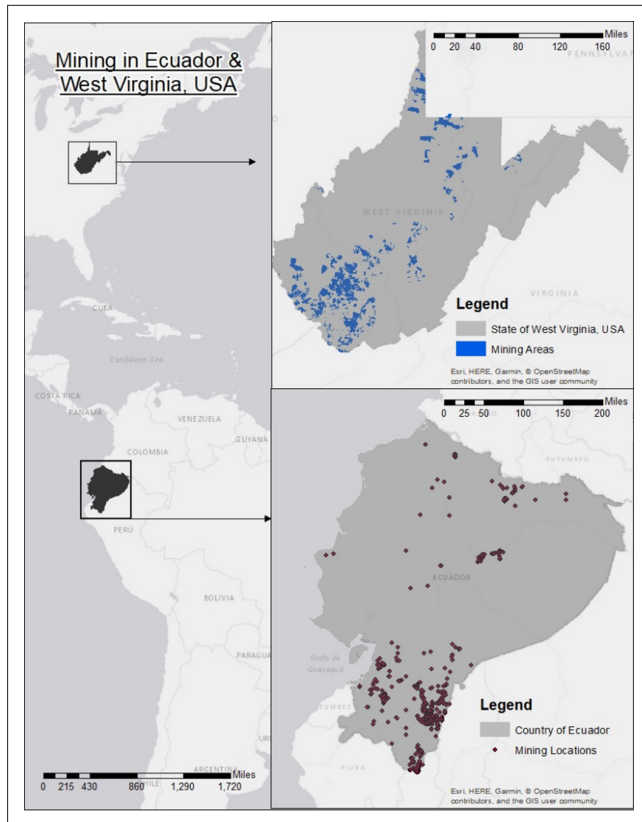


Figure 1. Map of study areas.

dispossession (Fox, 1999) and the othering of women and environmentalists (Bell, 2013). The state of WV provides water for domestic and productive purposes for 9m people on the East Coast of the United States or roughly 3% of the US population (Young et al., 2019). However, these waterways are jeopardized by the construction of three gas and oil pipelines and five more pipelines planned, stretching almost 500 miles and potentially affecting 2,246 stream sections and around 860 wetlands (West Virginia Rivers, 2017).

The Biosphere Reserve of Macizo del Cajas, in the region of Cuenca located in the south of Ecuador, supports the region's water supply and an important endemic biodiversity. The area surrounding the Reserve also holds significant reserves of silver and gold (Ministerio de Minería, 2016) and as such became a province prioritized for mining activity. There in 2011 the Río Blanco Mining Project was initiated as part of a process of extraction authorized by the Ecuadorian government. At that time, the Canadian company International Mineral Corporation (IMC) which was supported by local authorities summoned the local population to present the benefits that mining would bring to the area. After the start of operation in 2011, the mine was sold in 2013 to the company Junefield, Ecuagoldminig South America SA, which was mostly made up of Chinese capital. According to the company's data, the project would extract 605 thousand ounces of gold and 4.3 m ounces of silver in 11 years (Ecuador Productivo, 2016). The project covers 4,979 ha under concession, of which, according to the company, only 40 ha are

used for mining activities (“Proyecto Río Blanco Ya Exporta Material Mineral” 2018). The mining company and the Ecuadorian government's strategy has been to promote a sustainable development discourse that shifts attention from the consequences of environmental damage to the idea of a better distribution of the wealth generated by mining activity through the creation of jobs (Agencia de Regulacion y Control Minero, 2019; Ecuador TV, 2011). Responsible mining, as defined by the Ecuadorian government, claims to utilize high technology that will not damage the environment while in the same vein tackling poverty in the community of Molleturo (Torres Guzman, 2018). According to the Development Plans of the Cuenca region, the parish of Molleturo where the Río Blanco project is located is in fact among the poorest areas in the country.

Hence, while half a continent away from each other, Cuenca region and WV are both subjected to the same logic of extraction at the expense of water and disenfranchised and poor local residents.

Women, water, and organizing

In this section, we explore the case studies to draw out similarities and differences of how extraction women-led resistance has been motivated by embodied water pollution.

Women-led organizing

Several authors (e.g., Smith, 2015; Bell, 2013) highlighted the crucial role that women have played in spearheading activist movements for the improvement of people's lives in Appalachia. Mother Jones played a crucial role in the labor movement in the 1900s and laid the groundwork for the organizing of working-class women and men. The first instances of women's activism against coal mining, triggered by their concerns around water quality, were recorded in 1970s in Kentucky (Maggard, 1999) and in WV (Cable, 1993). These movements were established through women's preexisting networks through churches, town hall meetings, and potluck dinners (Rice and Burke, 2018). Unsurprisingly, women environmental activists have been identified as mothers. Their worry for their children's health fueled their willingness to work to stop environmental destruction (Caretta, Forthcoming; Willow and Keefer, 2015). This situation has not changed today. The number of organizations opposing energy extraction in WV is growing and many, especially within the most active ones, are headed by or completely comprised of women (Caretta, Forthcoming).

The percentage of poor households in Molleturo, where the Río Blanco project is located in Cuenca, Ecuador, is 89.03%; this percentage is disproportionately comprised of women-headed households (Cuenca GAD Municipal, 2015). Accordingly, the protagonists of the Río Blanco resistance have been mainly women peasants. Since 2008, members of the Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama (Defenders

of the Pachamama Women's Front) have positioned themselves against mega-mining projects across the country (Solano, 2013). The Women Defenders Front of the Pachamama have also played an important role in Río Blanco. Several women shared in the interviews carried out in 2011 that the women made the community aware of the plans of the mining company (IMC) and raised awareness about its negative consequences, effectively obstructing the influence of the mining company a priori. They also mentioned that in 2015 seven women members of the Defenders Front suffered physical aggression from the police for publicly protesting in the Molleturo park against President Correa with a sign that read, "responsible mining, miserable tale." In both case studies, organizing against the extractive industry is mostly led by women.

In the next sections we will demonstrate that while women are all guided by the same motivations in their resistance, there are also numerous intersectional differences between them. First, women in WV are often older and retirees, while women in Ecuador are younger and have partaken in intergenerational organized women's groups for over a decade. Second, the level of education varies, with women in WV having at the bare minimum a high-school diploma and often a college degree, while in most cases the women in Molleturo are illiterate. Regardless of their educational background, all women have an acute understanding of the environmental and social repercussions that political and industrial interests have or will have on their communities. Third, all women hold an occupation, as farmers in Ecuador and both in the private and public sectors in WV. The work of organizing for many of them generally blurs the line between work and free time and is an integral part of their daily routine and their identities. Finally, and most notably, the way that they are perceived by their fellow citizens is diametrically different. Women in WV have been long othered and presented as outsiders to the affected communities, even though they are locals or have resided in the area for a long time (Bell, 2013 and Caretta, Forthcoming). The general population in WV appears to remain hostage of the industry which has astutely portrayed energy extraction as the only viable development pathway for the state (Bell, 2013). Conversely, women in Ecuador are supported by the larger population in Molleturo and the city of Cuenca as the negative consequences of the exploitation of metallic mining in areas have awakened greater interest in the protection of water ("Río Blanco, Días 18").

Women's bodies and water

Women in both communities convey a sense of belonging and an embodied and emotional connection to water, which they express as a sense of enjoyment via recreation, as well as a feeling of love toward nature and a feeling that water and nature are part of their heart and soul.

I love West Virginia ... Until I came here, and I got my first sense of place and I just absolutely fell in love with it here, so

there's the physical component. I love these woods and these trees and these animals ... I can't really do that anywhere else, so this is the place that I love, these are the mountains that I have fought for and will fight for and have and will put my life on the line for many times ... (Interviewee #7, 3 May 2017)

Along the same lines, a woman from Molleturo shares how, before the mining company surrounded the area and caused the disappearance of an important water source, they used to move freely with their animals. When she realized the water was gone, she began to reflect on the consequences that the mining had on her community. Nowadays, she is one of the most visible faces of the Molleturo women opposed to mining:

Before [*the mining exploration*] I did not understand what was so bad about mining, then I started to see that every year the water supply was decreasing. Reforestation for the mining company includes the Peruvian quinoa and that plant is not good with water. It dries up the land ... Before we had many animals, and it was not easy to walk through the mud, and water basins. But now, the pampa is dry, and in summer the earth is yellow ... I believe that this is due to mining, although, the mining company says it is due to the change in climate. (Interviewee #4, 2018)

Conversely, the extractive industry in WV is described as a threat to water. When asked about their water stewardship work or about how they can maintain their work in the face of the transnational corporate extractive industry and the ideologies that would compromise water resources, women articulate their connection to water and WV as the driving force behind their work. This embodied connection motivates their desire to overcome the economic and political challenges of an energy-producing state:

We need to make it so people can get jobs and welcome businesses, but not at the expense of our community's health. I grew up in one of the most pristine forest of WV and if they ever got destroyed because of a stupid pipeline or fracking operation, that's like my heart and soul ... It seems like that state is just saying to do whatever you want. It's frustrating for the people who really care about enjoying that water and enjoy that land and having it for their kids and to recreate on. (Interviewee #12, 17 May 2017)

In the face of threats of water contamination from extractive industry that impacts their communities, families, health, and positive connections to water, women have an embodied experience of water through their struggle and fight for its protection. However, women's emotional and embodied connection to water is questioned, attacked, and marginalized. Women in WV illustrate instances in which their emotional and embodied connection toward water has given leeway to their belittling as

unprofessional. The women frequently describe how being perceived as emotional is detrimental to their work of resistance, which builds upon their efforts as citizen scientists to monitor water quality.

This passion and having an emotional attachment to my work is seen as a weakness. It's seen as flighty. Oh like ... it's not logical. The industry totally plays on this all the time, saying oh you're just being rash or emotional. Even if you're not. You're a woman so you must be. (Focus group, 22 September 2018)

Women in Ecuador face much worse prospects as they are physically attacked. Because of their resistance against mining, they faced criminalization charges enforced by governmental institutions, which effectively facilitated the work of the mining company with the purpose of demobilizing social protest. Women of Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama have suffered from arbitrary deprivation of liberty, physical abuse, and terrorist charges for the obstruction of public highways, and physical aggressions by pro-mining groups in Molleturo. This persecution caused some women to lower their profile or even abandon the group (Solano, 2013). In 2016, Junefield distributed jobs amongst the Río Blanco community. Women were hired to do care-work, especially in the kitchen and under poor working conditions. Women workers constantly felt in danger and after several protests they asked to be escorted to their homes at night. Yet, they were faced by harassment in the mining camp itself:

The cook began to harass me. I kept working and once the cook sent me to bring food from the cellar and he followed me, he took me by force to try to kiss me, but I gave him a good slap and told him that he has to respect me, then I went to the dining room to serve the food to the staff and I told him that I'm going to notify the engineers, he told me to go ahead and speak to them because they are the same as him. (Interviewee #2, 2018)

In all, women in WV and Ecuador have been protagonists in the struggle against mining activity due to its gendered consequences on women's bodies and access to clean water. As presented in this section, the territorial implications of extractive industry are experienced and understood primarily from an embodied resistance. The extractive industry is a transnational business that works and depends on a macro- and micro-scale at the same time. Whereas extractive industry exploits lands and bodies from a detached relationship to land, justified on the basis of its transnational scales, the response from women in both WV and Cuenca is on an intimate scale from the body. Women's emotional attachment and embodied experience of water quality and quantity deterioration are what have moved them to challenge the modes of operation of these transnational industrial powers. In addressing the scale of extractive industry and women's embodied responses to the practices of the

industry, we aim to show the benefits of using a decolonial multi-sited approach, which we will expand on in the following section.

Conclusions

Exploitative and extractive economic models jeopardizing water are often met with resistance and opposition by civil society (e.g., Bell, 2013; Bosworth, 2019). Hence, it is crucial to understand the embodied nature of people's perceptions of water and how this motivates their organizing against natural resource extraction.

In this paper, we contribute to the literature on extractive industry's effects on women's and indigenous people's lives (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2017; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Lu et al., 2017) by proposing an analytical framework exploring the social and embodied components of the extraction economy as it plays out in distinct waterscapes across the Americas. We particularly focus on how women organize against the extractive industry as a result of embodied water pollution in order to better understand how extractivism works across scales—the body, the environment, and transnationally. We contend a multi-sited approach that disrupts the North–South divide on the analysis of the consequences of the practices of the extractive industry and furthers a decolonial geographical approach in making apparent the embodied production and lived experience of territory across various scales. We are bringing together not only two apparently different case studies, but also concepts formulated within different geographical traditions that underlie different geographical understandings of the gendered embodied responses and in relation to water as well. We do this by linking Anglophone and Latin American geographies departing from the concepts of waterscapes and embodiment, coming from Anglophone geography, and *cuero-territorio* and *agua-territorio* originating from Latin American scholarship.

As shown, both Ecuador and WV have a long history of natural resources extraction. Women have responded to the exploitation by the hand of the extractive industry by organizing to resist and oppose—frontally, openly, or subtly. Women's organizing is triggered by their concerns over diminishing water quality and supply and how that impacts communities' future health and wellbeing. Women in WV express an embodied connection with the waters of the many rivers in the state and they mobilize to preserve and restore the clean waters that they perceive an embodied link with. Women in Cuenca are also acute onlookers who detect changes in their surrounding waterscapes and how these changes affect their bodies. They also have firsthand experience of how extractivism is manifested in gender-based harassment and water scarcity.

In both cases, women speak up and organize against the environmental and embodied consequences of extractivism. This narrative, however, is still marginal and is often ostracized and criminalized by companies and the governments of WV

and Ecuador. They experience the violence of extractivism through the “re-patriarchalism of territory” in the forms of a predominantly male workforce, increased care-work assigned to women, lower salaries for women, the commodification and contamination of natural resources, and the masculinization of space through intoxication with alcohol and consequent sexual violence (Colectiva Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2017; Halvorsen, 2018). Additionally, by stripping communities of their land and clean water, extractivism questions the sustainability of life, not only economic development (Colectiva Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2017). Along these lines, women’s organizing enacts a vision of desirable place to live, work, and care for their family (see also Haesbaert, 2004), opposing the prevalent jobs versus environment discourse and challenging the narrative that all economic development requires resource extraction and environmental degradation (see also Bolados, 2017).

These case studies highlight the importance of a decolonial multi-sited approach, as women’s motives and experiences are analyzed relationally, not separately, as part of the Global North and/or South geographical dichotomy. When activist scholars bring together case studies and localized theories, we are no longer just recognizing that other epistemologies and spatial ontologies exist. We are disrupting the linear flow of knowledge (either north–south or south–north), and move toward a more nuanced gendered response to extractivism focusing on structural issues. We argue for the recognition that space is constituted through a multiplicity of embodied experiences across multiple scales. Moreover, we contend that a multi-sited perspective can help geographers overcome the tendency to homogenize different realities rendering them as effectively disembodied. Articulating these concerns with current Latin American geographical debates on territory (including water) and arguing for a decolonial turn of knowledge production are keys to conceptually advancing the embodied dimensions of water (Halvorsen, 2018; Zaragocin, 2018).

By outlining women’s lived and embodied experiences and responses, this paper challenges problematic representations of Appalachia and Andean Latin America, especially women in rural areas as “poor,” “passive,” and “backwards” and the commonly held belief that extractive activities affect primarily the Global South and act as a separate process from those that occur in the Global North. Developing a common understanding of how transnational companies create similar societal consequences is beneficial to communities that are actively engaged in contesting extractive activity. This approach is particularly important for those who strive to halt water contamination and scarcity for disenfranchised and minority communities, as the women whose knowledge and experiences we were able to learn from. When we shared with women in both WV and Cuenca that we had seen similar dynamics in the other case study site, they were eager to know more and learn from each other. Community organizers in Ecuador expressed a desire to know more about the experiences of communities in WV, stressing that they see this as a crucial and necessary

approach to strengthening their own practices. Women no longer felt isolated in their struggles, and in the case of Ecuador, they felt immediately supported in knowing that women in the Global North are also motivated in their organizing because of embodied water scarcity and contamination. For Ecuadorian peasant women, this thought disrupts a narrative of the poor vulnerable third world woman, which they are explicit in asserting that this does not represent them. Accordingly, by exploring the consequences of the extractive industry from a decolonial multi-sited perspective, we can also move past the assumption that communities bearing the brunt of the social exploitations at the hands of international corporation are located only in the Global South.

While we have yet to facilitate reciprocal learning among these women’s groups through a funded research project, this paper is the first attempt to start this learning process. By presenting these case studies relationally, however, we encourage learning at the academic level by decolonizing geographical knowledge production by engaging with the debate on radical accountability, a central feature of current decolonial debates in Anglophone geography (Daigle, 2018). Moreover, we advance this discussion by going beyond an understanding of decolonization for Anglophone geography as the mere inclusion of other epistemologies and spatial ontologies. We also argue for the recognition of common structural forces cutting across continents such as extractivism. By doing this, we contend that a transnational understanding of the effect of natural resource extraction on waterways across the Americas is useful for expanding conceptual understandings of the relationship between water, embodiment, and community relations. We call on geographers, particularly those positioned as activist research scholars to consider the advantages of a decolonial multi-sited analysis in that it provides a nuanced approach to the study and questioning of structural, capitalist, and neoliberal powers and their effects on communities, territories, and bodies.

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