



The Transnational Capture and Pillage of Central America

Massive invasion of transnational corporations, a multifaceted and tragic toll on the Central American Dry Corridor Region

Nubia Barrera Silva

Abstract

Honduras, a geopolitical enclave of the Central American Dry Corridor, has reproduced and extended the original and irreconcilable contradiction between ultra-liberal police-military capitalism and the small Garifuna, indigenous and peasant properties settled on fertile land, where abundant fresh water provides livelihoods and food security, with a domino effect on the other countries of the isthmus. The destructive eco-environmental effects of agro-industrial, mining and hydroelectric corporations, tourism projects, maritime infrastructure, and the implementation of employment and economic development zones (EEDZ) or model cities have unleashed cascades of conflicts, endless arbitrariness and attacks on human rights and nature.

Conflicting transboundary waters due to acid mine surface and subsoil drainage ecological fractures in protected areas and Tela Bay have altered the environmental balance of a large part of the Atlantic coast. The dual meteorological character alternates a period of intense droughts with torrential rains, floods, hurricanes, landslides and even volcanic eruptions with a global impact on the collapse of the climate. The disruption of rain-fed agricultural cycles and the loss of staple grain harvests have affected more than a million families, throwing hundreds of people into the migratory void, leaving behind their way of life and the *raison d'être* of their existence.



Foto de [Kaustubh Raj](#) en [Unsplash](#)

Introduction

Central America is located in the Northern Hemisphere of the torrid zone, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. It is a natural bridge between the Americas,¹ the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Its biogeography is spread over eleven ecoregions of freshwater, mountains and volcanoes in the Ring of Fire. In this paper, Honduras is the geopolitical

The massive invasion of corporate capital demanded from the outset the complete militarisation of Honduras, extended to the other neighbouring CDC countries as a strategy of occupation and indiscriminate domination of natural capital and the creation of model cities.

epicentre of the Central American Dry Corridor (hereafter CDC). Activist Bertha Cáceres highlights Honduras' geopolitical position in the concentration of capital from the most promising sectors of the Global North and its subsequent expansion to the rest of the CDC countries.² The massive invasion of corporate capital demanded from the outset the complete militarisation of Honduras, extended to the other neighbouring CDC countries as a strategy of occupation and indiscriminate domination of natural capital and the creation of model cities.

The literature consulted agrees with Cáceres' assertions, pointing to the 2009 coup d'état as a turning point in the symbiotic armouring of ultra-capitalist enclaves with corrupt colonial practices under the influence of transnational

In 2016, Honduran social and popular organisations claimed that 35% of the national territory had been surrendered to national and transnational companies.

corporate power. In this scenario, some 300 hydroelectric projects and no less than 870 mining projects were approved. At the same time, the way was cleared to implement EEDZ or 'model cities', thousands of square kilometres of continental shelf were handed over to the British Gas Group for oil exploration. Added to this are tourism megaprojects and the uncontrolled expansion of large-scale monoculture plantations, particularly sugar cane and African palm. In 2016, Honduran social and popular organisations claimed that 35% of the national territory had been surrendered to national and transnational companies, overriding the constitutional rights of the ethnic-Garifuna and peasant peoples.³

Unlike the mestizo elites of the CDC, rural peoples have claimed territorial sovereignty, an inalienable right of the native being, subject to constitutional rights. Rootedness to the territory is a singular feature in the correlation between the social economy, communal organisations and the cultures of native peoples. The practice of cooperativism assumes a

Contents

- ➔ Abstract... (1)
- ➔ Introduction... (2)
- ➔ State policy, the expansion of plantations in "Middle America"... (3)
- ➔ The Hondupalma cooperative: Honduran model of peasant oil palm production... (4)
- ➔ In Honduras, water shortages, droughts and irreversible ecological-environmental fractures... (5)
- ➔ Land Reforms and Neoliberal Agricultural Modernisation... (6)
- ➔ Cross-Border Expansion of Oil Palm and Impacts on Rural Land Subtraction... (7)
- ➔ Transnationals in the Central American Dry Canal... (8)
- ➔ REDD+ projects IN CSEC... (9)
- ➔ Transnational Capitalism's Land Expropriation, an Irreconcilable Contradiction with Communal Properties... (10)
- ➔ Mining in Conflict with the Ecology of Binational and Transboundary Rivers Contaminated with Heavy Metals... (11)
- ➔ Model Cities, a Transnational Investment Network in the Central American Dry Corridor... (15)
- ➔ The Panama Canal... (16)
- ➔ Transnational Dispossession, Climate Crisis and Other Failed Solutions by UN Member Organisations... (17)
- ➔ Conclusions ... (19)
- ➔ Related Links... (21)
- ➔ About the author and Jus Semper ... (22)

¹ Global Water Partnership. Central América. [La Situación de los Recursos Hídricos en Centroamérica: Hacia una gestión integrada](#). 2017.

² Trucchi, Giorgio. "Modelo Extractivista: el despojo de territorios y la criminalización de la protesta en Centroamérica" en "América Media": pueblos en resistencia ante un pasado colonial que perdura con imposición y violencia, ed. By Winfridus Overbeek, (Montevideo: Movimiento Mundial de los Bosques Tropicales.2016), 5.

³ Trucchi, "América Media": Pueblos y territorios que resisten ante un sistema opresivo de discriminación. En "América Media, 6

preferential place, immersed in the dispute between competition and cooperation. The debate of Adam Smith's ideology of liberalism, "asserts that greed is natural and that it is possible to take away goods, positions or rights; cooperation, on the contrary, is a method opposed to aggression, it is equitable assistance, collaboration".⁴ A distinctive and determining place in the cosmovision of the original peoples is to be found in "identity. This is a kind of virtual place, which is indispensable for us to refer to and explain a certain number of things, but which does not really have a real existence".⁵ Anthropology allows us to build relationships between social being, culture and nature. Hence, in this paper, the story of tensions and conflicts created by capital in territories that have been dismembered from their own daily lives, facts and oral histories of their inhabitants, once they have been reconverted into enclaves of transnational corporations (TNCs) projects of agribusiness, extractive mining, hydroelectric plants, maritime and land infrastructures and hotel construction, is inescapable.

The territory is, therefore, more than the geographical floor; it is distinct from land, as land is a factor of agricultural production and an essential component in the solid economic structure based on self-determination and autonomy. This context allows us to better understand the phenomenon of exclusion in the territories and the economic and cultural significance of land dispossession as a loss of food security and food sovereignty. At the same time, the paradigms of good living have been thrown into uncertain migratory precipices, mainly towards the USA. This logic is confronted with the biogeographical dislocations of accumulation capitalism towards maritime and road transit enclaves installed in spaces of political-territorial exception of the EEDZ.

From a Mesoamerican perspective, we approach the CDC region, home to 90% of the inhabitants of the isthmus, from two perspectives: one cross-border agro-industrial, mining, hydrographic and the other, small-scale agriculture in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and the settlement of peoples located in the pre-Columbian areas of Mexico and the Caribbean, with reference to the Mayan, Lenca, Pipil, Kuna, Chorotegas, Nasos, Bribris, among others, millenary residents of these places.⁶ Guatemala is home to the largest indigenous population in the isthmus; about 45% of the national population and 61% of the total number of essential grain producers. On the other hand, we establish some contrasts and similarities between the state policy of cross-border expansion of the Jaremar-Aceytesa Group's African palm plantations and that of the Honduran Dinant, in confrontation with indigenous peoples, Garifuna communities and peasant farmers. This has resulted in incalculable ecological, environmental and social fractures through the imposition of agrarian reforms for the benefit of TNCs. The accumulation of expropriations must be added to the enclave zones, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) projects and the exploitation of open-pit mines, which are also in conflict due to heavy metal pollution in binational and transboundary rivers. Finally, capital dispossession is manifested in the climate crisis and other failed solutions of various UN organisations in food security. In particular, we mention the most significant successes of the Hondupalma cooperative, an unprecedented model of peasant production of African palm in contrast to the never-ending claim for rights over the commons in South America and Mesoamerica.

State policy, the expansion of plantations in "Middle America"

In the isthmus, monocultures spread without limits, border divisions or natural zones that governments and the respective environmental authorities should protect. This characteristic aims to see the whole and treat it as a business project of great magnitude and outside the national proportions of each Central American country. TNCs schedule

⁴ Amadeo Gómez, *Cooperativismo* (Apurímac: Perú, 2013), 119.

⁵ Lévi-Strauss et C. Benoist, J. M. (Comps.). *L'identité*, Paris: Pub, 1977, 45

⁶ Giorgio Trucchi. "América Media" pueblos en resistencia ante un pasado colonial que perdura con imposición y violencia. En: "*América Media*," 2016, 3

experimentation dates and pilot plans, as in the 1950s and 1960s in the Agúan Valley in Honduras and the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.⁷ From the transnational business point of view, the region's governments agree on developing strategies for outsourced production, tax exemption, support for free trade agreements, concentration of state subsidies, and corporate responsibility strategies, which are common in palm companies. The geographical extension of oil palm is increasing to 370,000 hectares, meeting the global demand for this product. It accounts for 51% of the oil consumed in global terms.⁸

Expansion of oil palm monocultures without geographical boundaries

| Country | N° hectares of farm | Characteristics | Displacement of communities, Ecological and environmental damage |
|------------|---|---|---|
| Guatemala | 130.000 hectares. | Palm cultivation occupies 4% of the country's total agricultural area. | Southern Petén, Izabal, Alta Verapaz, Quiché, Q'eqchí, Escuintla, Suchitepéquez, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos and Retalhuleu. |
| Honduras | 200.000 hectares. Around 600,000 tonnes of oil are produced annually. One of the main producers in South America. Plantations extend from Cortés to Colón (Atlantic coast). In Punta Izopo and Jeanette Kawas, monocultures are distributed between 20 and 30% of the protected areas, respectively. | The Hondupalma cooperative in 2021 produced around 8% of the national production. It brings together more than 600 smallholders (Report of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil). In 2019, the value of each tonne ranged from \$90 to \$95. Each worker earned \$20 per day for 12 hours of work per day (Guevara and Frazier). | Deforestation and loss of the territory of the Garifuna and Miskito communities. Since the coup d'état (2009), the Bajo Agúan Valley has recorded up to 160 murders of peasants in the last decade, not counting those who have disappeared inside the plantations. The company DINANT, owned by the Facussé family, the largest palm oil producer in the country, is blamed. |
| Costa Rica | 66,419.7 hectares (Agricultural Census, 2014). Production destined for the food and cosmetics industry. | Distributed over 2,169 farms, 67% of the area is located on 8.6% of the farms. 50% of the sown area is in the possession of 3% of producers. | |

Source: Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG), 2019⁹ y Henry Picado. "Palma aceitera como política de Estado en Centroamérica". GRAIN, 2017, 1-3 <https://grain.org/es/article/5663-palma-aceitera-como-politica-de-estado-en-centroamerica>.

The Hondupalma Cooperative: Honduran Model of Peasant Oil Palm Production

Palm oil production has intensified in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras. Sixty-one per cent of the national output comes from the Dinant Corporation, the Jaremar Group and Aceydesa. It also has the highest levels of violence. In contrast, the alternative model of the Hondupalma cooperative - among the 50 largest companies - is distributed over 10,644 hectares and spread over thirty plantations certified by the RSPO and ISCC Plus (International Sustainability and Carbon Certification). Annually, the cooperative produces around 222,000 tonnes of palm fruit bunches, processed by the members themselves into edible oil, soap, detergent and other products under three brands: Clavel, Jansur and El Portal, and exports to El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, the Netherlands and Germany. The surplus is sold in local markets. A relevant fact of commercial success is attributed to the practice of principles, values, respect for traditional

⁷ This work updates the data presented in: Nubia Barrera Silva. "Capitalism of Dispossession in the Palm Oil Plantations in the Countries of the Global South" - Contexts, Struggles and Peasant Resistance — The Jus Semper Global Alliance, August 2020.

⁸ Picado, Henry. "Palma aceitera como política de Estado en Centroamérica". GRAIN, 2017, 21-23

⁹ Guevara Leonardo y Lesly Frazier. "Honduras: palma africana se apodera del agua y de áreas protegidas". Mongabay, 2019.

land use and the application of agricultural sowing techniques. For example, intercropping of maize and other farm produce has optimised product quality soil and water protection with positive environmental consequences.¹⁰

In addition, the subsidiary company Energéticos Renovables generates renewable electricity exclusively for the parent company's operation. It uses biogas extracted from oily wastewater left over from the palm oil extraction process. The plant has a production capacity of 2000 kilowatt hours and supplies 45% of the cooperative's total electricity consumption. Among the difficulties, the cooperative's management says, is the lack of local strategies to cope with unexpected weather conditions, whether torrential rains or drought. We add the question: how will the next generation take over the company's management, as the ageing of the members makes it increasingly real that Hondupalma is losing its traditional peasant principles and values?¹¹

In Honduras, water shortages, droughts and irreversible ecological-environmental fractures

The Department of Atlántida is recognised as the top water producer, with four national parks: Jeannette Kaws, Pico Bonito, Nombre de Dios and Punta Izopo, a wildlife refuge, Cuero and Salado, and the Lancetilla Botanical Garden, the second most important in Latin America. All are natural sanctuaries that serve as lungs, sustenance and protection for millions of animal species and hundreds of communities in the country. Despite this exceptional richness in the protection of the ecosystems of the CDC, African palm has invaded the protected areas of Punta Izopo and Jeanette Kaws between 20% and 30%, up to the so-called core zone. The fire in Punta Izopo in 2019 resumed the same devastating force on the border with Paris de Lean, adjacent to the monoculture plantations of the Dinant Corporation and the 300 hectares of palm owned by the municipal mayor of Tela. In 2019, the state handed them an additional 157 hectares of protected areas and water-producing zones as if they were their own, to the fear and helpless gaze of the surrounding population. Day after day, they watch the decline of the lagoon and marine ecosystems without being able to stop the alterations in climate patterns and subsistence agriculture.¹²

Each African palm plant, after twelve years, consumes an average of 40 to 50 litres of water per day. Atlantis also has the second-largest underground water table. In 2019, rainfall barely reached 2500 mm of precipitation per year. And, instead of being recharged into the groundwater, the water flowed directly into the sea. In Colón, the wetlands have also dried up. The amount of water extracted by the palm is not replenished. The subsystem of protected areas in Tela Bay is

In all cases, politicians and business people enjoy complete freedom and impunity to burn, cultivate and destroy natural assets, despite complaints from well-known activists.

the cornerstone of the biological corridor of the Honduran Caribbean. These sites are responsible for maintaining the environmental balance of a large part of the Atlantic coast. Similarly, they have penetrated the areas of Mico Quemado in Yoro, Cuero, and Salado in Ceiba. Ecological deterioration is

unstoppable; the economic incentive of public policies promotes the expansion of the agricultural frontier in natural parks and micro-watersheds, with the aggravating factor of the excessive use of agrochemicals, logging, burning and draining of wetlands (Fundación para la Protección de Lancetilla, Punta Sal and Texiguat Prolansate).¹³ In all cases, politicians and business people enjoy complete freedom and impunity to burn, cultivate and destroy natural assets, despite complaints from well-known activists in the municipality of Tela.

¹⁰ Pérez, Iolany.

¹¹ Pérez, Yolany.

¹² Guevara, Leonardo y Lesly Frazier.

¹³ It has a territorial extension of 4251 square kilometres, more than half of which are protected areas. In: Guevara, Leonardo y Lesly Frazier.

Droughts in the CDC decrease the supply of locally consumed agricultural products and raise the costs of alternative sources to compensate for deficits. Another key risk to water supply is the imbalance that characterises the biogeography of Central America: 70% of the freshwater bodies available for human use are concentrated in the Atlantic Zone. However, the largest population agglomeration is located in the Pacific region. Similarly, the El Niño phenomenon accentuates the hydro-meteorological pattern, characterised by an annual period of intense droughts alternating with another of torrential rains and floods: water deficits and prolonged dry periods of more than three months predominate. These droughts and excessive rainfall patterns impact the two main annual harvest cycles of more than one million subsistence farming families of basic grains.¹⁴

Land Reforms and Neoliberal Agricultural Modernisation

There is a consensus among intellectuals, social organisations and politicians that the coup d'état against Manuel Zelaya in 2009 was crucial in reconfiguring power relations in the CDC region. The 1982 and 1992 laws promoted agricultural modernisation to replace the Peasant Agrarian Reform Law (1962), under the principle that anything goes for the benefit of the landowner-capitalist. For the first time, profitability became a priority within the framework of the debt contracted by the country. The sale and purchase of land away from the market boosted the concentration of profits for foreigners and nationals. According to Marx, "competition levels market prices, i.e. the products of the best land were sold as expensively as those of inferior land. It is this remnant which remains after deducting from the price of the products of the best land the cost of its production, which constitutes the rent".¹⁵ Under this procedure, the expropriation of land was consolidated through the forced sale of cooperatives, as they were vital organisations in the rural peasant economy. "In production cooperatives, the cooperative member: as a worker, he either tills the land or transforms the raw material or produces the service; as a member, he assumes responsibilities, proposes alternatives and makes decisions".¹⁶

In short: (i) Under the policies of accelerated modernisation of land tenure to market logic, they dealt a final blow to the Agrarian Reform: (ii) A large part of the small and medium landowners sold their reformed land and became day labourers. According to Marx,¹⁷ every improvement in agriculture or industry produces more with the same labour, in producing as much or even more with less labour. Nor need he resort to tilling inferior land, and successive capital investments in the same land remain equally productive. (iii) The forced sale of land prevailed in the most fertile and prosperous Atlantic coast region. Thus, *57% of the cooperatives' lands remained in the hands of Miguel Facussé Barjun and René Morales (Nicaraguan politician), the new rivals of political power vis-à-vis the US companies. In short, the dynamics of dispossession through violence, intimidation, coercion and threats by business people and their armed local narco-politicians were combined with the rapid expansion of African palm monoculture plantations. Other injustices were added against maize and rice crops, the basis of peasant food security, through agro-toxic fumigation, a pressure mechanism for the forced land sale. On the plantations, younger farmers became day labourers, cutting palm fruit or risking a leap into the void of migration.*¹⁸

We have stated that in Honduras, the economy of transnational capital is mobilised through the municipality of Amapala on the island of Zacate Grande. A bridge connects it to the mainland. It occupies the Isla del Tigre, the seat of the

¹⁴ Hábitat para la Humanidad. *Caracterización del Corredor Seco del Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica*. <https://www.habitat.org>. 10

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Miseria de la Filosofía* (Moscú: Editorial Progreso, 1981), 128

¹⁶ Amadeo Gómez, 27.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, 135.

¹⁸ Delphine Prunier. "La desigualdad como ventaja comparativa: fronteras, asimetrías territoriales y extractivismo agrícola. Apuntes desde el caso de Honduras". *CEMCA DOI: 10.22134/trace.80.2021.795* (2020), 207,11.

municipal corporation, and the Zacate Grande peninsula. After being declared a tourist zone, waves of expropriations

Private landowner justice has monopolised 65 beaches enclosed in walls and guarded by private armies. Only three beaches were left freely accessible to resident families, who were harassed by security personnel attached to landowners and foreigners.

and land sales followed without the required prior consultation with 24 black Garifuna communities dedicated to fishing and agriculture. Zacate Grande became a place of residence and a holiday resort for wealthy families. According to estimates by the Association for the Integral Development of the Zacate Grande

Peninsula and the Defence of the Territory (ADEPZA), under the deliberate absence of the state and land speculation, private landowner justice has monopolised 65 beaches enclosed in walls and guarded by private armies. Only three beaches were left freely accessible to resident families, who were harassed by security personnel attached to landowners and foreigners. Since the early 1960s, Carmen Malespín's name has embodied the massive accumulation of land through the inheritance titles of her grandfather's family, former Honduran president Terencio Sierra. These titles are opaque, questioned and ambiguous as to the location of the plots. However, the Constitutional Court ruled in her favour. This decision placed personal rights above the Constitution, prohibiting foreign ownership of coastal land. Over the decades, wealthy families have made successive sales and purchases. Under this logic, between 1982 and 1987, Malespín transferred the largest extension of Zacate Grande, an agricultural production area, to Miguel Facussé.¹⁹

Cross-Border Expansion of Oil Palm and Impacts on Rural Land Subtraction

The National Federation of Palm Growers of Honduras (Coopeagropal) manages the remaining 31% of the planted area, equivalent to 20% of production. In contrast, the Palma Tica consortium, a subsidiary of the transnational Chiquita Brands, is one of the four large companies of the Numar Group. It operates in Central America and Panama. It controls the processing and marketing of 80% of crude oil. It owns 40% of the planted area, equivalent to 24,800 hectares. In addition, some 19,200 hectares are planted by independent producers, who are financed with mortgage loans. At the same time, as part of the payment, the entire production is transferred to them for fourteen years.²⁰

Thus [capitalist] rent, far from converting the capitalist usufructuary into a simple labourer 'and from 'wresting from the colonist the surplus of the product, which he can only consider as his own', places before the owner of the soil—instead of the slave, the serf, the peasant census-taker and the wage-earner—the industrial capitalist (...). Once the ownership of land has become a source of income, the owner receives only what remains after deduction of the cost of production, determined not only by the wage but also by the industrial profit.²¹

It is stressed that the Numar Group, through its subsidiary Agricultural Services and Development (ASD), controls the entire supply of germplasm to the independent producers, Palma Tica SA and Coopeagropal. According to Picado, ASD has exported more than 300 million seeds to almost all oil palm producing countries in the world. In Iberian America, 65% of the planted area of monoculture palm contains ASD varieties, occupying more than 11% of the total planted area. Currently, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras have introduced palm-based agro-energy. One example, Fenapalmah, in 2015 claimed that 7 out of 10 oil extraction plants produced biomass energy.²²

¹⁹ Roux Hélène y Beth Geglia “¿Excepción o continuismo? Nuevos enclaves: poder e infraestructura en Honduras”, UAM Iztapalapa Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades núm. 87 · año 40 · julio-diciembre (2019). núm. 87, 34, 35.

²⁰ Henry Picado. “Palma aceitera como política de Estado en Centroamérica”. GRAIN, 2017, 23.

²¹ Karl Marx, 129.

²² Henry Picado, 23

Transnationals in the Central American Dry Canal

The governments and politicians of the CDC act according to agro-industrial demands and interests. The political and business elites lack the slightest interest in contributing to the development and industrialisation of the region's benefit by getting involved in drug trafficking and corruption. Costa Rica opted for de-financing peasant agriculture to bet on public-private agro-industrial investment. Thus began an industry marked by inequalities and powerful economic interests.²³

The never-ending claim to rights over the commons in South America and Mesoamerica

In Guatemala (2016): after 30 years, the African palm arrived in the Osteros municipalities of Tiquisate and Nueva Concepción, both of which border the Madre Vieja River, which rises in the high mountains of Quiché and Chimaltenango. According to the villagers, the river had not reached the sea for more than 15 years in the dry season. In February 2016, communal organisations, governmental institutions, human rights organisations, and the church, among others with recognised experience, met with representatives of the banana agro-industries and sugar engineers. After denouncing the theft of water, the populations demanded the return of the river to its natural course in the direction of the mouth of the river and the mangroves. The unrest focused on the Hame Group, a producer of African palm. Months ago, one of its companies, REPSA, was accused of the biggest ecocide in recent Guatemalan history; the contamination of the La Pasión River. Two days later, a large communal group went to the plantations in Pinar del Río, the site of the most significant deviations. After radicalising the demands, the people demanded that the transnationals comply with what had been agreed. As Guatemala is the only country in Central America without a water law, the Hame group argued that it had an advantage inherited from the now-defunct United Fruit Company to use a canal as a waterway. The community, supported by the mayor, then succeeded in closing the diversion, allowing the water level of Madre Vieja to rise. At the same time, they demanded the closure of the La Sierra diversion on the road to the sugar cane and banana plantations. The community members threw hundreds of stones on this occasion until the river was completely blocked. Thus, the waters of the Madre Vieja once again flowed back into the river amidst the discomfort and the withdrawal of the representatives of the sugar cane plantations. Then it was announced that the river reached the sea, and the river reached the mangrove swamp. For the community, it was undeniable: as long as the river reaches the sea, there will be negotiation and dialogue.

However, it did not end there, and soon the alterations of the riverbed returned. After 18 deliberations on the recovery of the natural course of the Madre Vieja River, the community withdrew from the technical roundtable due to non-compliance with the agreement. In April, the Social and Popular Assembly called for the great March for Water, which demands the human right to water for communities and nature. They left from La Mesilla, Tecún Umán and Purulhá. They called them the three great watersheds of our country. The people of Madre Vieja joined them and welcomed the Southern watershed, comprised of the women of the Cajolá community, the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), the Food Sovereignty Network and many other organisations and communities. They form a fence with banners and placards displaying their slogan 'the rivers to the sea, the rivers to the mangrove'. The rainy season starts in May. The communities know that the river will carry water to its mouth, but for the Madre Vieja leaders, the struggle is not over. Now, their concern is about what will happen next year.²⁴ In conclusion, the triumph of the communities' causes, even with the support of local authorities, is always in

²³ Henry Picado, 22-23.

²⁴ Carlos Salvatierra. Madre Vieja: el río que llegó al mar. En "América Media", 14,15,16.

dispute. In the face of dispossession, the transnationals renege on agreements under long-standing legal and illegal procedures until they take the natural patrimony.

REDD+ projects in CSEC

In Central America, REDD+ projects (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) are part of another strategy of rural land expropriation imposed by investment funds, multilateral organisations and international NGOs that call themselves conservationists. According to a study by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Central America has three large forest blocks: the Maya forest on the borders of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize; the Moskitia in Honduras and Nicaragua; and the Darien Gap. This stretch of wetlands and forests connects the CDC with extensive forests in Colombia in South America. In Guatemala, the Maya Biosphere Reserve, located in the department of Petén, is home to 85% of the country's protected areas. The green zone contains approximately 1.25 million hectares of forest. In response to the problem of forest reduction, integrated plans were created between corporate organisations and the territorial governance of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Between 2019 and 2021, 425 communities in the four countries will participate in implementing integrated management models for concessions governed by 25-year contracts through compliance with certain rules.²⁵

TNCs have transformed the ownership of communal lands and forests into forest concessions within the same reserves, a requirement for legal access on a usufruct basis as a natural resource. The pretext is to combat deforestation, climate change and adverse effects on the Global South. Since 2009, TNCs have turned Guatemala into a costly experimental laboratory for environmental services compensation projects. In 2012, according to the Honduran Institute of Forestry Sciences (ICF), Honduras' forests covered about 6.59 million hectares, equivalent to 59% of the country's surface area. Forty-seven per cent belonged to the state, 14 per cent to municipalities, and 39 per cent ceded to the UN-sponsored private sector REDD+ programme. Six Garifuna communities owned 1,600 hectares of land. However, since 2005, paramilitary forces have been closing their easements against the Supreme Court ruling and violation of ILO Convention 169, as opposed to corporate interests in carbon sequestration. In this sense, they have expropriated the Garifuna communities of northern Honduras and the Miskita of the Atlantic coast and then privatised them. REDD+ means that forests are managed and unaltered from the conservationist vision.²⁶ We highlight the REDD+ project "Forests for Life" in the Sierra del Lacandón, which covers 202,865 hectares and is financed by the European Union and the German government through the International Climate Initiative. The Property Law in Honduras (2003-2004), advised by the World Bank, quickly privatised the land under the perverse incentive of REDD+ emissions offsets. According to data from the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests, 760,000 hectares of Honduran mosquito territory have been titled through cooperatives, a legal requirement for privatisation.²⁷

Joint research by The Guardian, Die Zeit and SourceMaterial revealed that 94% of REDD+ carbon offsets certified by Verra, the world's leading carbon credit certifier, are 'worthless'. In the fossil fuel industry:

Baselines are calculated for convenience, and forest conservation programmes do not deliver any additional measurable CO2 reductions. Verra receives a commission for each credit it approves, creating a clear conflict of

²⁵ [Organizaciones indígenas en Centroamérica y Colombia reducen su vulnerabilidad frente al cambio climático por medio de iniciativas sostenibles. 23 de febrero de 2022.](#)

²⁶ [¿A quién le pertenece el bosque en Honduras? – DW – 04/12/2012.](#) 4 de diciembre 2014.

²⁷ Carlos Salvatierra, 31-35.

interest that incentivises the overestimation of carbon credits that can be sold. Experts have long argued that carbon offsets are a dead letter.²⁸

In four recent case studies added to the EJAtlas, every REDD+ project investigated was found to have an "inflated baseline", grossly overstating avoided deforestation. The climate debt incurred by developed countries is climate debt owed to forest stewardship communities in the Global South, not as a quid pro quo, not as a carbon offset, but as a climate and ecological debt.²⁹

Transnational Capitalism's Land Expropriation, an Irreconcilable Contradiction with Communal Properties

In Honduran enclave zones, the extractive industry is implicated in community conflicts and resistance. Between 2017 and 2019, the following rights were violated:

- Free and informed consent.
- Right to life, physical and moral integrity.
- Healthy environment and water.
- Defence of ancestral land and collective possession over the territory.
- Freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- Traditional livelihood practices and participation in public life in 87 projects.³⁰

A complaint was filed by the Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia in September 2013, as Azucarera del Norte SA encircled the La Candelaria tribe. Azunosa used to his advantage the supplanting of the legal order under siege and subsequent massive occupation of peasants in the territories of La Candelaria. Subsequently, under the guise of corporate social responsibility, it signed lease agreements with the peasants for the monoculture of sugar cane. In 2013, the indigenous peoples were dispossessed.³¹ In the sector of Guanchias,³² department of Yoro, around 700 families were evicted from their crops and houses were razed to the ground amidst heavy police deployment. Because Azunosa claims land ownership, it has filed a civil suit against the peasant organisations. In a frequent practice of destroying basic grain crops, Azunosa violently razed more than 500 plots of corn. This is a serious attack on the right to food in the rural sector, where 63% of the population lives in poverty and 50% in extreme poverty.

Let's see: 44% of Central America's forests are in indigenous territories. Since the beginning of 2015, communities in resistance have not let their guard down in the struggle to restore land and forest rights. In Mesoamerica, six and nine out of 10 South American countries have at least one legal framework validated by international bodies on the recognition of collective land tenure rights. However, governments evade proper implementation of the legal framework, while threats to community leaders by extractive industries have increased.³³ In no country have capital administrators managed broad and transparent consultation procedures according to ILO Convention 169; hence, conflicts and

²⁸ Rugh Nathaniel y Llaverio-Pasquina. "[Desacreditando los créditos de carbono](#)". 2023.

²⁹ Rugh Nathaniel y Llaverio-Pasquina.

³⁰ [Derechos Colectivos Vulnerados: Honduras](#). marzo 8 de 2022.

³¹ [Derechos Colectivos Vulnerados: Honduras](#). marzo 8 de 2022.

³² The peasant families are "clustered in at least 30 enterprises belonging to the National Federation of Peasants of Honduras (Fenach), the National Centre of Rural Workers (Cnrc) and the Movement of Landless Peasants of Yoro (Mccstdy). In Giorgio Trucchi. Honduras: Azunosa destruye hectáreas de cultivos. [Más desalojos de familias campesinas](#). 10 de agosto de 2023.

³³ [Rights and Resources Initiative \(RRI\). Annual Report 2022](#).

REDD+ proposals have accelerated the climate crisis by adding to the expansion of mineral extraction, water resource exploitation, and large-scale monoculture oil palm, sugar cane and fruit plantations.

permanent complaints about the lack of dialogue, representation and corruption from the elaboration and implementation of REDD+ projects. The approaches, consultation methodologies, and financial sources are similar and aim to privatise forests and territories under the guise of conservation. These policies have denied communities the free availability and access to forests as customary eco-

environmental goods: easement roads, timber uses, access to food tubers, medicinal plants and water. Consequently, REDD+ proposals have accelerated the climate crisis by adding to the expansion of mineral extraction, water resource exploitation, and large-scale monoculture oil palm, sugar cane and fruit plantations.

Another sensitive point relates to the property rights of indigenous and peasant communities, which are often poorly recognised or unclear in national legislation and seem to make it easier for landowners and TNCs to expropriate them. For ECLAC, the REDD+ process will also have to deal with difficulties with legislation that makes land titling or formalisation conditional on the landowner carrying out agricultural activities.³⁴ The imposition of states of siege, the granting of extractive licences in ancestral territories and social exclusion have generated serious conflicts and generalised violence in a deliberate manner.

Thus, in 16 South American countries (2020), 17,6 % of the land belonged to Afro-descendant or indigenous communities, and 3,2 % was in collective use. In recognised areas, communities have faced land tenure insecurity. Indeed, collective use areas decreased from 3 % in 2015 to 3,2 % in 2020. Similarly, actual communal ownership grew by 17 million hectares, from 16,7% to 17,6%. In Costa Rica, indigenous leader Levi Sucre Romero of the RIBCA Network, representing eight communities, warns that the government is not applying the law.³⁵ In Guatemala, under the slogan "Nothing to celebrate", indigenous people rejected the official commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Central American independence.³⁶

*Colonialist discourses and practices, such as dispossession, racism, negationism and violence. From the government, the implementation of assimilation policies, the reduction of the budget for functioning human rights and territorial bodies, and the disregard for prior consultation. Through the recurrent regime of the state of siege, social protest has been repressed. In addition, the so-called pact of the corrupt guarantees them impunity and racism against the backdrop of economic inequality and political marginalisation.*³⁷

Mining in Conflict with the Ecology of Binational and Transboundary Rivers Contaminated with Heavy Metals

Since colonial transboundary demarcation concerns boundary lines in protected areas and watersheds, regional integration procedures and sustainable development strategies have been applied in these biogeographical areas. At least

³⁴ Sanhueza, José Eduardo y Mariana Antonissen. "REDD+ en América Latina". CEPAL: Santiago de Chile. 2014, 31. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b31af25f-9a6d-41cb-bff5-9442ed548110/content>

³⁵ Article 1 of the Indigenous Law 6172 states: "Indigenous people are those who constitute ethnic groups directly descending from pre-Columbian civilisations and who preserve their own identity". Decrees 5904-G, 6036-G, 6037-G, 7267-G, and 7268-G have regulated indigenous reserves. They are inalienable and imprescriptible, non-transferable and exclusive to the communities that inhabit them. Their boundaries may not be changed except by express law. Indigenous peoples may only negotiate their lands with other indigenous peoples. They are exempt from all kinds of national or future taxes. [Nº 6172 \(asamblea.go.cr\)](http://asamblea.go.cr). Indigenous communities have full legal capacity to acquire rights and incur obligations of all kinds.

³⁶ Silvel Elías. "[Aferrarse al colonialismo: Guatemala y el despojo de los pueblos indígenas](#)". marzo 2023,

³⁷ Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

on paper, this includes conserving natural capital in regions heavily affected by armed conflict in the 1980s.³⁸ Agro-industrial and mining TNCs encountered this scenario after the coup d'état in 2009 in Honduras. It follows that borders are not static lines and war fronts, but 'dynamic regions' inhabited by vulnerable populations, "but environmentally rich, which not only had to be pacified and developed, but also preserved, in order for regional integration to be possible".³⁹ This approach has redefined the concept of borders into places of economic and socio-cultural contact determined by communal cooperation. Indeed, fertile rural lands and protected areas, privileged hosts of wetlands, and irreplaceable nesting homes for endemic species as yet unknown allowed their trees to provide transient resting places for thousands of migratory bird species. It also includes other vital functions concerned with delivering environmental services to the surrounding urban and rural populations.

In El Salvador, in the mining area of San Sebastián (department of La Unión), the chances of reversing heavy metal contamination have been reduced, if not nearly impossible. The OCMAL report (2020) states that it is unaware of technology that could reverse the impact of acid mine drainage. However, this does not preclude the adoption of control and risk prevention measures for the population living in the area.⁴⁰ The Cerro Blanco mine occupies 174 hectares, and is 5 km from Asunción Mita in Guatemala and 15 km from the border with El Salvador. In 2017, the Canadian company Goldcorp transferred it to Bluestone Resources, the parent company of Elevar Resources, listed on Canada's Toronto Stock Exchange. According to the last financial report (2020), it had accumulated a capital of 94 million Canadian dollars through the subsidiary Sociedad Entre Mares de Guatemala SA. After the exploration time had run out in 2007, the Guatemalan Ministry of Environment provisionally approved the Environmental Impact Study, previously rejected twice by the technical team of the Guatemalan Ministry of Environment. "The proof that this study was never useful was that they never extracted a gram of gold from this mine in 18 years; on the contrary, since 2010 they have extracted large quantities of thermal water, which they initially discharged untreated into the Ostúa River, which drains into the Guija Lake".⁴¹

Megaprojects seriously threaten the network of the water complex confluent of Lake Güija. The Lempa River flows through Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador territories. Lake Güija connects the border area between Guatemala and El Salvador. In the same way, the binational rivers Paz between Guatemala and El Salvador and the Goascorán River between Honduras and Guatemala converge in this area. The Ostúa River rises in Guatemala and flows into Lake Güija, the most significant flow being in El Salvador. The Lempa River is one of the longest rivers in Central America and the main river in El Salvador. Together with the transboundary rivers Angue and Ostúa, the Cusmapa is one of the tributaries of the lake, and the Desagüe River is an effluent of the lake and, at the same time, a tributary of the Lempa River. Large-scale melon monocultures occupy the geographical area. Likewise, the leading and most important cement producer in El Salvador is located about 17 kilometres away. The mining project Cerro Blanco is located in the municipality of Asunción Mita.⁴²

³⁸ CICA brings Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize together. It arose in response to the political-military crisis prevailing in the isthmus. It was created to promote peace, freedom, democracy (universal, direct and secret suffrage), and regional development. It also guarantees respect for human rights (Tegucigalpa Protocol). The CICA broke with previous integration experiences like the Central American Common Market. In: Medina Lucile and Tania Rodríguez. "Las fronteras centroamericanas, reflejo de las dinámicas regionales desde la independencia: Una trayectoria marcada por conflictos y cooperación". *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, vol. 471-34, 2021. Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica, 12

³⁹ Medina Lucile y Tania Rodríguez. "Las fronteras centroamericanas, reflejo de las dinámicas regionales desde la independencia: Una trayectoria marcada por conflictos y cooperación". *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, vol. 471-34, (2021): Universidad de Costa Rica, 15

⁴⁰ Conflictos Mineros en América Latina, Extracción, Saqueo y Agresión: la minería avanza junto al virus. (OCMAL, 2020, 84) www.ocmal.org.

⁴¹ [Mina Cerro Blanco: amenaza latente para el agua de El Salvador](#). Alianza Centroamericana frente a la minería. Febrero de 2021

⁴² Fuente: OCMAL. Conflictos Mineros en América Latina, Extracción, Saqueo y Agresión. www.ocmal.org. 2020, 84

In a study published in 2021, Lake Güija registered alarming levels of heavy metals, especially cyanide, arsenic, lead and mercury, from the Ostúa River, the main water supplier for 1.5 million Salvadorans. The basin provides environmental services to about 3.8 million people through three countries. Both cyanide and arsenic have exceeded the limit value. The maximum for cyanide is 0.005 mg/L, and the Ostúa River recorded 0.006 mg/L in 2021. Arsenic, a naturally occurring chemical that circulates in the water beneath volcanic sediments, went from 0.005 mg/L to 0.088 mg/L. Elevar Resources has pushed other exploitation procedures in line with its economic interests after denying any responsibility. In addition to the pollutants in the water complex, there is another heavy metal bomb at the Cerro Blanco open-pit mine.

According to ETNs, the gold in the mountain is, as it were, in a cone. For this reason, it has requested approval for the controlled blasting of 25% of the mountain, which could "only" cause some landscape alterations. The environmental authorities contradict this version: the changes go beyond superficial landscape alterations as if it were an incidental event between open-pit and underground mining. The reality is quite different: blasting one part of the hill would leave a huge hole adjacent to the rest of the unexploited mountain. As the radon gas is released into the atmosphere first, the first thing it leaves behind is a trail of eco-environmental fractures on the earth's surface, flora and fauna, contamination of surface water, and soil removal due to increased arsenic and other heavy metals. According to the WHO, human health would be exposed to lung cancer, skin lesions, cardiovascular diseases, neurotoxicity and diabetes. Therefore, proposals by Elevar Resources to use "less harmful" chemicals such as sodium cyanide to separate the gold from the rock have not convinced national experts or the affected populations. For his part, the environmentalist from Colectivo Madre Selva analysed the impact of blasting through physics: matter is neither created nor destroyed; it is only transformed. *In the case of sodium cyanide, the compound may disintegrate, but the issue remains.* Whether in the tailings dams or the filtered tailings, the danger foreseen by environmentalists is that the structure will collapse into the ravine leading to the Ostúa River.⁴³

Ultimately, in 2017, El Salvador banned metallic mining because of its high pollution levels and the serious risks to the fragile ecological balance. Since 2013, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office declared through the Ministry of Relations "to safeguard the human rights of the Salvadoran population on behalf of the adoption of binding agreements based on the principles of good faith, good neighbourliness and respect for the concept of shared watersheds, as well as the defence and guarantee of the human rights of the populations". Meanwhile, on the other side of the ocean, in Canada, the Bluestone Company [as if it had no responsibility] continues to promote the mine as the second-largest gold deposit in Guatemala and boasts the construction of a geothermal plant with a capacity of 50 megawatts of energy for its commercialisation. To date, environmental organisations have denounced the governmental bodies' irregularities in approving the Bluestone project. The extraction of thermal waters with high levels of arsenic has contaminated Salvadoran watersheds for more than 12 years.⁴⁴

⁴³ Arévalo, Karla. *El caso de la mina Cerro Blanco: "¿amenaza para los ríos de Guatemala y El Salvador?"* 2022.

⁴⁴ "Mina Cerro Blanco: amenaza latente para el agua de El Salvador". ACAFREMIN (Alianza Centroamericana frente a la minería). 9 de febrero de 2021.

Enclave zones in Honduras. Extractive projects, conflicts and community resistance in the defence of natural resources

| Projects | Human rights violations | Communities invaded and assaulted | Industries and countries aggressors of Human Rights |
|---|--|--|--|
| 19 extractive projects (hydropower, construction and the energy sector) | 19 cases (18,6%). At least 152 indigenous, Afro-descendant Garifuna or local communities. 129 attacks (43,7%) by individual defenders in the study. | 57,9%. <i>Resistance and defence leaders suffered threats and stigmatisation in 73,7% (documented cases), respectively.</i> | 68,4% of national origin in Honduras, the United States, Canada, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway violated the rights of at least 25 communities and attacked 28 Hondurans. The conflicts left 15 Honduran defenders murdered. Honduras has the second-highest number of killings and mass criminalisation of conflict after Colombia. |
| Installation of 13 hydroelectric dams, 40 in the planning stage and 74 small-scale projects. | 51 communities | Between 2016 and 2019, Garifuna environmental leaders were assassinated after opposing the dispossession of their territory for the installation of the Sociedad Hidroeléctrica de Masca S.A de C.V. Hidromasca project. | The construction of 17 dams on Lenca peoples' territories was re-launched between 2009 and 2010 in the context of the coup d'état and subsequent coup governments. Garifuna's communities continue to demand the fulfilment of the right to consultation under the fear of dispossession. 92% of the murders remain unpunished. Most of them are related to land tenure. |
| Execution of gold, bronze and silver mining projects on 1900 hectares. Los Lirios V and Los Lirios IV, of the company Los Lirios S. de R.L., of US capital. | There are more than 40.000 hectares under concession. They came into conflict with 20 communities in the Choluteca dept. Choluteca in the south of Honduras. | <i>The communities in the Choluteca Department derive their livelihoods from fishing and basic grain crops.</i> | Confrontations between the agro-industrial and extractive corporate sectors and the siege of communities by shrimp companies and offshore photovoltaic companies. |
| In 2018, the sugar company Azunosa del Norte SA was taken over by the Honduran group Caña de Azúcar Holdings e Inversiones Azucareras del Valle. | <i>This place is the cradle of 7 ethnic groups of the Xicaques or Tolupanes Indians.</i> | Displacement of communities of the Xicaques or Tolupanes indigenous people, residents of the La Candelaria tribe, in the department of Yoro. | <i>The Honduran state has recognised collective rights over ancestral territories covering various forests. However, 93% of the Tolupan people barely cover the costs of the basic food basket. They are at the extreme poverty line.</i> |

Source: "Derechos colectivos vulnerados: Honduras". Rights and Resources Initiative & Amazon Conservation Team, 18 diciembre de 2020. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/96a79ca30b8749e9ad955cbc2b19c98f>

Between January and November 2019, mineral exports amounted to \$153 million, mainly gold. Existing data regarding the location and territorial extent of the country's mining concessions and permits are not transparent. We highlight the debate between poverty, lack of opportunities and social exclusion. Under the impacts of deforestation and water pollution, more than 70% of the cases have been classified, as well as the poor availability of water, triggering health problems and food insecurity.⁴⁵ Under executive decree PCM-138-2020 on 6 January 2021, the government of President Juan Hernández approved 14 concessions for hydroelectric megaprojects across the country. It authorised the design, construction, expansion and operation of dams nationwide on rivers, streams and water sources. The water tributaries affected by the hydroelectric industry are in the rivers Ulua, Chamelecón, Choluteca; Jalán and Talgua, Guangololo, Leutona, San Francisco Morazán; Gila and Maicupan, Arsilaca, Mame and Selguapa in Comayagua. Furthermore, if any of these projects fail or are socially or economically unfeasible, the Honduran state would have to reimburse the value of the investment as stated in article 2 of the contract of the "Trust Fund for the Generation of Energy, Through the

⁴⁵ Derechos Colectivos Vulnerados: Honduras El impacto multidimensional de proyectos extractivos e infraestructura 2020. Rights and Resources Initiative & Amazon Conservation Team, 18 de diciembre de 2020.

Constitution of a Public-Private Alliance" between the National Electricity Company (ENEE), the Alliance for the Promotion of the Public-Private Alliance (COALIANZA) and Banco Atlántida, the document explains.⁴⁶

Model Cities, a Transnational Investment Network in the Central American Dry Corridor

Amapala (Honduras), near the coast and border with Nicaragua, the site of El Salvador's CDC (Puerto de Unión) and the departments of Valle and Choluteca, located at the heart of a corridor favourable to the flow of goods and highly advantageous to foreign capital, is a critical element of regional infrastructure plans. Its broad Atlantic frontage, equipped with modern port facilities, looks directly towards New Orleans. This location justified the \$250 million funding granted under the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) for constructing an inter-oceanic corridor. The CDC links the Sula Valley, Honduras' industrial heartland, with the Salvadoran port of La Unión, which looks towards Asia and its vast and promising markets. From this geography, the model cities complement the map of economic production centres in the Central American region.

Similarly, it is connected to foreign countries by the inter-oceanic corridors that cross the entire isthmus from east to west and north to south.⁴⁷ On the other hand, in global geopolitics, the ZEDEs are "exceptional" territories that have challenged capitalism's spatial contradictions, in line with the concept that Purcell defined as glocalisation (2013).⁴⁸ They are instruments of extraterritorial privatisation within the nation-state turned into props of the global economy. For Rosa Luxemburg, *capital removes all obstacles; the movement of accumulation needs the natural treasures and labour forces of the whole earth*.⁴⁹ For the most part, they are chained to pre-capitalist historical forms of production. Hence, the irresistible impulse of capital to take over these territories and societies.

The coup d'état in 2009 provoked a neoliberal turn under the hegemony of wide-ranging narco-corrupt governments, not only in Honduras but also in most of the CDC countries. As is usual for traditional right-wingers, after spreading the official slogan of attracting foreign investment as a strategy for development, job creation, and strengthening democracy, among other false expectations of well-being, the isthmus was assigned to transnational capitalism. Thus, under deception, the landed elites introduced the ZEDE, which "explicitly [aim] to go beyond the special economic zones already existing in the world, creating ex nihilo entities detached from national jurisdiction for the production of goods and services with high added value (intensive agriculture, mining, shrimp farming, tourism, etc.)". In contrast, the participation of civil society and business sectors was ignored, throwing 70% of the population into the informal economy, with no voice or representation in the international arena. Hence, the deterritorialisation of the nation-state hit rural people hardest after they felt the direct effects of decentralisation and the fragmentation of the territory in terms of transnational capitalism.⁵⁰

Capitalist dispossession spread throughout the entire geography of the CDC without the law or control of government authorities; natural resources were privatised, and the use and management of land, forests, water springs, lagoons and

⁴⁶ "Conflicto en las comunidades por 14 proyectos hidroeléctricos aprobados por el gobierno de Honduras. Febrero 3 de 2021.

⁴⁷ Best Practice Adoption (CAMP) runs the special regime of the ZEDE Act, comprising between 12 and 21 members, mostly from the US, Europe and other foreign countries. Among its functions, it makes decisions on investor proposals, tax policy, intelligence agencies, criminal prosecution and the prison system. In Hélène Roux and Beth Gaglia, "¿Excepción o continuismo? Nuevos enclaves: poder e infraestructura en Honduras". *Iztapalapa*. núm. 87. (2019), 29

⁴⁸ Mark Purcell. "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*" vol. 27 núm. 3, 564-90.

⁴⁹ Bartra Armando. "Rosa Luxemburgo: Violencia y despojo en los arrabales del capital". *En Reproducción, crisis, organización y resistencia*. Coord. Germán Sánchez, Alejandro Álvarez y Silvana Figueroa. México: Puebla: BUAP, 189, 2014.

⁵⁰ Hélène Roux y Beth Gaglia, ¿Excepción o continuismo?, 28

rivers were reconverted. Thus, in the enclave zones, the functions of the state were left in the hands of the transnationals. Ultimately, as the budgetary contributions previously provided by the state were reduced, trade unions and other sectors of the economy now had to compete with each other in the search for private investors and cooperation.⁵¹ The model based on privatisation, externalisation of governance and decentralisation complements each other. Bartra rightly takes up Rosa Luxemburg's thought "on the permanent character of the dispossession of capital for reasons of survival and because it is its nature (...) to devour and continue to devour its environment, which is recurrent and a condition of possibility of its existence."⁵² This fact was observed by Rosa a hundred years ago and is as true today as it was then, which is why it is necessary to re-read *The Accumulation of Capital*".

The Panama Canal

The Universal Company of the Interoceanic Panama Canal is 80 km long and connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Locomotives transfer the ship from one lock to the other on the canal banks. From there, hundreds of gas tankers and container ships carry grain, low-cost commodities, and minerals, about 5% mainly from the USA, China, and Japan. Since 2006, it has been too small and obsolete to accommodate new container ships on. 2016, it was renovated, and the new canal opened its locks, allowing 95% of the world's ships to pass through. The bed of Gatun Lake was also deepened by 45 centimetres. At present, the canal is again showing anomalies, in addition to the impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

According to the Canal Control Authority, passage fees range from \$10,000 for the smallest vessels to \$300,000 for New Panama container ships (...), which can carry almost 12,000 containers. Prices can even skyrocket during peak periods. The transit of fewer ships daily reduces congestion and the frequency of stranded vessels. In particular, excessive demand contrasts with logistical operating deficits, and alternatively, the authorities offer auctions as an option in available time slots or long-term pre-bookings. The queues in the two oceans predominantly affect bulk carriers, who opt for quota auctions, which can be worth up to 700,000 dollars. In this way, cargo ships avoid queues and waiting times, while bookings facilitate immediate passage and shorten waiting times between 9 and 20 days. In the case of a chemical tanker, it paid \$2,400,000 and passed before the others. This is a financial gain, considering the canal model is on loan. For the time being, passage restrictions are confirmed for 2024. Due to the shortage of rainfall, shipowners have started to use other trade routes, particularly the Arctic route, as the increase in global temperature and acceleration of ice melting favours it. This route becomes more viable during the summer months.

On the other hand, the reductions in tonnage and daily transit numbers of container ships from 40 to 32 and in draught from 50 feet to 44 feet, on occasion, with vessels down to 1200 containers in Puerto Balboa on the Pacific and transported via rail to the Atlantic. This cargo movement can amount to an additional \$750 per container. The additional costs are passed on to the end consumer.⁵³

On average, the El Niño weather phenomenon decreases rainfall on the Pacific slope with a relative increase in spatial and temporal variations associated with orography in the Caribbean Region. In 2016, 2019, and 2023, droughts intensified. Rainfall indicators have stagnated at zero, reducing not only the water level of the canal but also two artificial lakes and the inland rivers of Gatun and Alajuela.⁵⁴ The former is fed mainly by the Chagres River and rainfall

⁵¹ Hélène Roux y Beth Geglia.

⁵² Bartra Armando, *Rosa Luxemburgo*, 191.

⁵³ Looking 4 (ES). "[Por qué muere el canal de Panamá](#)". 9 de octubre de 2023. 7:09, duración, 12:50'

⁵⁴ Looking 4 (ES) 8:16.

from the canal's watershed, home to 25 of Panama's 38 protected bird species.⁵⁵ It is home to 160 of the 229 reported mammal species. Half of the population consumes water from Gatun Lake. In the face of prolonged droughts, we must consider that the canal system adds additional externalised costs in management, 200 and 250 million litres of freshwater lost to the ocean every time a ship passes.⁵⁶ This waste is a problem in times of climate collapse and threatens the provision of environmental services to dependent populations. What worries shipping companies most is the absence of viable alternative solutions. If there is a consensus, any proposal depends on the arrival of abundant rainfall. This is unlikely if we accept that the climate crisis is unstoppable.

Transnational Dispossession, Climate Crisis and Other Failed Solutions by UN Member Organisations

Massive expropriations have displaced rural communities to hillsides, with degraded and unproductive soils prone to long periods of heavy rains, droughts, landslides and floods. For example, in 2018, droughts in the Region caused the loss of more than 280.000 hectares of beans and maize in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, directly impacting the food security of more than two million people.⁵⁷ Furthermore, there is deficient [or non-existent] infrastructure without access to markets, social services, and technical and financial assistance. In Guatemala, 48,3% of producers are 'cuentapropistas' (self-employed); in Honduras, 71,4%, with other vulnerabilities added to the lack of formal work agreements, social protection coverage and work-related accidents. An ILO report (2018) shows that informality in the agricultural sector exceeded 98% in Honduras, 97% in El Salvador, 96% in Nicaragua and 95% in Guatemala in complex food and nutrition insecurity scenarios.⁵⁸

Since late 2020, hurricanes Eta and Iota in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Belize have left nearly two million people vulnerable to disease, exacerbated by the loss of homes and schools buried in mud, contaminated wells and destroyed water supply facilities.⁵⁹ The tragedies have left 80 per cent of people on the 'brink of famine', particularly in areas of high levels of violence, even before the pandemic. On the other hand, the effects of El Niño also have consequences for agricultural production and livestock.⁶⁰ In recent years, 70 per cent of crops have been lost and 50 per cent damaged by flooding. In the CDC, other existing conflicts have been exacerbated. First, the deterioration of rural employment under heat stress and health risks, as well as the proportion of working hours during the time workers need to rest. Second, reduced performance and productivity, particularly in regions most exposed to extreme heat and in agricultural sectors that rely more on outdoor and daytime work. Unicef (2016) revealed after the 2014-2016 drought, in 30% of households surveyed by the Honduras CDC, young people aged 12-17 years were forced to work.

Thus, unreliable water consumption and reduced supplies directly impact rain-fed agricultural production and, at the same time, directly correlate with diseases such as diarrhoea, a direct cause of malnutrition. According to Fraga (citing UNOCHA, 2016), at the end of 2015, after the worst drought in 30 years, more than 3.5 million people in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador faced food insecurity. They demanded immediate food assistance, health care and livelihood

⁵⁵ Octavio Colindres. [Los vecinos del embalse Gatún](#). 16 enero de 2020.

⁵⁶ Several sources consulted agree with this estimate of freshwater discharges into the ocean.

⁵⁷ Ortiz de Zárate, Almendra. ["Migración climática en el Corredor Seco Centroamericano"](#). 12 de septiembre de 2022

⁵⁸ Fraga, Federico. ["Corredor Seco Centroamericano: el contexto, las razones y el potencial de una estrategia de creación de empleo en Guatemala y Honduras"](#). Documento de trabajo núm. 23-2020.

⁵⁹ [Huracanes consecutivos en Centroamérica dejaron al menos a 1,5 millones de niños, niñas y adolescentes en riesgo de enfermedades graves debido a la contaminación del agua](#). UNICEF. 22 de enero de 2021.

⁶⁰ [La zona que más sufre el cambio climático](#). AQUAE.

recovery. As a result, people often adopt adaptation and survival measures that, in the medium and long term, result in an even greater deterioration of their living conditions. Fraga (citing UNOCHA, 2016) highlights that "families tend to reduce the number and/or size of meals consumed per day, resort to indebtedness to buy food and inputs, consume cheaper food or food of lower nutritional quality, cut down trees to sell firewood and even sell their breeding livestock and/or consume their seed reserves, among others".⁶¹

On food security, in Guevara and Frazier, La Mesa Nacional de Incidencia para la Gestión de Riesgo, a governmental organisation, states that the drought has affected basic grain crops. As a result, there has been a drastic drop in crop productivity, the majority of the population has lost their livelihoods, and life has become more expensive. The Organised Social Movement (MOSO) in 2018 stated that, in places like La Ceiba in Atlántida, 95 % of the households have no water. "African palm cultivation continues to expand without any control, increasing forest devastation, threatening the food sovereignty of the department, the access to water for human consumption of countless communities and the health of the biodiversity of forest areas." In Honduras, there is an excessive commitment to the planting of African palm monoculture in water-producing areas, which, according to different environmental organisations, residents and experts, is a threat to people's lives.⁶²

As a result, the miracle of transnational capital is revealed on the other side of dispossession. It appears as a good neighbour and benefactor in specific anti-hunger programmes, whether FAO, WHO or UNEP. These organisations throw handfuls of grain and humanitarian assistance programmes to the dispossessed mired in the agonising uncertainty of worries about the imminent future. They target specific population groups, as claimed in the literature of ECLAC and the agencies mentioned above, to reduce hunger and promote "sustainable development" without mentioning the actual causes of both land dispossession and the climate crisis. In short, James O'Connor's eloquent assertion in the introduction to an important article that "there are few terms as ambiguous as 'sustainable capitalism' and associated concepts such as 'sustainable agriculture', 'sustainable energy and resource use' and 'sustainable development'" makes sense.⁶³

Consequently, according to historical records in the CDC, despite the great richness in biodiversity and being the epicentre of countless crops of maize, beans, tomatoes, chilli, etc., and of a large number of wild and domesticated native species, food insecurity shows another visible face in the importation of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) of maize, soya and cereals distributed by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). The Central American Alliance for the Protection of Biodiversity called on the WFP to withdraw food aid containing StarLink maize immediately. This is why the alliance of environmental, farmers', consumers', human rights and trade union organisations in five Central American countries have accused the WFP and the USDA of underestimating the rejection of Central American society under the shield of free trade agreements.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, in South America and Mesoamerica, free trade agreements impose different varieties of GM maize for human consumption.

⁶¹ Fraga, Federico, 4

⁶² Guevara, Leonardo y Lesly Frazier.

⁶³ James Connor. ¿Es posible el desarrollo sostenible? Universidad de California. Abril, junio de 2000.

⁶⁴ GRAIN. *Contaminación transgénica en Centroamérica y el Caribe*.

Conclusions

In the transnational enclaves, contradictions between TNC capital in collusion with national governments and rural landowners have advanced. Under a lurid cloak of impunity, the national armies of the CDC and in most South American countries, associated with narco-paramilitary groups, have subordinated themselves to foreign interests and local elites. Through the doctrine of the internal enemy, they have criminalised the protests, marches and peaceful struggles of historically resilient social leaders in defence of land and territory. It should be noted that protest is a constitutional right inherent to free expression, especially when it demands compliance with the Magna Carta of Central American countries. De facto armies have been removed from civil-military functions and roles in the defence of sovereignty and the protection of human rights in communities. In this context, ultra-neoliberal capitalism in the areas of agro-industry and forestry, mining, tourism, fishing, and the creation of model cities in extraterritorial spaces have supplanted the limited fragility of national authorities and shattered the rule of law in each country, as well as international humanitarian law. Similarly, we must understand the fragmentation of the political-administrative territorial units of nation-states and the biogeographical rearrangement of rural territories and commons to suit capital.

We must emphasise that inter-border demarcations have altered the astonishing design made by nature in rivers, mountains, forests and their shared biodiverse reservoirs. The natural heritage, in turn, following transnational spurious intervention in the unlimited extraction of natural resources: water, land, minerals, protected areas and forests have left irreparable eco-environmental burdens with impacts on the peasant economy. The Panama Canal is an exceptional case of use and waste of between 200 and 250 million litres of fresh water, after the passage of a single ship through the locks without any measure of water conservation, despite the warnings of international organisations about the distortions of the dual meteorological character combined with the El Niño Phenomenon. In short, no common good has been able to escape the greed of landowning and transnational capital.

The contradictions of ultra-liberal capitalism have systematically been evicting the territorial spaces of leaders and influential and troublesome people from rural communities, most of whom are ancestral. This practice has involved coercive and violent methods, whether for arbitrary population resettlement, displacement to unproductive frontiers far

It is impossible to confuse a cooperative with a capitalist enterprise unless one suffers from oligophrenia".

away from local businesses, or demographic expulsion to the USA via Mexico. We have noted that land expropriation in the wake of the transnational corporate onslaught has induced land reforms under the guise of capitalist agricultural modernisation. Agribusiness has promoted the extinction of the doctrine of the cooperative system as an organisation centred on the capital-labour alliance based on equal rights and responsibilities. "In cooperatives, surpluses are distributed according to the operations or payments of each member. In enterprises, profits are distributed among shareholders on the basis of each shareholder's shares. Consequently, it is impossible to confuse a cooperative with a capitalist enterprise unless one suffers from oligophrenia".⁶⁵

Unlike transnational capital, in the CDC Region, land and territory form an inseparable dialectical unit; land represents an economic good offered by nature or Mother Earth. It is a factor of production destined for food sovereignty, using the labour force of the owner, as opposed to the rent of industrial capital. The epicentre of this writing lies in the dialectical unity between land and territory, in direct confrontation with the extractive capital of the natural heritage. In Marx:

⁶⁵ Amadeo Gómez, 65.

Instead of binding man to nature, rent has only bound the exploitation of land to competition. Once it has become a source of rent, the ownership of land is itself the result of competition since it now depends on the market value of agricultural products. As rent, land ownership loses its immobility and becomes an object of trade (...) To obtain monetary income from the sale of its agricultural products, [palm monocultures, large-scale sugar plantations and forests] to see its land ownership as nothing more than a money-minting machine.⁶⁶

In furtherance of the above, land, in addition to economic autonomy, generates spheres of democratic interaction in political and cultural activities linked to territorial identity. In rural communities, territory is more than the surface or geographical land. They are cultural spaces of good living in areas destined for housing, communal facilities, forests, and other places of recreation in communal houses or frolicking on the banks of rivers, tributaries or streams. Thus, in the relationship of the social collective with nature, we recognise the ancestral nature of the commons as a collective heritage governed by tradition over generations. It is up to intergenerational oral history to pass on knowledge, experience and skills for good everyday living. Karel Kosík: Everyday life does not mean private life as opposed to public life. Nor is it the so-called profane life as opposed to a nobler official world. In everyday life, the scribe and the emperor live in a natural atmosphere, and no one even remotely asks what the meaning of daily life is.⁶⁷

The expropriation of land and territory throws people into unpredictable situations. In addition to the tragedy of the loss

We must understand the tragedy of expulsion from land and territory. "War [or famine] destroys everyday life. It forcibly separates millions of human beings from their environment, tears them away from their work, snatches them from their familiar world". Indeed, when all is lost, all that remains is migration.

of food security on their farms, there is the daily disruption of the world known in the intimacy of the family, the routine of watching children grow up, participating in or accompanying relatives or neighbours in joy, illness or death in their daily lives. From this perspective, with all its complexities, we must understand the tragedy of expulsion from land and

territory. "War [or famine] destroys everyday life. It forcibly separates millions of human beings from their environment, tears them away from their work, snatches them from their familiar world".⁶⁸ Indeed, when all is lost, all that remains is migration. Paradoxical as it may seem, migrants see it as an option to find alternatives in the USA similar to those they had before the TNCs' dispossession.

In the last decade, migration has gained supporters among the young population, while the old remain in precarious jobs. It is estimated that at least 1.3 million Central Americans will become migrants or refugees by 2050. Both those who flee and those who remain will not be able to evade the environmental threats associated with air and water pollution to human, animal and ecosystem health, whether through war, widespread violence, metal mining, intensive agriculture or the extraction of fresh and thermal water in a jigsaw puzzle of events, problems and conflicts, some

As we usually say in South and Central America, our tragedy and blockages to industrial, technological and socio-economic development are summed up in the curse that comes with the wealth of our natural resources, as we have recounted in this paper.

known and others unexpected and sometimes unpredictable. Contrary to the existing literature, the leading cause of migration is not droughts nor the accentuated dual meteorological character of the isthmus. Ecological and environmental damages are added to other effects of drastic climate changes

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, 130.

⁶⁷ Karel Kosík. *Dialéctica de lo concreto*. México: Editorial Grijalbo S.A. de C.V., 1963, 92

⁶⁸ Karel Kosík, 94.

emanating from the fundamental contradiction between transnational capital and small landowners. For this reason, we distance ourselves from the neoliberal literature when it blames extreme weather for the causes of migration, among other conflicts systematised in the abstract category of "man" or climate change. Finally, as we usually say in South and Central America, our tragedy and blockages to industrial, technological and socio-economic development are summed up in the curse that comes with the wealth of our natural resources, as we have recounted in this paper.

Related links:

- The Jus Semper Global Alliance
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Capitalism of Dispossession in the Palm Oil Plantations in the Countries of the Global South](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Ethnic-Peasant Resistance in South America and Mesoamerica to the 4.0 Agriculture of Catastrophe Capitalism](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Water as the Pandora's Box of Ecological Debacle from South and Central America](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Lithium and the Contradictions in the Energy Transition that Devastate the Global South in Favour of the Global North](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Ituango Dam: an Apology for Necropolitics in the Privatisation of the Cauca River in Colombia](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Spiral of contradictions between financialised capitalism and rural smallholdings in South and Mesoamerica](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Trees and the 'Net-Zero' Emissions Hoax](#)
- Nubia Barrera Silva: [Controversial Demographic Projections Under Climate Collapse in 2050 - South and Mesoamerica in a Global Context](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [Transitioning to Geocratia — the People and Planet and Not the Market Paradigm — First Steps](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [The Unbearable Unawareness of our Ecological Existential Crisis](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [Marketocracy and the Capture of People and Planet](#)
- Álvaro de Regil: [The Deceptive Delusions of Green Capitalism](#)
- Mauro Bologna and Gerardo Aquino: [Deforestation and World Population Sustainability: a Quantitative Analysis](#)
- Michael Löwy: [Why Ecosocialism: For a Red-Green Future](#)
- Paul Burkett: [An Eco-Revolutionary Tipping Point?](#)
- Alejandro Teitelbaum: [The Progressively Accelerated Degradation of the Environment](#)
- John Bellamy Foster: [The Long Ecological Revolution](#)
- John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Hanna Holleman: [Capitalism and Robbery - The Expropriation of Land, Labor, and Corporeal Life](#)
- John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark: [The Robbery of Nature](#)

❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

❖ **About the author:** Nubia Barrera Silva is an Anthropologist from the Universidad del Cauca, Business Administrator from the Universidad Externado de Colombia, Master in Environmental Management and Audits from the Universidad Internacional Iberoamericana and Master in Climate Change from the Universidad Europea del Atlántico. In her role as professor and researcher, she has approached the areas of business and corporate social responsibility, environmental education, socio-anthropology, ecology and the environment from interdisciplinary approaches. She has been an Academic Par of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in Colombia. She has formulated and executed projects in the area of corporate social responsibility. She has been a prominent speaker on the Integral Rural Reform, the axis of the Peace Agreement in Colombia. She has promoted the defence of water in common areas, public health, food sovereignty of the ethnic and Afro-peasant sectors and the human rights of environmental leaders. She has published essays and articles on the neoliberal impact on education and the conservation of watersheds, among other issues, in indexed journals of different universities. She is currently preparing the second edition of a book.



❖ **Quote this paper as:** Nubia Barrera Silva: The Transnational Capture and Pillage of Central America – The Jus Semper Global Alliance, January 2024. This paper has been published under Creative Commons, CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0. You are welcome to reproduce the material for non-commercial use, crediting the author and providing a link to the original publisher.

❖ **Tags:** Tropical rainforests, transnational capitalism, catastrophic capitalism, agro-food production, consumerism, mining, food sovereignty, water, extractivism, Central America.

❖ The responsibility for opinions expressed in this work rests only with the author(s), and its publication does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by The Jus Semper Global Alliance.



Under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

© 2024. The Jus Semper Global Alliance
Portal on the net: <https://www.jussemper.org/>
e-mail: informa@jussemper.org

— About the author and Jus Semper