The commoditization of nature and socio-environmental resistance in Ecuador: 1980-2013

Sara Latorre, Katharine N. Farrell, J. Martinez-Alier

Abstract
This article advances the understanding of the relationship between social metabolism, the commoditization of nature, institutional changes, and patterns of conflict in Ecuador during the most recent phase of global capitalism. Ecuador is one resource-rich periphery country that moved after 2007 from a neoliberal to a post-neoliberal policy regime. By analyzing 64 socio-environmental social conflicts in the period 1980-2013, we focus on the continuities and changes in the relationship between environmental dispossession and resistance in both Ecuadorian policy regimes. The results suggest that conflicts during the post-neoliberal regime have certainly not disappeared because the distributional consequences of environmental dispossession have continued at a similar pace as before or even quickened. However, the combination of social investments financed by natural resource exports and coercive policies has isolated the environmental defenders from the bulk of the population.

Key words
Globalization; social metabolism; commoditization of nature; environmental dispossession; socio-environmental conflicts; political ecology; Ecuador

1. Introduction
Many scholars agree that the decade of 1970 marked a turning point in the history of global capitalism (Harvey 2005; McMichael 2004; Robinson 2008). They argue that, since its inception in Europe, this socio-political and economic system has gone through various phases of capital accumulation: each one being the direct result of efforts to overcome periodic, diverse crises that the capitalist system experiences as a consequence of internal contradictions (see also Polanyi 1944; and Schumpeter 1950). Harvey (2005), Robinson (2008) and numerous other scholars have argued that, in the 1970s, the previously national-economy based capitalist system scaled up to the global sphere, in order, to overcome a crisis of stagnation and declining profit-making opportunities. In this phase of renewing accumulation opportunities, a transnational, global arena of activity was established, which complemented the already established
national arenas that had typified previous phases.¹ During this period, the pathways facilitating capital accumulation attained a new quality: a global scale of operation, characterized by the rise of purely transnational capital and of globally integrated production and financial systems (i.e. global capitalism). Trade in raw materials reached unprecedented levels, with the opening-up of new markets and of new regions supplying of raw materials and receiving capital investment (Dittrich et al. 2012; Krausmann et al. 2009). With this opening-up economic growth and associated accumulation pathways were once again established, this time at the global scale; capitalist production both intensified and extended into new regions, and with unequally distributed geographical and social patterns of impact and advantage (Harvey 2005; Robinson 2008). In particular, this new phase has been typified by increasing polarization between intense nodes of profit and capital accumulation, or "core areas" and distributed supplier zones (with labor and natural resources), or "periphery areas". For instance, in Latin America as a whole, analysis of social metabolism in terms of material flows show that Domestic Extraction of Materials increased fourfold in tons between 1970 and 2008, and the Physical Trade Deficit (exports minus imports, in tons) increased at a similar rate. Ecuador, which is our focus in this text, exemplifies this pattern (Vallejo 2010; West and Schandl 2013) and provides us with a heuristic lens through which to examine the social and ecological consequences of global capitalism in closer detail.

Ecuador is one of the few-resource-rich periphery countries that has made a transition from the neo- to a post-neoliberal model of development - during this latest phase of capitalist expansion. Generally speaking, scholars agree that Ecuador, without abandoning the path of global integration as a supplier of primary commodities, has, since 2007, aimed to re-establish the role of the state in distributing wealth and to consolidate a national social contract through collection of resource rents. That is to say, a new policy regime has been implemented in which the terms of engagement between the state and capital have changed (Bebbington 2012; Escobar 2010; Gudynas 2010; Ospina 2009; Svampa 2013; Veltmeyer 2013). It is also one of the major Latin American sites of class struggles over extraction and exploitation of natural resources.

¹ Robinson identifies the following capitalism's phases: the Mercantile phase (1492-1700); the Competitive-Industrial phase (1789-1800); the Corporate phase (1870-1970) and the Globalization phase (1970-ongoing).
and therefore provides ample scope for exploring the impacts of this phase in periphery states.

Together with population growth and growth of domestic economies, rapidly increasing international trade in raw materials has placed huge social and environmental pressures on periphery areas to initiate extraction, leaving these supplier regions with the negative ecological impacts (externalities). This latest phase of capitalism, the process of capital accumulation through direct appropriation of assets, as opposed to through generation of profits, is more intensive than in previous phases, leading Harvey (2005) to identify it with what he calls "accumulation by dispossession" (hereafter AbyD).

Whereas Harvey discusses new enclosures of both social and ecological commons, we focus here only on the ecological commons, and in particular on the ways that dispossession is achieved at the peripheries of global capitalism, as a basic part of globalized social metabolism, through the process of environmental cost shifting (Martinez-Alier 2002a). With this focus, we expand upon Harvey’s proposition, exploring how assets are appropriated not only through the ordinary capitalist process of production, as inputs, but also through degradation (quality-based dispossession) that serves to facilitate the process of capital accumulation. While the phenomenon is global, the ecological impacts of AbyD are to be found in resource-rich / low-GDP / low-labor-income periphery countries, such as Ecuador. In the following pages, we review, through reference to an inventory of 64 socio-environmental conflicts across the period 1980-2013, the environmental dispossession patterns of exploitation and commodification in Ecuador, and the different forms of resistance that this has triggered. Our aim is to help advance understanding of the relationship between the commoditization of nature, institutional change and patterns of conflict, both in Ecuador and throughout the global South, during this latest, global phase of capital accumulation. While there are numerous studies dealing simultaneously with these three issues, they are usually single-case-based or thematic (Bebbington et al. 2007, Veuthey and Gerber 2012, Perrault 2006; Gerber 2011). On the contrary, there are still very few

---

2 Examples of social commons considered by Harvey are the rights and entitlements guaranteed by post-second war welfare state in advanced capitalist countries. By the same token, he gives as examples of natural commons the enclosures of land, water, and genetic material.
published papers that systematically examine patterns across a large number cases with in a single country or region.

In order to provide context for this review, we begin with a brief description of the recent transformation of Ecuador’s political economy, followed by an overview of the research methodology and data collection methods employed in preparing the inventory. We then present a comparative analysis of the 64 cases of socio-environmental conflict, which span across Ecuador’s political economy transformation, identifying continuities and differences across time, space, commodified activity and prevailing political economic regime.

2. Background

The Ecuadorian political economy within the global capitalism phase.

The Ecuadorian neoliberal regime

Agri-food commodity export sectors have a long history in Ecuador’s political economy. However, since 1964 oil production became the main source of revenues for the Ecuadorian state. During the first oil bonanza (1972-1982), foreign debt grew significantly until 1982, when Ecuador could no longer finance its payments. As a result, Ecuador negotiated a rescheduling of its debt, subject to direction and economic adjustment plans of international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank. These programs prioritized fiscal solvency and inflation control, which was to be achieved through market liberalization, privatization and integration and specialization within the world economy (McMichael 2004, Robinson 2008). At this time, Ecuador shifted its development strategy from state-led development to state-promoted linkage to global production chains, driven by transnational capital (Robinson 2008). New export products were introduced, such as cut flowers, fruit juice and preserves, shrimp, garments, which were served as leading axes for capital accumulation (Sawer 2005). The influx of transnational agribusiness, along with the transnationalization of domestic agribusiness, in these commodity areas has been accompanied by financing and guidance, often imposed through conditionality terms, from IFIs and other aid agencies and organs (Acosta 2006, Robinson 2008). Their competitive edge in the global market
is comprised of cheap labor and the externalization of the ecological damage associated with export production (Vallejo 2010, Falconí and Larrea 2003).

From 1982 to 2006, Ecuador followed a neoliberal agenda, in the midst of strong social unrest and mobilization and political volatility. Ten presidents came to power during these years. Three of them were overthrown by mobilizations led by the indigenous movement. While neoliberalism re-activated economic growth, it was accompanied by increased poverty and inequality (Larrea 2004), which eventually led, during the 1998-1999 Ecuadorian financial crises, to massive emigration and the dollarization of the economy. The neoliberal project and associated financial crisis unleashed counter-hegemonic social and political forces that discredited neoliberalism among the general public, bringing about a new period of popular struggle and social change.

The Ecuadorian post-neoliberal regime

The government of Rafael Correa, Alianza País (AP), took office in 2007, advancing an explicit anti-neoliberal discourse to be institutionalized through a constituent assembly process (November 2007-July 2008). This period was seen by social groups as a unique political opportunity, not only to halt neoliberal modernization but to advance radical alternatives to previous four decades of developmentalism (Becker, 2010; Radcliffle, 2012). Ecuadorian civil society elaborated and positioned their demands within the constituent assembly, where there was, to a great extent, the political will and an openness to channel these demands (Latorre and Herrera 2014). The 2008 Constitution, which reflects the work of that assembly, includes recognition of rights of Nature, the re-conceptualizing of development as Sumak Kawsay (collective wellbeing), the recognition of the pluri-national and intercultural nature of the Ecuadorian state, explicitly placing social function above private interest in the management of environment and natural resources, and the recognition and pursuit of a moral economy as one of the centerpiece of the Ecuadorian model of development (Asamblea Constituyente 2008).

3 The three president removed from power were Abdalá Bucaram (1997), Jamil Mahuad (2000) and Lucio Gutiérrez (2005).
With the national elections of April 2009, the political structure of the state was reshaped.; Parliament was dominated by the political force of AP and the power of the executive was reinforced. Many of the most progressive members of AP abandoned the party at that time and the political project of the ensuing Ecuadorian government, which remains in power still today, has been described as developmentalist or neo-extractivist and national-statist (Escobar 2010; Gudynas 2010; Ospina 2009, Svampa 2013).

However, in contrast to the neo-liberal era, these socio-economic policies have been carried out under the Correa government by directing a greater share of commercial revenues to the national purse, mainly from the oil and telecommunication sectors, and through improvements tax collection. At the same time, Correa's mandate has also coincided with a sharp expansion of Ecuadorian and Latin American exports to China (particularly raw materials), imports from China, and Chinese direct investments and credits in the region, which is concentrated, in Ecuador, mainly in the energy, mining and infrastructural sectors (Ellis 2009, Escribano 2013). Finally, this Chinese-led demand for raw materials has come at an historical moment when raw materials prices have remained persistently high, from 2000 onwards, the economic terms of trade have favored accumulation within the Ecuadorian economy as never before in recent history (Muradian et al. 2012).

As we set out here to explore relationships between the commoditization of nature, institutional change and patterns of conflict, it is important to note that Ecuador’s recent era of state building has also involved, in addition to an upscaling of extractive activities and commoditization of nature, the establishment of a political institutional framework that eschews the direct participation of any particular social group, such as indigenous peoples and women, and which limits the participation of interest groups (Ospina 2009). Instead, the government has created new citizen participation mechanisms that are consultative but without authority and which privilege technocrats and scientific knowledge as the key pillars for policy-making (Ospina 2009, Escobar 2010), while the national budget and national policy-making been centralized. It is to be expected that these trends will be reinforced following Correa’s resounding electoral victory of February of 2013, with a new presidential mandate until 2017.

3. Methodology
The inventory includes a wide range of socio-environmental conflicts and associated accumulation activities occurring in Ecuador between 1980-2013. We begin chronologically with the 1980s as this is generally agreed to mark the beginning of the globalization phase of capital accumulation in Latin America (McMichael 2004; Robinson 2008; Acosta 2006).

The selection of activities and conflicts included in the inventory is informed by our understanding of AbyD as an ongoing process, by which the capitalist appropriation of value (accumulation) from a commons is carried out through extra-economic means, which understand to be in line with De Angelis (2001), Harvey (2005), Glossman (2006) and Kelly (2011). While we do not claim that the list is exhaustive, we refer to it as an inventory, rather than a sample, as it provides a general overview of both the activities and geographical scope of environmental conflicts related to AbyD during the study period. We have included well-documented cases, to ensure good description, while at the same time aiming to cover the whole of the Ecuadorian territory and to include the main commodities at issue during the study period. We presume that the process of accumulation may be distanced, in both time and/or space, from the physical act of dispossession. On this basis we consider not only state interventions to advance capitalist interests, such privatizations and other mechanisms described by Harvey (2005), but also cost shifting associated with environmental production costs, as mentioned above, which impacts the ecological commons and the bodies of workers, their families and neighbors. Hence, we have also included conflicts over environmental working conditions and over environmental living conditions impacted by capitalist forms of production and resource extraction, and on the same basis, conflicts concerning large-scale infrastructure development that are directly related to furthering capital accumulation. Finally, we have, of course, also included cases involving the direct appropriation of natural assets, both through extraction, for use in capitalist production and also through contamination, for use as sinks (including carbon dioxide sinks), where the accumulated waste residuals associated with capitalist production are deposited. In broad terms, we have considered conflicts referring to the two main ways of valuing and commodifying nature: natural resource exploitation form and nature conservation based appropriation activities, like carbon and ecosystem services markets.
Data collection is based on a combination of literature review (academic and non-academic sources, including activist records) and primary data collected by the first author, through site visits and interviews over several field trips to Ecuador between 2004 and 2013. All 64 cases and the associated data source references are listed in the Appendixes (I, II, III). Each case has been named using key words that are compatible with the language used in Ecuadorian public discourse and extended summaries of most cases are stored and will be soon available through the environmental conflicts database of the European Union funded research project EJOLT (www.ejolt.org).

The following criteria have been used to delimit the individual cases included in the inventory. In keeping with our analytical approach, each case documents a situation where protesters have articulated concerns regarding a commodity based activity that reflects either AbyD and/or AbyC. Conflicts are treated as single cases, in the first instance, based on the presence of common concerns regarding a particular commodity activity: e.g. a point of petroleum extraction, a waste dump, etc. Since some commodity activities cover very large areas of the territory, while others are quite localised, we have added a second criterion, related to the articulation of the protest, to help delimit specific cases: where alliances have been established among protesters we treat this as a single case, regardless of how widely dispersed the protests are geographically. Where alliances have not been established among geographically dispersed protesters we take geographical proximity as our reference: proximal protests with common commodity activity concerns are treated as single cases, regardless of whether formal alliances have been established among the protesters, while those that are geographically separated and have not established alliances, are treated as separate cases, in spite of being affected by the same commodity activity. In the latter instances we focus exclusively on particular areas, where resistance has been most public and well documented, taking these as indicative of the larger, more diffuse conflict.

With respect to temporal and actor heterogeneity, we have prioritised continuity with regard to commodity activity over discontinuity with regard to diversity and variability among offenders. Where the commodity activity of concern has changed significantly, either in physical extension or main characteristics, we have treated the two stages of associated conflicts as separate matters of concern and so separate cases. On balance, where the commodity activity of concern has remained largely unchanged over time,
but there have been multiple “offenders”, either all at one time or successively, we have treated this as a single matter of concern and so also a single case.

Finally, in order to consider relationships between the inventoried conflicts and the massive institutional change undergone by Ecuador during the study period, the cases are further classified according to three temporal categories: those that started and reached some outcome prior to the regime change in 2007; those that have carried over from the old to the new regime and those that began in 2007 or afterwards. The distribution of cases across these delimitation categories is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Case by Type and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases where geographically <strong>proximal</strong> protesters share common matters of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance coordinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Start and Outcome of Conflict Before 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Continues across Both Periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Began in 2007 Onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each case record in the inventory includes the following variables: locality, date when the conflict began and (where appropriate) when it finished, commodity of concern, drivers of the conflict, offenders and protesters, protestor demands, strategies and grounds for mobilization, and outcomes as measured against protest demands. For still ongoing conflicts the results obtained at the time of writing are used as outcome.
4. Discussion

The geography and timeline of socio-environmental conflicts commodification in Ecuador

Figure 1: Conflicts starting in the three periods between 1980 and 2013 over Accumulation by Dispossession.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographically diversity of the commodity frontiers (Moore 2000) in Ecuador and how they have developed over time. The inventoried conflicts are color coded here by commodity activity category, with specific details of the commodity in question (or type of waste disposal) included in the point labels. This study is concerned with Ecuador’s mainland, which has three main regions: Coast (blue – to the west), Highlands (brown - middle), and Amazon (green – to the east). The three have radically distinct topographies and ecologies and historically have had distinct socio-economic and political configurations. We begin our discussion by considering each region, in turn, before then moving on to identify driving forces and consistent offenders appearing across commodified activity, time and region.

In the Amazon region, oil extraction started in the mid-60s in the Northern provinces (Sucumbíos and Orellana), later expanding to include the south in subsequent decades.
At that time, extraction in areas traditionally habited by indigenous peoples, some of which were also designated for some kind of protected status, was actively promoted by the Ecuadorian state (Valdivia 2005). Many of the conflicts that began in the neoliberal period (conflicts 2, 33, 38, 39, 55,) reflect resistance to the advance of this commodity extraction frontier. The outcomes of these resistances were regionally varied, with exploitation proceeding straightforwardly in the northern provinces of Sucumbíos, Orellana and some parts of the middle province Pastaza, even inside protected areas, whereas temporary stops were achieved in other parts of Pastaza and in the southern provinces of Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe. From the 1990s onward, following the Texaco case (conflict 48), and with increasing consistency in the next decade, many conflicts have arisen concerning environmental liabilities associated with oil exploitation, mainly in the northern provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana. In these cases (conflicts 19, 20, 21, 48) the main reasons for mobilization have been pollution and associated health problems and the undermining of livelihoods. These later conflicts in the northern Amazon of Ecuador, where extraction is now winding down, can be understood as a response to the accumulation of what Martinez-Alier (2002a) has had called “Ecological Debt:” here in the form of ecological damage left behind at physical point of oil extraction.

Also starting during the neo-liberal period, we have, in this region, a classic case of bioprospecting (conflict 7) in the province of Pastaza, where local indigenous communities protested against commodification and privatization of the biodiversity of the forest and of their indigenous medicinal knowledge regarding the use of the rainforest plant Croton lechleri.

In the post-neoliberal period starting in 2007, the pattern of conflicts in the Amazon region is broadly unchanged, in spite of radical changes in government, suggesting that here conflicts are being driven, or at least strongly influenced, by global factors. For example, the Ecuadorian state has continued to push expansion of oil extraction in the south, in areas where there was already resistance in the 1990s (conflict 33, 39, 55), igniting still further resistance (conflict 34) in the process. Similarly, conflicts 2 and 9, in the Amazon region province of Napo, record opposition starting in the neo-liberal period (conflict 2), among kichwa indigenous communities, alleging manipulation of government consultation concerning bids for two oil extraction blocks. Plans for the
associated fields were cancelled in 2005, following the overthrow of the president Lucio Gutiérrez (2005). However, in response to a spike in global demand, these were re-instated by the Correa government in 2008, when the exploitation rights were granted by executive decree to a Canadian oil company without any prior consultation (conflict 9).

Southern Amazonian provinces are also the site of the large-scale metal ore mining activities. Here too, while resistance started in the neoliberal period (conflict 22), new conflicts have arisen during both the transition period (conflicts 41, 44, 45) and under the post-neoliberal Ecuadorian government (conflict 42) which has been promoting this activity, in collaboration with new Chinese actors, with the aim that it becomes a leading economic sector. In this region we also find examples of what we might call cross-sectorial conflicts, where extractive activities (oil and mining ones) coincide geographically with resistance to government-led conservation initiatives related to payments for ecosystem services (conflict 50), in areas with large amount of well conserved rainforest, located mainly in legally recognized indigenous territories.

Exploitation of oil fields in the northern provinces has also continued in the post-neoliberal period, arousing new resistance (conflict 28 and 61). Here too, exploitation is advanced in socially and environmentally fragile ecosystems that are part of the territory of indigenous peoples, in this case peoples living in voluntarily isolation. The trend of pushing forward oil exploitation in the Amazon is now, following the Correa government’s ending of the Yasuní-ITT initiative in August 2013, the dominant one.4

Finally, new collective actions in this region largely reflect demands for adjustment of the ecological debt balance, in the form of the better infrastructure, basic services and environmental restoration (conflict 36), including actions related to the ecological impacts of landfills where oil wastes (among others) have been deposited (conflict 60).

---

4 This initiative, born in activist circles (Acción Ecológica and other NGOs) before its official adoption by Minister of Energy and Mines, Alberto Acosta and (more reluctantly) by President Correa in June 2007, consisted in keeping the oil from the Inshpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (Yasuní protected area) fields in the ground indefinitely in exchange for an international contribution of at least 50% of the revenues the state would have received from extracting this oil. From the beginning, Correa’s commitment to this project was ambiguous (Espinosa 2013; Martin 2010).
The Highlands of Ecuador, which form part of the Andean Mountain Range, have a more diverse set of commodity frontiers. Since the neoliberal period there have been several attempts to initiate large-scale metal mining projects in the region’s southern provinces. Mineral deposits are located mainly in headwaters or in highly populated areas with domestic agriculture. In most of these cases exploration activities were carried out during the 1980-90s by several transnational companies, despite local opposition (conflicts 3, 25). However, these projects did not advance further until the post-neoliberal period, when the government began to explicitly promote mining activities in the region (conflicts 8, 24, 26, 41). A well-known copper mining deposit in the northern province of Imbabura still remains un-exploited today, despite several attempts at exploitation and thanks to long-standing resistance, extending back to the 1990s (conflict 43). Most recently, there is now increasing resistance to building-materials mining for domestic demand, which has arisen in response to its polluting effects, after decades of exploitation (conflicts 58, 59).

The Highland region has traditionally been an area of domestic agriculture and livestock production, characterized, despite reforms, by high inequalities in the land distribution (Ruiz 2010), where a few large-scale, commercial farmlands (haciendas) coexist with a huge number of indigenous-peasant farmers with very small holdings and lack of access to credit and technology. In recent years farmlands associations have been moving toward the agribusiness sector, for example in large-scale livestock production (mainly poultry and pork). This has led to intensification, such as large-scale feedlot facilities, and associated environmental impacts, which are the main reason behind local resistance to the rise in agribusiness (conflict 49). However, reduced subsistence farming activity is also present, with peasants forced to diversify their livelihood strategies and with both temporary and permanent migration to urban areas (Ruiz 2010). At the same time, in the province of Pichincha, non-traditional agro-export activities, such as flower production, which arrived in the 1990s, has continued to grow (Korovkin 2005). It typically involves the use and release of highly polluting chemicals, first in the work place, where they affect mainly women and eventually in the environment, as effluents. It also requires huge amounts of water, demand for which is igniting conflicts with the food production sector (conflicts 5, 6). In recent years there has been conflict over the high toxicity and polluting effects of flower production waste (conflict 62).
which, in a similar vein to oil wastes in the Amazon provinces, goes directly to landfill without treatment.

Another non-traditional export commodity in this region, presented in the form of a marketable ecosystem service, is the proliferation of plantations (mainly of non-native tree species) intended to serve as carbon emission offsets for industrialized countries (Farley 2010). While these have been planted on both individual and communally-owned private land, conflicts have arisen mainly around plantations on communally-owned land, where expectations regarding paid employment and revenues have not been met (conflict 37).

Finally, although Ecuador has historically had limited industrialization, some industry related conflicts arose during the late 1980s and early the 1990s in the southern Highlands provinces of Cañar and Azuay (conflicts 10, 35). Here the main causes of mobilization were, respectively, polluting practices associated with industrial food processing (sugar cane) and increasing industrial demand for land traditionally used by the small-scale agriculture sector. The Highlands region has also seen conflicts related to energy infrastructure projects, in the north over transportation of oil from point of extraction (Amazonia) to point of processing on the north Coast (conflict 46) and in central Ecuador, over large-scale hydroelectric dam facilities (conflict 56). The conflicts reflect, respectively, concerns about the risks of leakages and pollution from an oil pipeline through a high biodiversity area where ecotourism was the main source of revenues, and concerns about anticipated impacts of the dam project on the prevailing agriculture-based livelihood. Both cases reflect contemporary Ecuadorian government strategies, first to continue with oil export and more recently, to increase energy output and diversify the country’s energy sources.

Ecuador’s Coast, which was, following independence and up until the oil boom of the 1970s, traditionally the main export-oriented region of the country. While massive growth in banana plantations took place before the period covered by our inventory, many traditional and non-traditional commodity frontiers are still to be found here today. Central among these is the shrimp-farming frontier in Ecuador’s mangroves, which experienced its main boom during the 1980-90s, when Ecuador became the largest shrimp producing country in the western hemisphere (Veuthey and Gerber
2012). The industry developed quickly and without regulation, spreading toward communal mangrove areas where fishermen, shellfish gatherers and charcoal makers had historically secured their livelihood. During this period, conflicts arose in response to depletion of mangroves (conflicts 11, 12, 40). At the end of the 1990s a severe disease outbreak nearly led to a collapse of the industry, with many shrimp farms remained unproductive for years after. By 2007 shrimp production had returned to previous levels and was resisted by a national movement for the defense of mangroves, which mobilized to reclaim illegal shrimp-farming areas advancing an indigenous-based territorial language (Latorre 2013). From 2009 onwards commercial, export oriented shrimp farmers have been supported by the government with measures intended to regularize their legal status. Both government efforts to grant shrimp farmers title to mangrove land and the reactivation of previously abandoned ponds have been highly contested (conflicts 52, 53, 54).

Also related to seafood commodities, there have been conflicts over the extraction and processing of fish, mainly for the production of fishmeal and fish oil (conflict 1), which has been conducted without adequate environmental protections. Along the coastline there are several areas where tourism plays an important role in the economy, with the major tourism infrastructure located in Manabí and Santa Elena, while the sector is also important, although less developed in the province Esmeraldas. Conflict in these areas is related mainly to attempts to privatize common areas, such as beaches (conflict 51) and customary peasant lands (conflict 63) and to confrontations around unclear property title (conflict 64).

To the south is the main locale of the traditional agro-export banana sector, which is a highly polluting activity with exploitative and hazardous labor conditions (Henriques et al. 1997). There have been many conflicts here, due to the health problems and dangerous working conditions experienced by banana plantation laborers (conflicts 27, 57), including dibromochloropropane (DBCP) poisoning cases, where Ecuadorean workers have unsuccessfully sought justice in the United States, under the Alien Tort Claims Act. Two important inland commodity frontiers, timber and oil palm production, are concentrated mainly in the northern coastal province of Esmeraldas, which has one of the most important remaining primary tropical rain forests in the country, most of which is under indigenous communal land tenure. Since the 1970s logging has spread
across the area and during the 1990s, in response, new forest management approaches were developed and implemented through international and national initiatives (Rival 2003). These initiatives were modeled on voluntary private firms' self-regulation or on “regulation through funding,” with aid designed to encourage technical and institutional change. Initiative consisted mainly in creating plantations and reforestation areas, through subsidized purchases of deforested private land, which were highly contested due to their bias in favor of private corporate groups over the impoverished indigenous and afro-Ecuadorian population that were suffering the impacts of deforestation (conflict 29). Other privatized timber extraction strategies have included harvest agreements made with diverse Chachi indigenous communities, to secure long-term wood supplies. One of these communities, which refused to take part in what it considered to be a very asymmetrical partnership suffered continuous harassment from the company involved (conflict 30). Forestry's huge power and influence over the state is also reflected in the drawn out, only recently resolved conflict 32, where a timber firm was granted a concession in an area belonging to the State National Forest Heritage, where logging was legally forbidden. The plot happened to also be in the customary possession of peasant inhabitants who rejected being displaced and refused to recognize the concession, despite persecution by the logging company. Commercial eucalyptus plantations, logged for paper production have also spurred conflicts in the province (conflict 31). This commodity activity began at the start of the current century with a major Japanese company project of 10,500 ha, but has not expanded since then, in large part due to a ban on new eucalyptus plantations issued in 2005 by the municipality of Muisne, in response to their high water demand, to contamination and to threats made to peasants who refused to sell their properties (Gerber and Veuthey 2010).

The beginning of the oil palm industry in Ecuador dates back to the late 1950s. However, in the 1990s oil palm monocultures expanded significantly in the Northern provinces, with large-scale cultivations critically damaging the local environment (Hazlewood 2010). The impacts and motivations for resistance (conflicts 16, 17) are similar to those seen with the traditional export commodity activity of banana plantations: in response to negative health impact on workers and community members due to exposure of humans and ecosystems to agrotoxins. In addition, as with the non-traditional export activity of rose production in the Highland Sierra, labor conditions in
the oil palm plantations are very hard and workers have great difficulties to organize and exercise their rights in a context typified by violence and cheap labor supply.

While a more recent arrival to the region, large-scale energy infrastructure projects have also led to conflict in the coastal provinces, with the well-known case, in the late 1980s, of the Daule Peripa dam (conflict 14), which was one of the main components of a massive multi-purpose state initiative water infrastructure project begun during that period. This was one of the largest and most complicated infrastructure projects in Ecuador in the last forty years and has caused huge environmental and social impacts both up- and downstream of the dam. More recently, there has been resistance to new government promoted hydropower dam projects proposed for the region (conflicts 13, 15), although it should also be noted that some large hydroelectric project in the zone between the Sierra and the Amazon, have been accepted without conflict.

Energy infrastructure projects related to oil extraction have also lead to conflicts here. The Agua Blanca comuna opposed an oil pipeline that was to be constructed through the Machalilla National Park (MNP) and the territory of several comuna inhabitants on the grounds that it was to be placed across diverse pre-columbine archeological remains that were critical for Agua Blanca's tourism sector (conflict 4). In the province of Esmeraldas conflict has continued for over two decades, concerning the activities of an oil refinery (conflict 18), due to long-standing polluting practices that have caused severe ecological and social damage since the start of its operations.

Finally, conflict in this coastal region has also arisen in response to the direct privatization of public services. For example, in the city of Guayaquil (province of Guayas) there has been conflict over the privatization of water and sanitary services, which was carried out in 1999 (conflict 47). This case reflects a politics of privatization that could be seen in the 1990s across many Latin American countries, as part of a neo-liberalization process, where it was argued that pricing water was the only way to prevent negligent waste and secure sufficient investment in infrastructure (Perrault 2006).

The nature of the driving forces and offenders across commodified activity and time.
Having reviewed, across regions and in detail, the variety of inventoried conflicts, we now turn our attention to consider what or other shared patterns, if any, can be observed across the cases. Due to the export-led character of Ecuador’s economy, with the exceptions of building materials and perhaps also hydropower, international demand for Ecuadorian commodities is the most prevalent driver of environmental conflicts. This is particularly evident in the sectors of oil and mineral extraction, which are dominated by transnational corporations (TNCs) whose headquarters are typically in Europe or North-America. There are also trans-Latin corporations (TLCs) based in Chile, Brazil and Argentina that are involved in conflict related extractive activities (conflicts 39, 43) and more recently an increasing presence of Chinese corporations (conflicts 44, 45). Alongside these TNCs, TLCs and Chinese corporations, the Ecuadorian state is now also directly engaged in oil extraction, still mainly for export, through state companies that have been catalogued repeatedly as offenders in our inventory (conflicts 19, 21, 28, 36, 38, and 48).

Globalized supply and demand for agri-food products, reflecting changing diets and consumption patterns, has also been a major driver of conflict. The trend to concentrate profits in the marketing and retailing stages of food-commodity production, with subcontracting and outsourcing as basic organizational features (Robinson 2008) inevitably has impacts for primary suppliers like Ecuador. Complex networks of vertical and horizontal integration interconnect TNCs with diffuse economic agents, including national firms and small-scale farmers, facilitating the appropriation of Ecuadorean value added, in the form of exported food and plant materials and also in the form of ‘outsourced’ waste deposition. In cases related to the commodities such as bananas, seafood, pork and poultry, flowers and oil palm, the vertical integration of production, processing, and marketing is common and combinations of national and transnational capital investment bodies make it difficult to establish the formal nationality and legal accountability of the consortiums involved.

In what we have referred to above as the ‘post-modern’ commodity frontier of oil palm plantations and carbon offsets markets, a key driver of expansion is the global energy and environment crisis and associated national and regional climate change policies and

---

5 Hydroelectricity is to be to some extent related to the new mining sector, so international demand for gold or copper can be considered indirectly an important driver for this activity as in Chile.
associated global agreements. Oil palm is part of what are known as "flex crops," which can be employed for multiple uses, such as food, animal feed and biofuel. At the same time, the various new initiatives of payments for carbon sequestration and for the maintenance of carbon sequestration related ecosystem services can be understood to be driven, in large part, by a complementary global demand for the CO2 generating energy that produces the related demand for sequestration (Farrell 2012).

Logging activities, on balance, show a more traditional pattern of exploitation, similar to that of agribusiness, with vertically integrated national corporate enterprises dominating the timber sector, which responds to both national and international demand, while in the case of the eucalyptus-based plantations for paper production (conflict 31) the immediate offender was a transnational consortium.

Finally, among the infrastructure initiatives, for those related to oil production, the state, in partnership with TNCs and TLCs is the main offender, while for hydro-energy projects, in the post-neoliberal period the state has played a much larger role than previously, relying on financial capital and building firms from countries such as Brazil and China. This new trend contrasts with hydropower in the neoliberal period, during which IFIs served as main sources of financial capital. In that period, IFIs and other international and inter-governmental organizations also played an important role in financing and providing technical assistance (often imposed as a condition for the release of finance) for the promotion non-traditional agricultural commodities, large-scale energy infrastructure and the privatization of basic services, as in conflict 47, where a U.S transnational corporation was involved in water privatization in Guayas. In all cases of opposition to landfills the direct offender is always either the Ecuadorian state or a local municipality that is in charge of waste disposal. However, here too, global demand is a key driver, with a substantial amount of this waste, particularly the hazardous components, derived from export-oriented activities such as rose and oil production.

The Dynamics of Resistance
Having identified above common drivers of conflict across the country, here we return to the typology of commodified activities presented in Figure 1, in order to structure our review of the patterns of the resistance. Table 1 provides a condensed overview of the forms of resistance and associated outcomes observed in the inventory, organized according to the four commodified activity types identified above: conservation; mineral extraction; agro-food/forestry; and infrastructure.

We begin here with the category of mineral extraction, which has been both one of the most active and enduring activities associated with conflict in Ecuador and throughout Latin America. Here the principal protesters in oil conflicts are indigenous and settler inhabitants of impacted areas. In the 1990s the indigenous movement (led mainly by the CONAIE) embraced the organizing principles of identity and territory and became a powerful nationwide actor. As a result, most of the oil conflicts involving indigenous peoples have been channeled through the multi-level indigenous movement's organizations, using both political and legal strategies of resistance. In the cases involving settler populations, the Amazon Defense Coalition tends to be the main umbrella organization through which demands are channeled. This organization has played a key role in publicizing the harsh and polluting conditions in which northern Amazon citizens live and also leads the many legal processes initiated against oil companies for ecological and health damages. In all the oil production cases the role of advocacy groups, including national and international NGOs, in networking and financing protesters' actions, has been fundamental. The NGOs tend to specialize in either denouncing/generating public awareness of destruction of the Amazon or in defending human rights. The two main demands among all these cases are: (i) abandonment of exploitation (particularly in indigenous territories and protected areas) and (ii) restoration of the polluted environment. In cases where resistance is from the indigenous population, it has tended to be intertwined with demands for recognition of indigenous rights (before the 1998 Constitution) and later for compliance with related law (from 1998 onwards). The focus has been mainly on the right to prior consultation,

---

6 Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

7 The organizing structure of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement is: The CONAIE as the national-level organization is made up of three regional-level organizations (CONFENIAE (for the Amazon region), Confederation of Kichwa Peoples of Ecuador-ECUARUNARI (for the Highland region), and Confederation of Coastal Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador-CONAICE (for the Coast region). Each regional-level organization is the umbrella for a wide set of second-level organizations which in turn act as the umbrella for a large number of first-level organizations.
sometimes accompanied by claims for economic and development support, which reflect the poverty and lack of basic infrastructure in the northern Amazon provinces.

While political strategies of resistance are more common here, there is also a strong presence of legal modes of action. Resistance to oil exploitation has tended to employ direct action (mainly strikes, roadblocks, marches, peaceful occupations of governmental/company offices or facilities) combined with public campaigns, which consist mainly of press releases, complaint letters to the Ecuadorian government, radio communications and e-signature request. In some cases (conflicts 28, 33, 34, 38, 39, 48, 55), these campaigns have reached international scope, including company boycotts and mobilizations of shareholder activism. During the 1990s national public campaigns with the support of transnational alliances, led by activist NGOs, became a predominant strategy for resistance. Among these is the international "Amazon for life" campaign, led by CORDAVI, which is perhaps the most well-known. In 2007 that campaign was reactivated by the Ecuadorean activist NGO Acción Ecológica, under the slogan “Yasuní depends on you,” as the social civil counter-part of the government lead Yasuní-ITT initiative (conflict 61). Numerous lawsuits have also been filed, both within Ecuador (conflicts 2, 19, 20, 21, 48) and internationally, in the US courts under ATCA and with intergovernmental institutions, including the Inter-American Commission, the International Court of Justice and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (conflicts 9, 28, 33, 38, 39, 48).

Across the mineral extraction conflicts both outcomes, measured in terms of fulfillment of protestor demands, and also the role played by the state have been more heterogeneous. Conflicts involving legal demands for ecological restoration (conflicts 19, 20, 21, 48) have tended to end with protesters demands being met (success), with all four inventoried cases resulting in court decisions in favor of the plaintiffs. However, resistance to the expansion along the oil extraction commodity frontier, has, in the majority of the cases, not been successful. In only two of the nine cases inventoried was still-stand of oil extraction activities achieved, and in both cases at the expense of militarization, through force majeure declarations of the government (conflicts 33, 39). Ironically, such coercive policies, which have become more predominant in the post-

---

8 The Corporation for the Defense of Life – see also Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW).
neoliberal period have also lead to unsuccessful outcomes, with the Ecuadorian government filing charges of terrorism against protesters (conflicts 34, 36, 39).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of commodified activity</th>
<th>Demands</th>
<th>Mode of action</th>
<th>Outcomes (*=repression)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioprospecting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-Offsets</td>
<td>37, 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>51, 63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral extraction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>2, 9, 28, 33, 34, 38, 39, 55, 61</td>
<td>19, 20, 21, 48</td>
<td>36, 48, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal ore</td>
<td>3, 8, 22, 24, 25, 26, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45</td>
<td>3, 44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building material</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agro-food/forestry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 10, 49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>11, 12, 52, 54</td>
<td>40, 53</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>27, 57</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logging</td>
<td>29, 30, 31, 32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4, 18</td>
<td>18, 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam</td>
<td>13, 15, 23, 56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13, 14, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic services</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landfill</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60, 62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The Nature of Resistance
In metal mining conflicts the principal protesters are again the directly affected indigenous and mestizo settler peasant populations. However, in some cases urban populations have showed solidarity and support. Here directly affected populations are resisting through a wide range of organizations with weak ties which have not converged into a nationwide coalition. Among the indigenous population, as with the oil cases, indigenous organizations are the principal structures for resistance (conflicts 22, 26, 44, 45), while in the Highlands water irrigation organizations are also a key organising platform. Among the mestizo population organizational structures are more diverse. Over the years various coalitions and committees have emerged, many of which have had difficulties both in getting started and in remaining over time. Those that have persisted have become very active at the local level, often with women achieving an important role as leaders and spokespersons (such as the Women’s Pachamama Defense Front). In all these cases protesters have had the active support of many national activist NGOs. During the 1980-90s these supporting NGOs played a leading role as the main protesters against the first mining cases documented here (conflicts 3, 25).

There is strong homogeneity among the demands across the mining conflicts, regardless of protesting group. These tend to include demands for recognition of democratic and decision-making rights, which tend to appear at the local level, such as with conflict 25, where protesters held a local referendum. Similar claims are also present in indigenous claims to territorial rights and in the language identity politics (conflicts 22, 44, 45).

The main strategy of resistance in all these conflicts, as with oil extraction, has been a combination of direct action and public campaigns, including marches and strikes. However, unlike the oil cases, very few mining cases have scaled-up to the international sphere and the legal actions have generally not yet played an important role. One exception to the latter was during the constituent assembly period (2007-2008), when the majority of organizations lobbied for the legal prohibition of mining activities in protected areas and headwaters. This was achieved with Constituent Mandate number 6, of the constituent assembly, but was not fully implemented and in 2009, with the Mining Law, the prohibition was lifted.

As regards outcomes, in the mineral mining sector they have generally not been successes for the protesters. Not a single mining project included in our inventory has
been definitively cancelled (although some foreign companies have left, such as the Canadian company Kimross), and the government has been recently introduced a politics of repression and criminalization of protest (conflicts 8, 24, 26, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45), which suggests that successes in this area are unlikely in the immediate future.

Finally, the two building materials mining cases in our inventory, distinct resistance dynamic. In both conflicts peasant protesters have presented demands for environmental restoration. However, whereas, in one case (conflict 58) they also demanded closure of the mining operations, in the closing down of the company, in the other (conflict 59) demands have focused on ensuring technological improvements to reduce impacts, expressed through appeal to legal standards. Both have involved direct action, such as facility occupations. In the first case, where closure was the protesters’ aim, the occupation ended with police intervention and the discarding of protesters' demands. In the second, the state mediated the conflict and an agreement was reached, introducing improved environmental practices.

Resistance to infrastructure projects has been related mainly to energy projects associated with either the transportation and processing of oil or the production of hydropower and has been based principally within on the peasant population. There is no formal social movement supporting these disparate struggles, which are quite heterogeneous with respect to protesters, demands and strategies of resistance. Throughout the country, environmental NGOs have played a decisive role in coordinating resistance.

In the dam (hydropower) conflicts, where peasants are the main protagonists, environmental NGOs are also key protagonists, providing legal advice and mounting public campaigns. In all the new dam projects, protesters have completely opposed construction, with their principal strategy of resistance again being direct action supported by legal procedures. Some have filed lawsuits in the Ecuadorian judicial system (conflicts 15, 56) and others in the (unofficial) Latin-American Court of Water and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (conflicts 13 and 56 respectively). This second route has been also used by the protesters demanding environmental restoration for damages caused by an existing dam (conflict 14). So far, outcomes have not usually been in keeping with protester demands. One exception is
conflict 13, in which the present government agreed to negotiate the final project design with locals. In other cases the projects have proceeded without public participation and in some cases (conflicts 15, 56) with the backing of military force.

The dynamics of resistance to oil infrastructure are more diverse. In the case concerning the oil refinery in Esmeraldas (conflict 18) the protagonists are Afro-Ecuadorian urban inhabitants and the strategies of resistance, direct and legal action and public campaigns, are similar to other restoration conflicts. However, protest against pipelines infrastructure is more diverse with respect to both demands and strategies, ranging from negotiations to reduce the associated environmental and social impacts (conflict 4) to direct opposition and internationalizing of the conflict through publicity and the first one involvement of international environmental NGOs (conflict 46). In both cases the projects have continued uninterrupted. However, in the former of the two, protesters demands for the protection of eight archeological sites of extreme importance for local tourism were met. In the oil refinery case (conflict 18) protesters filed a lawsuit demanding environmental restoration and economic compensation for damages associated with this state-owned facility. Although the protesters won the court case restoration of the zone and improvements in the standards of the refinery have not been forthcoming.

Finally, protests against landfill and water privatisation are generally urban or peri-urban. Protest against the privatization of water services (conflict 47) employed both legal and internationalization strategies, with protesters managing to make use of World Bank arbitration services to resolve many of their complaints and improve accountability and service for water users across the city. Protest against landfills, which are technically a local government activity, have included, as with other resistance to polluting activities, demands either for environmental restoration or for compliance with environmental protection legislation (conflicts 60, 62). In both the conflicts direct action was combined with legal measures and protesters employed epidemiological research, led by an activist NGO, in order to sustain their legal claims. While both conflicts are still ongoing, so far resistance has resulted, in one case, in a

---

9 It is worth clarifying that despite the 2008 Constitution prohibited the privatization of water, there have not been subsequent regulations to develop this principle. The result is that the company still operates in Guayaquil.
failed attempt at negotiations with the local authorities (conflict 62) and in the other in a court decision in favor of the protesters (conflict 60). However, in this second case, the mandated restoration work did not satisfy protesters demands and they have recently remobilized, with the response coming this time directly from the state, which has prohibited their demonstrations.

In contrast to infrastructure conflicts, the inventories agri-food cases, while very heterogeneous with respect to protesters are quite consistent as regards both demands and strategies of resistance. Whereas indigenous and afro-Ecuadorian populations are the main protagonist in the oil palm and rose production cases, and also play a key role in defense of the mangroves, mestizo settler populations are central in the banana, fishmeal and livestock conflicts. However, a common feature among all these protesters is that they live in rural or peri-urban areas impacted by the globalization of agriculture and horticulture. The most common demands are improved working conditions, ensuring environmental conditions that are in compliance with current laws and patterns of economic activity and land use that reflect fair distribution of access to natural resources (conflicts 1, 5, 6, 10, 16, 17, 27, 49, 57). Trade union organizations are important supporters of resistance in several cases (conflicts 16, 27, 57), showing the presence of working-class environmentalism. While political mobilisation often serves as a complement, most strategies in this commodity area have based in legal actions. However, the case of conflict 49 presents a novel strategy in resistance to agro-food sector impacts, using the independent World Bank associated arbitration mechanism, the Office of the Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman (CAO), to push for negotiations with the government. However, whereas protesters in conflict 47 (mentioned above) were able to reach a collaborative agreement with the private US company involved there, protesters in conflict 49, who were confronting an Ecuadorian company, were not.

On balance, protests concerning working standards (both as regards wages and environmental standards) in the agri-food cases (conflicts 1, 5, 10, 16, 49) have seen

---

10 It is worth clarifying that despite the 2008 Constitution prohibited the privatization of water, there have not been subsequent regulations to develop this principle. The result is that the company still operates in Guayaquil.

10 CAO is an independent recourse and accountability mechanism for the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) investment projects. CAO conducts an assessment without legal force, which is reported to the President of the World Bank Group. Its main goal is to facilitate a dialogue between parties, in order to identify convergences and agreements.
some of their demands met; key among these is that all workers must now, in the post-neoliberal period, be affiliated with the social security system and have the legal right to unionize. However, amidst a context of continuing violence and cheap surplus labor, it remains to be seen to what extent these rights will be exercised.

In commercial logging, the principal protesters are indigenous/mestizo forest dwellers who are working with NGOs. In all these cases NGOs have been fundamental, either in leading the struggle or in providing legal support (conflicts 29, 30, 31, and 32) while strategies of resistance have been mixed. The principal demands have been the elimination of pro-corporate conservation policies and protection of forest inhabitants' rights in the face of the illegal activities of logging companies. The outcomes in all the cases have been positive for the protesters.

Finally, regarding conservation-related conflicts, the principal protesters here are indigenous and mestizo rural populations. Their demands are consistent across cases, with all protagonists opposing proposed projects flat out, while strategies of resistance are quite varied. Resistance to conservation for tourism has involved legal action, combined with media communication, whereas opposition to carbon offsets projects has involved mainly public information campaigns. In these latter conflicts protagonist communities have sometimes appealed for help from NGOs in interpreting contracts they have already signed, for example with the Dutch foundation representing electrical companies (FACE), which was planting pines in their territories. Activist NGOs and national-level indigenous organizations have also take the initiative as protagonists here leading opposition to the expansion of the sector, mainly through oppositional public statements accompanied by documented evidence, based on activist knowledge. All of the inventories carbon offset project conflicts were still ongoing at the time of writing, without any clear resolution, as are several of the tourism cases, although those that have been resolved so far have seen with decisions in favour of the protesters. Opposition to bioprospecting or “biopiracy”, in contrast, has been mobilized both at local and international levels, with international shareholders in offender companies constituting an import target group for exercising political pressure. However, as the dragon's blood tree case (conflict 7) included in the inventory ended when the project being abandoned by the company it is not possible to say how the negotiations regarding royalties and compensations to the Kichwa communities might have tuned out
in the end. This issue is, however, again coming to the fore, as the Correa government has begun to promote biotechnology initiatives.

**Conclusions**

The inventory of environmental conflicts presented and analyzed in the preceeding pages highlights how Ecuador has, over the past 30 years, both resisted and rearticulated its position as a primary commodity exporter, supplying capital based producers across the planet. Our main aim here has been to explore, through a large N comparative study, relationships between the commodification of nature, institutional change and environmental conflict. Our inventory has traced how Ecuador’s role as a primary production exporter has changed, and equally importantly how it has not, following the advent, in the 1970s and 80s of a new stage of world capitalism. As regards changes, we find that, over the inventoried period, from 1980 to 2013, Ecuador has become now a supplier of not only of traditional raw materials but also, and increasingly, of luxury goods (so far shrimp and flowers, perhaps in the near future gold) and post-modern ‘virtual’ exports, such as the dedication of land to carbon sequestration and to market-led conservation activities. Our inventory also shows that Ecuador has begun to established itself as an outsourcer of the increasingly scare resource of environmental quality, as a virtual exporter of not only cheap labor but also of contaminable territories, which are being exposed to hazardous and resource-intensive production activities. Here we find that both national and transnational capital accumulation is being served through by externalizing both the social and the environmental costs of primary production through "competitive" integration into the global market. However, particularly with regard to mineral extraction, which began to play a central role in the Ecuadorean economy around the same time as the start of globalization, the modes of exploitation and accumulation have remained largely unchanged over the inventoried period.

At the local level this increasing global market integration has exhibited a clear pattern of impacts: privatization and contamination of commons has led to deteriorating quality of living environments, displacement and reduced local resident access to land and other natural resources. On balance, there has been some progress in the quality of labor conditions in the post-neoliberal period, particularly in the agri-food/forestry sector.
Following Harvey (2005), we have referred to the first pattern as "accumulation by environmental dispossession," where accumulation of wealth is achieved through the shifting of environmental burdens, with the benefits of natural resource exploitation concentrated in a globalized capitalist class comprised of both national and transnational elites, facilitated by local displacements and local dispossession and local exposure to contamination of land and resources. When we compare these driving forces across the four types of commodification of nature employed in our inventory, there appears to be some clear correlations between the degree and persistence of globalised commodity demands and the ways in which the regime change of 2007 has impacted patterns of conflict and exploitation. With regard to both mineral extraction and infrastructure, our inventory suggests that there has been little change in the manner of exploitation but rather, in the post-neoliberal period, a blurring of the traditional North-South geographical divide between exploiter and exploited. This is reflected in a growing Ecuadorian private and state-capitalist-class and has been accompanied by a substantial rise in Chinese direct foreign investments. In the areas of agro-food/forestry and conservation based commodification of nature, by contrast, there have been changes in both the manner and the masters of exploitation, with traditional exploitative activities like banana production being complemented both by the creation of new post-modern and non-traditional extractive activities, like carbon sequestration and flower production and also by the glocalisation of exploitation, as in forestry and food-processing, where globally integrated local business facilitates global capital in the work of shifting social and environmental costs onto local communities.

Our inventory shows that income-poor, rural and racially discriminated populations are the principal groups suffering from, and resisting environmental dispossession in Ecuador. Their motivations for resistance are often based on their direct reliance on natural resources – what Martinez-Alier (2002b) has called the environmentalism of the poor – and on claims to indigenous rights and demands for environmental justice. Their positioning is based on three basic demands, which are distributed across commodity types but reasonably consistent over time. First, in relation to large-scale infrastructure projects and the expansion of existing mineral extraction (and more recently the commercial forestry sector), protesters have tended to adopt a strict oppositional stance and have demanded the right to participate in decision-making. Second, where existing extractive frontiers have become old and resources spent, protesters have also demanded
environmental restoration. Finally, in their resistance to environmental dispossession through new infrastructure projects, the commercialization of traditional knowledge and the new corporate agri-food sector, protesters have demanded improved ecological and social standards and the prioritization of the social functions of environment and resources over the interest of capital. All three types of demands have been framed predominantly in a rights-based language that is consistent with the general position of global movements for environmental and social justice: e.g. rights to indigenous territories, to food sovereignty, to land, to a healthy working and living environment, and demands to respect the rights of nature. While only a small portion of the inventoried conflicts have included clearly glocalized resistance, both national and international NGOs have consistently been key actors supporting the networking of protesters within Ecuador and, at times, in transnationalizing these struggles. Their participation has also been fundamental for sustaining the politics of legal actions and public campaigns, in which the protesters have engaged most often, thereby helping to reinforcing the environmental justice tone of resistance.

While the outcomes of these struggles, as measured against protesters demands, are very heterogeneous, there do appear to be some clear trends. At the one extreme, resistance to the expansion of established extractive frontiers, in particular oil and mineral mining, has rarely been successful, and this has not changed under the post-neoliberal government of Rafael Correa. In contrast, environmental restoration struggles have mainly succeeded, particularly over the last ten years, although enforcement has been poor. Struggles for better social and environmental standards in production have seen more mixed results over time and a marked improvement in recent years, where, in place of consistently poor results during the neo-liberal period, national and international companies have been forced to comply with Ecuadorian legislation throughout the post-neoliberal period, although standards have still tended to be low.

Alongside these successes that have come under the mandate of the Correa government, this post-neoliberal state itself has, in recent years, started to play a direct role in facilitating capitalist development, directly attacking autonomous pockets of resistance to infrastructure and extractive projects and endeavoring to silence critics, social organizations and NGOs. This is reflected in a marked reduction, as compared with 2007, in spaces for dialogue and participation, by increasing legal constraints placed on
organized civil society and in some cases also by direct confrontations between the state and protesters strictly opposed to specific extractive activities. While there is most certainly grounds for devoting economic resources to compensate Ecuador’s poor for losses resulting from previous extractive activities, the government has begun to implement social policies financed to a large extent by oil exports. However, these policies, which depend at present on continued export oriented extraction, have not reduced the number of conflicts. Instead, they have served only to contribute to the isolation and of already marginalised protesters. While there have clearly been more successes in Ecuador in recent years for those resisting accumulation by dispossession and contamination, our inventory suggests that patterns of both resistance and reform continue to be strongly influenced by the accumulation opportunities that are available here for globalised capital. Correa’s government, in trying to meet the immediate material demands (health, roads, education, basic services) of the Ecuadorean public and private sectors, has weakened the avenues of political resistance available to those who are still being dispossessed and contaminated and has reduced the solidarity across communities, that existed during the neoliberal period. In the post-neoliberal period marginalised populations in Ecuador continue to suffer the immediate consequences of AbyD and to resist, but their potential allies, among the urban and peri-urban working classes, who are, all for the better, no longer directly suffering from the glocalized shifting of social and environmental costs, are growing less likely to join them in the struggle.

References


