

## **Against extraction in Guatemala: multispecies strategies in vampiric times**

Marco Chivalán Carrillo, Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala, (AVANCSO) and Universidad de Murcia.

Silvia Posocco, Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London,  
ORCID iD 0000-0002-2075-1480

Twitter: @silviaposocco

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### **Biographical note**

Marco Chivalán Carrillo is a Maya thinker trained in Philosophy and History. He is a social researcher in the Social Imaginaries Research Team in AVANCSO and a co-author of *Sexo y Raza: Analíticas de la Blancura, el Deseo y la Sexualidad en Guatemala* (AVANCSO, 2015).

Silvia Posocco is an anthropologist based in the Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London and the author of *Secrecy and Insurgency: Socialities and Knowledge Practices in Guatemala* (Alabama University Press, 2014).

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### **Abstract**

In this article, we develop a speculative analysis of the agential modalities connected to the extractive industries that dominate the present history of Guatemala. We focus on appropriation, extraction and the destruction of places of refuge for humans and non-humans, as well as on the strategies and responses that emerge for thinking and doing ‘in the ruins’ (Tsing 2015) in seemingly apocalyptic conditions. We mobilize technoscience, multispecies thinking and Indigenous epistemologies to develop a decolonial theorization of the multiple agential modalities in play in these contemporary dynamics. More specifically, through the figures of the vampire and the snail, we explore structures of terror in the colonial order, multispecies strategies against capture, and the colonial matrix underpinning different planes and scales of mining of territory, bodies and substance. Contemporary forms of extraction are the manifestation of colonial practices, but are also tied to strategies of resistance to colonial machines and sex/race *dispositifs* (AVANCSO 2015) by Indigenous, poor and marginal constituencies organizing in defense of the commons. The article deploys decolonial knowledge practices and epistemologies for an analysis of the material-semiotic dimensions of extraction and racism in contemporary Guatemala.

**Keywords:** extraction, dispossession, colonial order, multispecies thinking, Indigenous epistemologies, resistance

A mí me quitaron la plaza de maestro cuando propuse la consulta sobre la hidroeléctrica.

Como eso no me intimidó me llevaron a la cárcel. Como castigo y para silenciarme. Quieren que salga muerto de aquí, acabado completamente, pero tengo fuerza. Me queda el respaldo del pueblo Q'eqchí. Tengo muy claro que es más valioso el río Cahabón que lo que yo pueda estar sufriendo en la cárcel.

Bernardo Caalí

The vampires are the immigrants, the dislocated ones, accused of sucking the blood of the rightful possessors of the land and of raping the virgin who must embody the purity of race and culture. So, in an orgy of solidarity with all the oppressed, one identifies firmly with the outlaws who have been the vampires in the perfervid imaginations of the upstanding members of the whole, natural, truly human, organic communities. But then one is forced to remember that the vampire is also the marauding figure of unnaturally breeding capital, which penetrates every whole being and sucks it dry in the lusty production and vastly unequal accumulation of wealth.

Donna Haraway (1997, 127)

## **Introduction: concepts, figures, problems**

This article approaches analytically multiple forms of agency connected to the extractive industries and projects that dominate the present history of Guatemala. It focuses on those who are conceiving, planning and managing appropriation and extraction, and consequently, the destruction of places of refuge for humans and non-humans, as well as on the responses to these seemingly apocalyptic conditions and the strategies that emerge for thinking and doing ‘in the ruins’ (Tsing 2015). Practices of expropriating vampirism take place at the dawn of the third millennium of the Gregorian calendar, the so-called 21st century, but their roots run deep and are tied to the extractive histories of the colonial order. Our critical approach to the analysis of the colonial order as always historically and culturally situated in its techniques of reification and complex temporalities, is informed by the noise generated by multispecies technoscience and Indigenous scholarship. Drawing on our reading of the work of Donna Haraway (1991, 1997, 2016), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993, 2004, 2015) and the collective work of Guatemalan scholars, local community leaders and organizations (AVANCSO 2016) and others (AVANCSO 2015; Chivalán 2016), we speculatively explore the following hypothesis: the practices of extractivism and extermination confirm racism as the founding myth of modernization (Bautista 2015), a colonial machine that was inaugurated with the invasion spearheaded by the bloodthirsty Pedro de Alvarado in the 16th century. This founding moment in the history of the colonial machine cannot be compared to the creation of the steam engine that powered industrialization, because colonial machines require racialized bodies as well as land in a mode of governing that functions through multiple forms of accumulation-dispossession.

We engage with the conceptual apparatus put forward in the text *Elq'ak ut kawil ch'oolej. Rilb'al li teep releb'aal iq' b'ar nake' risi xq'emal li xch'ochel Tezulutlan-Verapaz* (*Dispossessions and Resistances: A View to the Extractive Region North from Tezulutlan-Verapaz*), edited by the Association for the Advancement of the Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO). The authors of this text-*t'ot* – *t'ot* being the Maya Q'eqchi' word meaning *caracol* in Spanish and *snail* in English – argue that the contemporary operations of the extractive industries have inaugurated a fifth cycle of extractivism in Guatemala (AVANCSO 2016). The text-*t'ot* produced by the AVANCSO researchers takes the form of a snail, that is, a conceptual organization that does not share a Western linear teleology or structure. Instead, the text-*t'ot* models through the figure of the snail multiple forms of extractivism to account for cycles of life and death in Guatemala. At the same time, it weaves together the cyclical resistance of human and non-human inhabitants of the region. The *t'ot* is a Maya Q'eqchi' analytic of living and dying, as well as a way of figuring the cycles of resistance that have followed cycles of violent extraction. The text-*t'ot* connects to analytic and figurative strategies tied to Maya Q'eqchi' epistemologies. It also echoes histories of resistance in Indigenous communities in Zapatista territories.<sup>ii</sup> In this view, and as we explore further in the article, the current extractive cycle has been unfolding since 1995. Similarly to what took place in previous historical periods, contemporary dispossessions infringe on the lives and rights of people and the environment. AVANCSO researchers (2016) argue that historically and in the present, the state in Guatemala has responded to environmental struggles with violent strategies of repression and criminalization. They define criminalization as the suppression and harassment of community leaders that manifest in evictions, punitive

judicial proceedings, and prison sentences, as well as in the framing of environmental activism in the media as a criminal activity. The authors argue that:

‘At the level of the capitalist system, the fifth extractive cycle, or the fifth dispossession, relates to the phase of accumulation by dispossession tied to peripheral regions or extractive regions. In this phase, the restructuring of territories is also taking place – a spatio-temporal restructuring – guided by a (capitalist) logic of territory as much as by the logic of capital (Harvey 2005)’ (AVANCSO 2016, 61).

Drawing on this incisive analysis, we track different modes of capture and opposition against colonial *dispositifs* of dispossession. The forms of resistance of the *pueblos originarios* – Indigenous Peoples, or Native Peoples – and *campesinxs* – the category that designates a politically constituted collectivity of peasants – against these deadly projects are sufficient demonstration that their life, and regrettably, also their death, amount to resistance to five centuries of necropolitics (see Mbembe 2003),<sup>iii</sup> pursued alongside, and in connection to, other species. We explore how land, bodies and substance are contemporary domains of struggle where dynamics of dispossession and resistance are currently being articulated in Guatemala. To do so, we engage with and mobilize decolonizing approaches and perspectives putting into conversation analytics drawn from multispecies technoscience and Indigenous scholarship. In the course of the discussion, we return to the ‘accumulation by dispossession’ thesis put forward by Harvey (2004), but broaden the ethical, political, conceptual, epistemological and ontological terrain, extending and exceeding Harvey’s framing. With Donna Haraway’s

work and the multiple agential modalities foregrounded in the text-*t'ot*, we aim to develop an openness to the possibility of engaging with non-human figures in analytical storytelling. More specifically, we think collectively with the vampire and the snail in order to reflect and critically grapple with practices of resistance that develop in response to extractivism. The figure of the vampire inhabits multiple paradoxes, as ‘the one who pollutes lineages on the wedding night; the one who effects category transformations by illegitimate passages of substance; the one who drinks and infuses blood in a paradigmatic act of infecting whatever poses as pure; [...] the one who is undead, unnatural, and perversely incorruptible’ (Haraway 1997, 214). Nevertheless, the vampire is also simultaneously burdened by a multiplicity of associations, so much so that ‘once touched by the figure of this monster, one is forced to inhabit the swirling semantic field of vampire stories’ which tie this ‘undead and noninnocent figure’ to histories of racialization and differential and exclusionary constructions of the human (Haraway 1997, 215). The vampire is an ambivalent figure that is ambiguous as it is mobile, as it shuttles between its predatory capacity of suctioning others’ blood, to bearing the brunt of the racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia that has orchestrated vampire fantasies historically. Inhabiting paradox, the vampire suctions life and bestows death and is open to alliances that are as constitutively ambiguous and dangerous, as signaling the opening up of domains of possibility.

The other animal we are following is the snail – *t'ot* in Maya Q'eqchi', *caracol* in Spanish – a mollusk with the particularity of having the capacity of proceeding slowly in turns in the same way as its undulating and spiral carapace. This is an animal that inhabits paradox by being of the night, hibernating and, at the same time, reproducing

hermaphroditic life in conjunction with another. The snail is an important figure in Ancient Maya mathematics, astronomy, and ritual. As Malbrán Porto argues,

‘mollusks symbolism among the [Ancient] Maya is very varied and can be said to have had a mediating function, as the mollusk has its origin in water and mysteriously moves across the three planes of the universe, which it ties together in relation’ (2015, 17, our translation).

The agential entities of the text-*t’ot* therefore do not lead to the linearization of time and reification of space of Western epistemologies. Whilst there is a risk we might short-circuit in the process of learning to think with the text-*t’ot*, we are nevertheless at once summoned and interpellated by a *mundo maya* – a Maya world, a set of perspectives, and epistemological pre-theoretical commitments – that is not steeped in nostalgia but rather, in the concreteness of Maya knowledge practices and everyday life. Mucía (cited in AVANCSO 2016, xx) notes the salience of the figure of the snail both in terms of modeling mathematical knowledge and figuring living and dying: ‘The Maya zero, in the shape of the snail, represents birth and death, the beginning and end of a cycle which also contains previous cycles’ (Mucía, cited in AVANCSO 2016, xx). This is the reason for the importance of the snail in the analysis of the symbiotic and cyclical character of natureculture in the region discussed by Savaldó et al. (AVANCSO 2016). Furthermore, it is important to highlight here the inherently polysemic character of the figure of the snail, given that ‘in contemporary Maya languages, similes and links between the snail and the womb, the vagina, the fingertip, the navel, the eye and the heart stand out’ (AVANCSO 2016, xx). The semantic versatility of the snail propels us towards different



ways of figuring the cycles of living and dying. This exercise encourages us to remain vigilant and sensitive to strategies for countering the novel ways in which the old extractive techniques of the colonial order extend into the present.

The article focuses on multiple forms of extractivism in Guatemala, and on how decolonial praxes in defense of the commons challenge colonial logics in the present. First, it analyses contemporary extractive practices, notably mining, oil extraction, and intensive monoculture, with a view to interrogating the *longue durée* of the condition of coloniality and its syntagmatic structures of terror and violent critical events. Second, it considers multispecies strategies against capture, their conditions of possibility and actual manifestations. Third, it connects extractive processes to the body, considering contemporary practices such as oocyte (ova) retrieval, as present-day dynamics which conjures up the dispossession of Indigenous women wet-nursing Criollo infants in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción in the 18th century. Guided by the figures of the vampire and the snail, the article draws on multispecies thinking and Guatemalan Indigenous perspectives. It offers a conceptual contribution to tackle present conditions which are generating wounds, suffering, devastation, dispossession, harm and death. The analytical intent is animated by the possibility of inhabiting speculative futures. It is also spurred on by the resistance, multiple struggles and reverberations of life in Guatemala.

We began our conversation in Guatemala, where we first met on 22 October 2016, in the context of a public performance of artist Manuel Tzoc Bucup, 'Piel' [Skin].<sup>iv</sup> This text has been conceived and elaborate jointly – *por cuatro manos* – with sensibility and alertness to the vectors of power that transverse bodies, persons, languages and texts in

their multiple and shifting co-constitution. We acknowledge and take responsibility for how our bodies are marked as they transect different racial formations and for the ways in which knowledge production emerges from intra-species and interspecies sociality.

Chivalán Carrillo says about himself that he is ‘the one who responds to the name Marco’ and has been traversed by multiple *dispositifs* of production of subjectivity and political fictions, such as ‘*indio, marica, homo sapiens, philosopher, literate person, mayor de edad, researcher, queer activist*’. Chivalán Carrillo has been inoculated by a grammar that is alien to the K’iche’ language – his mother tongue – since the age of six, biopolitically speaking. Chivalán Carrillo’s (de-)formation includes studies in Philosophy and Literature in a private university through scholarships. Newly displaced by feminist and interspecies perspectives, Chivalán Carrillo is based in a corner from which they give an account of the issues faced in the country where he was born, and in the global South more generally. Posocco also acknowledges the multiplicity of vectors for the production of subjectivity that marks their positionality, as well as the geopolitical histories, global power asymmetries and dynamics which make part of this account possible. Two trajectories bear foregrounding here. First, the embeddedness in the Guatemalan context produced over time through a mix of biographical and research endeavors and experiences. Second, the privileges afforded by assignations of whiteness in Guatemala and elsewhere, and the (de-)formation of a British university education which have not thwarted a commitment to activist scholarship, anti-racist and queer critique.

### **Critical events, or the syntagmatic structures of terror**

An analysis of contemporary *dispositifs* of dispossession is particularly urgent at the present time. In this section, we chronicle some of the critical events that, regrettably, make practices of extractivism and multispecies annihilation legible in the present. We are trained in feminist of color and multispecies approaches of citation and writing (Ahmed 2013) and are interested in delineating these cases in order to distance ourselves from ‘greenwashing’, that is, facile forms of environmentalism that are as self-serving as they are re-colonizing. We are also not interested in keeping anyone’s ecological conscience clean, least of all our own. Rather, we want to foreground these events to excavate the multiple power relations that constitute them. Recent events drag into the present previous cycles of violent extraction. Furthermore, we feel compelled to drill down into the dense points of articulation where practices of extraction and practices of resistance intersect and become intertwined. In these terms, we argue that critical events delineate and (re)constitute decolonial grammars - *gramáticas descoloniales* – that pollute the colonial order from within. Through relevant extracts from the press and political analysis available in the public sphere, we outline the ground our arguments aim to connect to, and trace the most recent episodes of extraction and criminalization. More broadly, we aim to trouble and undermine the apparent dichotomy between extractivism and resistance. Rather than relying on this problematic distinction, we opt for showing the complex, thick relations that underpin colonial modes of governing and the technologies of the body that are generated as a result in dense points of articulation of ‘oppositional consciousness’ (Sandoval 2000).

On 3 January 2019, Prensa Comunitaria published an intervention by journalist Carlos Choc regarding the campaign of aggression and criminalization he experienced as a response to his efforts to protect Lake Izabal against the pollution caused by a multinational nickel mining conglomerate.<sup>v</sup>

On 3 January 2019, an ACOGUATE report highlighted the effects of criminalization noting that many of those detained in the context of protests over access to land or against extractive developments are community leaders and in many cases also *autoridades ancestrales*, that is, Indigenous leaders part of Indigenous forms of community governance.<sup>vi</sup> The criminalization of environmental and land activism is therefore also an attack against the identity and governing structures of Indigenous communities.<sup>vii</sup>

On 17 January 2017, Sebastian Alonso was also killed in similar circumstances.<sup>viii</sup>

On 23 November 2018, Lolita Chávez concluded a series of feminist workshops denouncing the destruction of the environment and biodiversity, noting that Guatemalans use 20% of the available water in the country and that water consumption is highly stratified and unequal (Castillo 2018).<sup>ix</sup>

On 20 November 2018, author Gorka Castillo denounced the operations of mining, logging and hydroelectric plants, arguing that they operate with the sanction and support of the current government of Guatemala. At the same time Indigenous leaders opposing the looting of resources are being harassed and killed, as evidenced by the 137 assaults and 21 murders of Indigenous protesters in recent times in the country.<sup>x</sup>

On 28 December 2018, an article published in *América Económica*, ‘Mining conflict in Guatemala troubles the Industry across Latin America’, reported that an executive from a Canadian mining company stated that Indigenous peoples have great influence over the political class and this makes them practically invincible. The statement was offered anonymously, presumably out of fear of reprisals.<sup>xi</sup>

In view of these manifold sites of struggle, we consider how these critical events might be said to connect to the arguments put forward in the text-*t’ot* edited by AVANCSO mentioned earlier and examine more closely the analysis of neo-extractive capitalism. The AVANCSO research team specifically focuses on the so-called Northern Extractive Region, or Región Extractiva Norte (REN) and Tezulutlán-Verapaz, that is, areas encompassing Petén and Alta Verapaz (REN) and some areas of Quiché, Baja Verapaz and Izabal. They argue that in the REN region, one finds a greater concentration of extractive industries and projects than anywhere else in the country. The REN is the only region where there is a notable concentration of hydroelectric plants, mining, agro-industry and oil extraction (AVANCSO 2012, 2016, 5). AVANCSO argues that historically, the northern region of the country was seen as a repository of ‘natural resources and riches’ and that this imaginary was very prominent across colonial, neocolonial and neo-extractivist cycles of dispossession that appealed to the governmental interests, as well as those of popular constituencies and the market (AVANCSO 2012, 2014, 4). The AVANCSO researchers note that: ‘currently, the REN is the only region where oil exploration and extraction is taking place. In the REN region, important mining and agro-industry projects are being carried out. Sixty per cent of large hydroelectric projects planned or currently under construction are found here’ (2016, 5).

The book-*t'ot* argues that extractivism is nothing new in Guatemala and charts cycles of dispossessions (or cyclical dispossessions) that cannot be reduced to economic cycles, or phases in political economy. The text-*t'ot* proposes that the five cycles of dispossession be understood in terms of dynamics of coloniality. The first cycle marks the colonial invasion in the colonial era up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the longest cycle, lasting almost four centuries. The second cycle, or neocolonial dispossession, extends from 1860-1870 to 1944-1954. These dates are significant, because they mark the Liberal reforms undertaken by Justo Rufino Barrios that included capillary confiscation of Indigenous territories (Grandin 2000, Martínez Pélaez 2009) and the so-called October Revolution in the decade of democratic rule during the presidencies of Juan José Arévalo (1945-1951) and Jacobo Árbenz Guzman (1951-1954) that came to a violent and abrupt end with the CIA-sponsored coup of 1954 which put an end to land reform and other democratizing experiments undertaken between 1945 and 1954 (Grandin 2004, Schlesinger and Kinzer 2005). The third dispossession, or neocolonial recomposition, takes place between 1955 and 1978. The fourth dispossession is the ecocide-genocide between 1978 and 1994, whilst the current cycle is that of capitalist neoliberal extraction, or neo-extractivism and starts in 1995 (AVANCSO 2016, 8). To each extractive cycle there corresponds a cycle of resistance. This genealogy of extractivism and resistances to it has been developed by a multiplicity of agential entities engaged in an effort to develop an analysis of their condition and through collective reflection and memories. The AVANCSO research team explain that the crafting of this genealogy has been possible through a community-grounded and community-led process of production of knowledge,

a collectively managed knowledge practice called *encuentro de saberes*, or ‘knowledge encounters’, or ‘encounters between ways of knowing’.

The multiplicity of human and non-human entities that participated in the elaboration of the text-*t’ot* is an example of the specific modality of *investigación-acción*, or research-action spearheaded by AVANCSO. The authors of the text-*t’ot* explain that the analysis emerged out of *encuentros* – meetings, or gatherings – that brought together men and women with diverse histories and perspectives. The *encuentros* were not grounded in an extractive understanding of knowledge production, but rather, they operated as a *comunidad de investigación* – a research community, or ‘*Jun Komonil aj tz’ilonel*’ in which everyone participated, contributed, asked some questions, and offered some answers (AVANCSO 2016, 101-102). We therefore join this mode for the articulation of knowledge through a type of research that follows the form and path of the *t’ot* in its spiral trail that eschews linearity, contributing to the analytical elements and dissemination of the text-*t’ot* crisscrossing it with other knowledges and cycles in knowledge production and understanding. Through these cycles we can begin to envision the figure of the *t’ot*, the snail whose spiral-like structure entails a concatenation of dispossessions of nature, land, time-labor, and bodies: (AVANCSO 2016, 200).

A decolonial reading of the text-*t’ot* suggests that the birth of capitalism has to be found not in industrialization, but rather, during colonization. The text-*t’ot* challenges any romanticizing of what is now understood as the pre-invasion *mundo mesoamericano*, or Mesoamerican world. The Maya world was not exempt from extractivist practices, though these certainly stemmed from an-Other worldview. The text-*t’ot* deploys

Harvey's notion of 'accumulation by dispossession' in order to give an account of extractivism in its more recent permutations. Nevertheless, it does not restrict the analysis to an account of accumulation by extraction of labor time, but rather recasts the very notion of 'extraction' in order to encompass other dimensions. In this sense, then, the *text-t'ot* expands, reworks and distorts the semiotic-material specificity that might underpin the notion. This expansion also occasions new points of convergence, for example, with Moore's idea of the production of 'cheap nature', that is to say, the cheapening of that which can be expropriated: nature with or without humans (Moore 2016). A similar critical re-orientation of Harvey's (2004) notion of 'accumulation by dispossession' is offered by Goldstein, who argues that 'dispossession as a social relation of deprivation, impoverishment, and displacement suggests a constitutive relation between land and bodies that is often overlooked' (Goldstein 2018, 85), here also echoing the analysis of the territory-body, or '*territorio-cuerpo*', offered by Cabnal, which we explore in more detail below.

### **Multispecies strategies against hunts and capture**

The five cycles of dispossession charted by the *text-t'ot* (AVANCSO 2016) are concerned with the different ways in which the tentacles of the colonial machine may be said to relate to different techniques of accumulation and expropriation. Dispossession in Guatemala constitute a set of logics, which have been in operation from the moment of the colonial invasion and over five centuries. Pedro de Alvarado writing to Hernán Cortés on 11 April 1524 commented on how he was engaged in testing the capacity and



willingness of the Kaqchikel people he encountered ‘to terrorize the earth’.<sup>xii</sup> ‘Terrorizing the earth’ is a syntagmatic phrase that can be tracked as constituting a regime of truth, in Foucauldian terms (Foucault 1975, 2014), that has had important consequences over time. The colonial machine is therefore also from its very inception a machine that produces terror (see also Mbembe 2003). We invoke Foucault in our efforts to understand the governing of the body-territory during the colonial invasion and the colonial order in order to tease out the relations of power. In *On the government of the living: lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980* (2014), Foucault asks: ‘What is the relationship between the fact of being a subject in a relation of power and a subject through which, for which, and regarding which the truth is manifested? What is this double sense of the word subject, subject in a relation of power, subject in a manifestation of truth?’ (2014, 81). Foucault’s reflections are relevant to our arguments in so far as they connect to our own exploration of types of body-territories produced through *dispositifs* of colonial truth. What types of subject and territory were performed through the inhabiting of truth of the colonial order? We explore these questions specifically in relation to how extractivism establishes a new order directed to the dispossession not only of ‘man’ but also ‘nature’.

The colonial order is a necropolitical order (cf. Mbembe 2003) which sustains the biopolitical projects of those who flaunt fully liveable lives at the expense of those consigned to death or slow death (Patterson 1982). The colonial techniques of expropriation extend to the *territorio cuerpo* [territory body] and *territorio tierra* [territory land] - to follow Lorena Cabnal’s arguments (2013) articulated from the lens of *feminismo comunitario* and Maya Q’eqchi’ and Xinka perspectives. According to Cabnal,

in Guatemala, the nexus territory-body and territory-land corresponds to a multiplicity of ways of producing death and life simultaneously. The colonial machine started to work with the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado and his army. Lovell et al. recover an account that captures the violence of these events very effectively:

‘[...] The local population blocked trails in an attempt to impede the invaders. Nonetheless, Alvarado and his men proceeded towards Xetulul ... They continued to advance, pursuing retreating K’iche warriors for half a league beyond Xetulul. We have no records, as we have elsewhere, of houses being burned, crops destroyed, provisions seized, or people taken prisoner or branded as slaves of war. The invaders camped out in Xetulul’s marketplace and spent two days pacifying the surrounding areas. Abundant groves of cacao, zapote and other tropical fruits created a natural defense that favored the locals because it did not lend itself to the deployment of the Spanish Cavalry’ (2016, 38).

The scene describing the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado offered above shows the inexorable force and aggression of the invaders, the technique of war that was deployed through the burning of houses, and the destruction of crops and provisions of the local populations. Lovell et al. go on to show that the threats of punishment issued by Alvarado included the destruction of the extensions of maize cultivation - ‘les talaría sus maizales’ (2016, 61). This is not at all an unusual scene in the history of Guatemala, but rather, a familiar technique of devastation that has befallen those who, at different times, have

opposed colonial governance. As Chamayou has argued, ‘as a social phenomenon, Indian hunting was indissolubly a large-scale economic activity, a way of life’ (Albert Du Boys, cited in Chamayou 2013, 30-1). Nevertheless, the scene describing the violence that accompanied the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado also portrays the indissolubly tight interspecies connections as a ‘natural defense’. This is also an allegory of multispecies resistance that is also, thankfully, iterative in the moments of annihilation exile from sites of refuge. From this decolonial chronotope there emerge complex questions concerning the conditions of possibility of flight as well as the (interspecies) socialities and practices of ‘making kin’ (Clark and Haraway 2018). In view of our interest in oxymoronic figures, it is important to note that the invasion-colonization of Guatemala also entails attending to emerging research in colonial historiography that shows how Nahuas and Oaxaqueños in particular participated in the invasion of Mesoamerica (Matthew 2017, 86). Matthew’s analysis shows that history is made of conflicts, negations, alliances and betrayals. And yet, this new perspective on the complicities which were part of the experience of invasion-colonization do not in any way invalidate the analysis of the cruelty in play in the process, though it does suggest a shift in perspective, following Matthew, towards a reconstruction of the past through the gaze of the Indigenous collaborators in the establishment of the colonial order.

Extractivism summons histories of violence, bloodshed and death, but also points to the potentialities of resistance and struggles for habitable forms of life and death that may be worthy of honor and respect. Tying together Haraway’s string figures with the *text-t’ot* and networking multispecies and Indigenous analytics and their respective practices of fabulation offers strategies for inhabiting vulnerable and wounded conditions and worlds

in times of technoculture (see also Tsing 2004, 2018; Tsing et al. 2017). These forms of dwelling and cohabitation entail ethical commitments to modest decolonizing practices founded in partial and hybrid articulations (Haraway 2016, 7). This relational ordering is dependent upon ‘partial connections’ (Strathern 1991). We are interested in the possibilities that partial connections hold for enabling or activating dissident forms of social practice, re-description and re-narration. The task is to explore how situated zoo-techno-political imaginaries can undermine and unsettle the colonial imaginaries we inhabit in our everyday through alliances.

### **Planes and scales of body-territory (bio)extraction**

Horizons of hunt and capture and necropolitical analytics blur the experiential boundaries and taxonomic distinctions between humans and non-humans. They show how histories of colonial extraction have redrawn the contours of bodies and territories. The body-territory conjuncture offered in Lorena Cabnal’s analysis of dynamics of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and speciesism tied to experiences of dispossession in Guatemala powerfully connects to arguments in the Black radical tradition that insist that capitalism should be understood intrinsically in its racialized and racializing dimensions, that is, as *racial* capitalism (Robinson 1983, Melamed 2015). The analytical plane opened up by the text-*t’ot* also suggests that we pursue the analysis of racial formations as much as of racial capitalism alongside the multiplicity of agential responses to dynamics of extractivism and dispossession by rescaling body-territories along *t’ot* geometries and planes. This is significant because extractive practices are *already* rescaling the object of

extraction in important ways. In this view, it is important to track how in the course of different cycles of dispossession – colonial, neocolonial recomposition (1955-1978), ecocide-genocide (1978 – 1994) and neo-extractivism (1995-present) (AVANCSO 2016:8) – specific modes of capture of racialized bodies have developed and flourished.

With reference to the colonial cycle, a focus on practices of wet nursing illustrates the vampiric dynamics that sustained the production of the body politic and the seemingly conflicting imperatives that arose out of eugenic assumptions tying whiteness to ideals of racial improvement of bodies, populations, and territories. The analysis is reoriented in the direction of the domestic space, allowing for an excavation of the relations that governed bodies in domestic settings where intimacy, exploitation and violence coexisted in the late colonial period. The case of twenty-one Indigenous women wet nursing the offspring of Creole families in the Jocotenango area between 1797 and 1799 illustrates how Indigenous women were key to dynamics of extraction and accumulation not only in production, but also in reproduction. Wet nurses in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción had to forcibly leave twenty-eight of their own children in their hometown. Historical records held in the Historical Archive of Central America in Guatemala City show that eight of these children died while their mothers were breastfeeding Creole children. Creole children's lives and survival appear, from this perspective, closely tied to Indigenous children's death (Chivalán Carrillo 2015). Physicians were key to the administration of Creole children's lives and Indigenous children's death. The historical sources show the role of physicians in cementing ideas regarding the importance of using wet nurses to feed Creole children, but showed no concern for Indigenous children's health. The disposability of Indigenous bodies was also the foundation for the establishment of the

authority of medical knowledge, through physicians and their efforts to ‘improve’ the health of the Creole population. In this raciological order, wet nursing in Jocotenango does not fit neatly into a history of women’s labour, waged breast feeding, child abandonment, milk parenting, or social mobility. Indigenous women never wanted to be wet nurses. The historical experience of the wet nurses of Jocotenango in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century has much in common with the historical accounts of slave women used as wet nurses in the United States (Golden 1996). Interestingly, the medical discourse about racial degeneration through milk was not present in Guatemala.

The extraction of Indigenous women’s bodily substance took different routes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when transnational dynamics of extraction in embodied dimensions developed through transnational adoption circuits. From the mid-twentieth century through to what Salvadó et al. have termed the cycle of neocolonial recomposition (1955-1978), Guatemala became a key exporter of adoptees. The country consistently ranked as the top Latin American ‘sending country’ of adoptees during the last three decades of the 20th century (Briggs 2010, Posocco 2014). Sizable transnational adoption flows intensified during the course of the Guatemalan conflict (1960 – 1996). Transnational adoptions were at times and in specific instances linked to the handling of children caught up in Army assaults against Maya and other Indigenous communities during the Guatemalan conflict’s scorched earth campaigns of the early 1980s (Posocco 2017). These cases of forced removal and abduction of children make the relation between the practice of transnational adoption and genocide explicit. Numbers peaked in the post-Peace Accords period, when transnational adoptions progressively evolved into thoroughly commodified and heavily marketized arrangements (Posocco 2011, 2014). Holding practices of wet

nursing in colonial times alongside transnational adoption in postcolonial war-torn 20<sup>th</sup> century Guatemala within the same frame in the light of their shared extractive character, it is difficult to tease apart the reproductive labour that sustained them from biolabour (Cooper and Waldby 2014), whilst accounting for the vampiric qualities and conditions in the respective extractive planes of the *t'ot* – snail. As extractive practices such as oocyte (ova) harvesting grow in the medical and new reproductive technologies sector in Guatemala City, it will be important to examine how raciological orders shift in and through these emergent planes and registers of extraction. As in the case of wet nursing, the contribution made by Indigenous women is at once captured and denied. Extractive harvesting practices and looted body/territories are obscured. From this perspective, it seems important to consider the parallels between the extraction and circulation of milk and oocytes, reproductive capacity and bodily substance. What is remarkably constant in all these dynamics, however, is that despite the historical specificities, the erasure of Indigenous women's substance, agency and labour endures over time and across cycles. Bodily substance and bodily capacities are detached from Indigenous women through a form of dispossession that ensures the fantasy of reproduction of the body politic in which they are actively disappeared. A peculiarly vampiric raciological thinking underpins these forms of extraction, where Indigenous bodies are marked for death, mined and plundered to ensure the future of the body politic, their substance at once phagocytized, gobbled up and disavowed. Extractive cycles in their vampiric dynamics are haunted by the figure of the Indigenous woman as 'the universal donor' (Nelson 1999, 241) whose exploitation is rescaling the planes of body and territory in old and new technologies of hunting and capture.

Judith Butler argues that vulnerability is inherent in any sentient being (2004). However, when seeking to qualify this condition or capacity further, it is clear that the intensity of vulnerability depends on the charge of vectors of power in multiple systems of domination. The murders of community leaders in late 2018 and early 2019 we chronicled in our description of the contemporary state of play of extraction *enflesh* the relations between the violence exerted by the agents of neocolonialism and those who are heirs to the techniques that perpetuate accumulation through different scales of dispossession. Less prominent, more inconspicuous and out of view, the histories of extraction of bodily substance and bodily capacities give a glimpse into the domestic spaces, medical and legal environments where those responsible for the heightened state of vulnerability of ‘the dispossessed’ – be them human or non-human – operate. Opportunities for accumulation correspond to deepening intensities of exposure and scales of loss of sustenance, shelter and life for human and non-human ‘wretched of the earth’ (Fanon 1971). Extractive industries such as mining, hydroelectric plants and intensive monoculture (sugar, coffee, palm) entail the exhaustion of rivers and lakes as well as their perverse use through, for example, the capture and re-direction of waterways, as in the case of the re-routing of the Cahabón River away from communities and into the pipeline of the hydroelectric plants known as RENACE.<sup>xiii</sup> These industries’ extractive activities engender necropolitical spaces of multiple human and non-human abandonment and death. Shaping policies and practices of accumulation by multiple dispossessions germane to extractive vampirism, the agents and sponsors of extraction reduce ‘nature’ – with or without humans – to a vast field of exploitable resources



producing what Moore has called ‘cheap nature’ (Moore 2016). In the plane of the body and its components, mining extends to bodily substance and bodily capacities.

The defense of territory and life on the part of Indigenous and campesinx communities are practices of resistance and as such, *decolonial* practices in the sense that Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018, 12-31) gives to the term in her reading of the sociology of images as a decolonial practice. Resistance in this context is indisputable, despite the fact that those who oppose these developments may end up in criminalized, detained or otherwise directed to modalities of death, including social death (Patterson 1982). In Foucault’s description (1975), forms of sovereign death-making entail the spectacularization of punishment in hypervisible rituals. Contemporary hunt and capture take spectacular and more covert forms, in ever deepening planes of mining of body-territories.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have focused on ambivalence and explored manifold dimensions of extractivism in Guatemala. We have addressed dilemmas, analytical moves and speculation to grapple with the complexity of extractivism operating on land and bodies. The vampire and the snail have allowed us to dwell on the paradoxical and enflashed dimensions of extraction. These processes are paradoxical because they operate through techniques and *dispositifs* which are vehicles of suffering, pain and death, but at the same time, they are intersected by flight, fissures, and counter-moves and counter-narratives of resistance which seek to sabotage the deadly machines of dispossession. The figures who

have accompanied our fabulation of Guatemala's '*ayer-hoy*', or the temporality of 'past-present', are also fundamentally oxymoronic. For example, the case of vampirism in the Indigenous town of Jocotenango and in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción in the late colonial period, allowed us to strategically conjure up the colonial landscape, in ways that, whilst being far from innocent, allowed us to envision how Indigenous women employed as wet nurses by Criollo families in Nueva Guatemala inhabited a paradox of the colonial order. They are the figure which could contaminate the whiteness and racial purity of the Criollo newborns, whilst Criollo infants are turned into vampires who extract milk in order to live. By suctioning the Indigenous woman's milk, the Criollo infant absorbs the life of the Indigenous woman's own offspring, as the Indigenous child is placed in a zone of abandonment (Povinelli 2011) or 'in the ruins' (Tsing 2015), without shelter, food, or parental support. Likewise, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we established other analogies with extractive industries and ventures that take territory, body or substance as their object of concern. We considered how these extractive practices intent on extracting 'natural resources' for profit – including bodies, substances, and capacities – expose humans and non-humans to abandonment and death. In contrast, the defenders of what Lorena Cabnal calls body-territory (Cabnal 2013), are enfolded in the oxymoronic figure of the vampire, as they turn to pollute the intentionality of extractive agencies and agents as they labour and organize to oppose their projects of accumulation and cheapening of nature.

Crisscrossing readings of technoscience and multispecies thought with the text-*t'ot* and Indigenous perspectives, we have sought to problematize the analysis of the cycles of extractivism and resistance through a decolonial reading. This perspective speaks to, and

is grounded in, a community of companion entities and species (Haraway 2003) committed to the development of analytics of naturecultures. Our reading of the text-*t'ot* also suggests that the text-*t'ot* itself is the result not only of an *encuentro de saberes* – or ‘meeting of ways of knowing’ – among humans (researchers, community leaders), but also between humans and non-humans. Non-human entities entangled with humans produced an articulation of natureculture, given that rivers, forests, animals, water and land and the multiple blossoming of *ri uwach ulew* – a K'iche' phrase whose meaning in Spanish can be approximated as *faz de la Tierra* o *mirada de la Tierra* and in English as ‘Earth's doing’ or ‘Earth's gaze’ – engendered a *saber-haciendo* – a knowing-and-doing and a *hacer-sabiendo* – a doing-and-knowing in partial and local articulations. It also partially enmeshed with Haraway's reading of the Chthulucene (2016). Furthermore, it proposes a reconfiguration of sites of refuge given that, as Tsing (2015:6) suggests, ‘in a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin’ (2015, 6). These diffractions bring us closer towards decolonizing politics, ethics and practice which entail resisting, in the face of death. The cycle of living and dying also brings us closer to thinking the conditions of possibility of a regeneration of the colonial wound and a new blossoming, rather than being hardened into inaction in the face of the apocalypse.

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i 'They took away my teaching post when I proposed a public consultation on the hydroelectric plant. As that did not intimidate me, they put me in jail. As punishment and to silence me. They want me to get out of here dead, completely finished, but I have strength. I have the support of the Q'eqchi' people. It is very clear to me that the Cahabón River is more important than what I might be suffering in jail'. Bernardo Caal, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=249398> (Last accessed 16/07/2019).

ii Casanova argues that 'the new proposal of the Caracoles combines and integrates in practice both logics, that is the construction of power by networks of autonomous peoples (*pueblos autónomos*) and the integration of power structures such as the self-government by those who struggle for an alternative within the system. This proposal appropriates elements that are anti-system (*anti-sistémicos*) in that the establishment of rebel autonomous municipalities start from the strengthening of the capacity for resistance of the peoples (*pueblos*) and their capacity to create an alternative system' (2009, 339, our translation).

iii Biopolitics and necropolitics refer to analytics of modes of governance focused on the management of life (Foucault, 1977), but also primarily concerned with 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death' (Mbembe, 2003, 39). Necropolitics, for Mbembe (2003), foregrounds the centrality of death, terror formations and death-worlds in the contemporary organization of social and political life. See also Haritaworn et al. (2014), Posocco (2017).

iv For more details on the performance, please see: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/24/pictures-of-the-day-24-october-2016/guatemalan-artist-manuel-tzoc-presents-his-performance-called-pi/> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

v <http://www.prensacomunitaria.org/tag/carlos-ernesto-choc/> (Last accessed 20/02/2019).

vi <https://acoguate.org/informe-de-observacion-2017/> (Last accessed 20/02/2019).

vii <https://acoguate.org/corozal-arriba-el-derecho-de-tierra-y-la-criminalizacion-de-sus-autoridades-ancestrales/> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

viii <http://www.biodiversidadla.org/Noticias/Asesinan-a-dos-defensores-que-resisten-a-proyectos-hidroelectricos-en-Ixquisis> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

ix <http://www.albedrio.org/htm/articulos/a/alc-001.html> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

x <http://www.albedrio.org/htm/noticias/ctxt201118.html> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

xi <http://www.albedrio.org/htm/noticias/americaeconomica281218.html> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).

xii 'Envié a la ciudad de Guatemala [Iximché], que está a diez leguas de ésta [Utatlán], a decirles y requerirles de parte de Su Majestad que me enviasen gente de guerra, así para saber de ellos la voluntad que tenían como para atemorizar la tierra'. Pedro de Alvarado a Hernán Cortés, 11 de abril de 1524

xiii For a detailed account of the case, see <https://prolegalgt.wordpress.com/2018/01/02/cahabon-la-historia-del-secuestro-de-un-rio-y-su-descarada-impunidad/> (Last accessed, 20/02/2019).