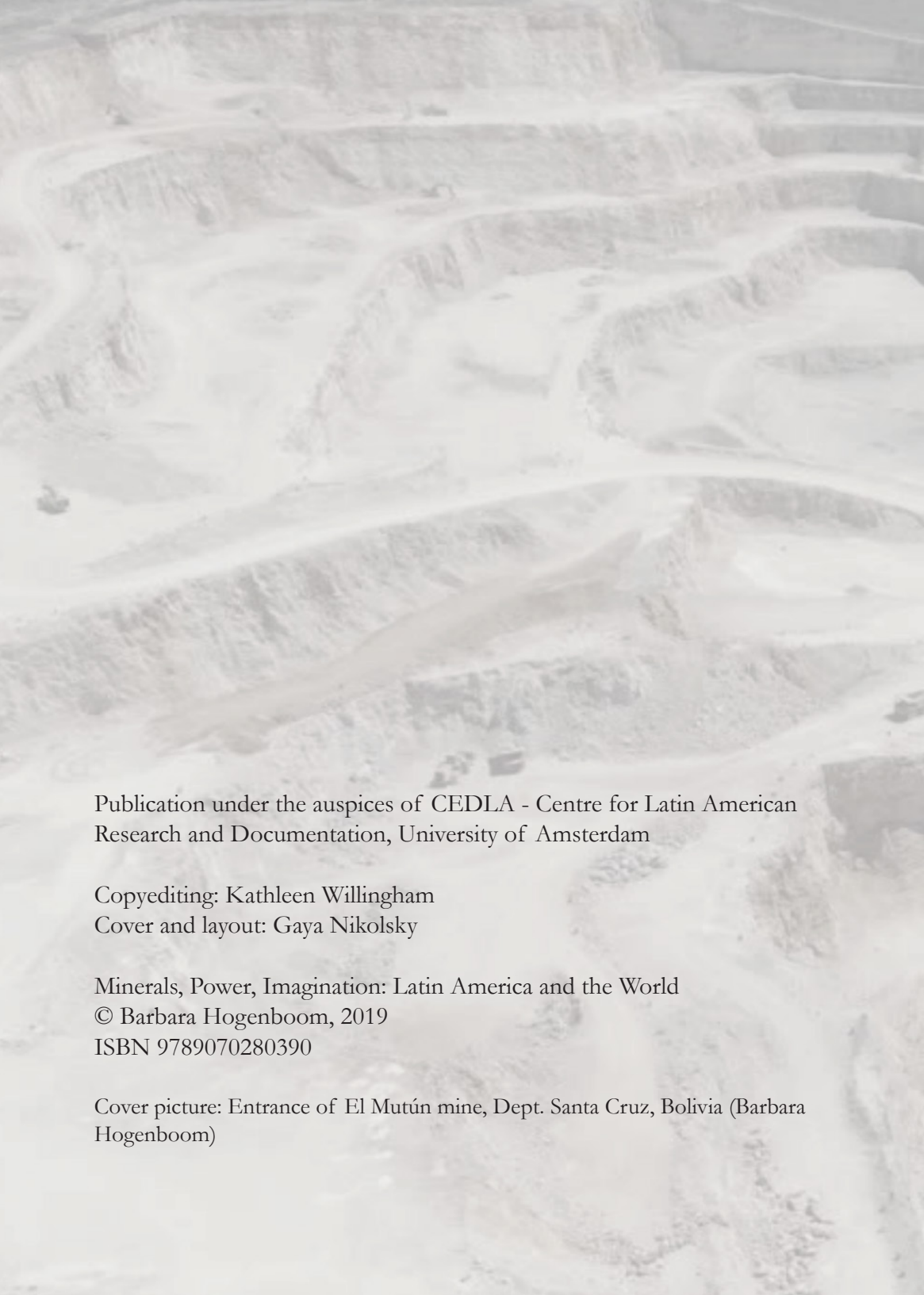


# Minerals, Power, Imagination: Latin America and the World

Barbara Hogenboom



Inaugural Lecture  
University of Amsterdam  
14 June 2019



Publication under the auspices of CEDLA - Centre for Latin American  
Research and Documentation, University of Amsterdam

Copyediting: Kathleen Willingham  
Cover and layout: Gaya Nikolsky

Minerals, Power, Imagination: Latin America and the World  
© Barbara Hogenboom, 2019  
ISBN 9789070280390

Cover picture: Entrance of El Mutún mine, Dept. Santa Cruz, Bolivia (Barbara  
Hogenboom)

# **Minerals, Power, Imagination: Latin America and the World**

**Inaugural Lecture / Rede**

uitgesproken ter gelegenheid van de aanvaarding van  
het ambt van hoogleraar Latijns Amerika Studies  
aan de Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen van de  
Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op vrijdag 14 juni 2019 door  
**Barbara Hogenboom**

*El petróleo es un tema fatal.*

(Oil is a life-threatening theme.)

*Entendíamos por cultura  
la creación de cualquier espacio de encuentro entre las personas,  
y eran cultura, para nosotros,  
todos los símbolos de la identidad y la memoria colectivas:  
los testimonios de lo que somos,  
las profecías de la imaginación,  
las denuncias de lo que nos impide ser.*

(We understood by culture  
the creation of any space of encounter between people,  
and culture, for us,  
were all symbols of collective identity and memory:  
the testimonies of what we are,  
the prophecies of the imagination,  
the denunciations of what prevents us from being.)

(EDUARDO GALEANO, *Días y noches de amor y de guerra*, 1978)

*Mevrouw de Rector Magnificus,*

*Meneer de Decaan,*

*Dames en Heren,*

Thank you so much for being here today. It means so much to me that people from all my different worlds have come together in this hall: family and friends, students and PhD candidates, the CEDLA team, colleagues from the Humanities, Social Sciences and other faculties of this university, colleagues from other universities, and others who, just as I do, have a fascination for Latin America. At first, I saw the combination of all my worlds as a demanding challenge in writing my inaugural lecture, but it also has its advantages. Precisely because I wanted this lecture to be comprehensible to everyone, I am freed from a number of scientific conventions and high-flown concepts that have always made me slightly uncomfortable, even though I have spent half my life in the academic world.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to tell you about my fascination for the Latin American governance of minerals from the local to the global scale, and about my plans for research and collaboration in the coming years. It is obvious that, on the one hand, there is a relation between non-recyclable resources such as metals and oil and, on the other, power. In the mid-seventies, when the region fell under the dominance of dictatorial regimes, the Uruguayan journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano wrote, "Oil is a life-threatening theme". Later I will explain how imagination, culture and collective identity have a role to play in this as well. I will refer to minerals in the broad sense, including various materials originating from the subsoil: metal ores, coal and other solid minerals as well as oil and gas. But I will also discuss what they mean, and the place these minerals occupy in Latin American society and imagination.

*El Mutún, Bolivia*

Let me start by taking you to a place in the heart of South America, a place that only few people know about: El Mutún. Near the border with Brazil in the east of Amazonian Bolivia lie enormous untouched reserves of iron ore and manganese far from the modern “civilization” of major cities and political centres. Hardly any infrastructure connects this mine-to-be to the rest of Bolivia and global markets. And although I have never been there, this remote place has attracted my curiosity for years. Even stranger, there is not much to see or do there for my research. Up to now, no mining town has arisen, the forest has not been cleared, and there are no signs of local resistance. My work centres on the politics and injustices of mineral extraction. This subject combines three dynamics that have always interested me: first, interactions and power relations between civil society, the state and the private sector; second, political and economic processes across the local, national and global scale; and third, the ways that humans relate to natural resources, and to nature. Yet in El Mutún, little has happened so far – and as I sometimes have to tell my students: you cannot do research on a process that is not yet happening.

A few years ago when I visited the mining region of Carajás in the Brazilian state of Pará, I saw how quickly things could change. A few decades ago, in a similarly remote location in the Amazon, the world’s largest iron reserves were discovered. After the construction of a road and a railroad, a huge open pit mine was realized. And right next to the mine, in this sparsely populated area, in less than twenty years, the city of Parauapebas emerged, with 200,000 inhabitants. From this fieldwork I learned that mining is like a pressure cooker of modern “development” – again in quotation marks because the rapid changes surrounding an extractive project are turbulent and often not very positive for the local communities, production processes and nature. Mining towns in Brazil and the rest of Latin America are no longer enclaves. Although few locals get a job within the gates of the mining company, some do benefit from new economic activities and social services such as schools and health care. On the other hand, the boom-and-bust of world market prices can instantly bring an end to local operations and jobs. Other affected groups are the people who, against their will, have their farming land or indigenous territory expropriated, people who suffer from the effects of deforestation, pollution and disrupted water systems, and who see their environment, community and

way of life change radically.<sup>1</sup> And then, after mining activities have exhausted the reserves, local economic benefits evaporate, yet the environmental impact continues for decades and generations. This is as true for mining as it is for oil and gas extraction. In our own country, the current wave of earthquakes around the Dutch gas fields in Groningen Province remind us only too well that the neglect of the local population and their environment is happening here as well; thus it is a worldwide problem.

But at least, one might think, the country as a whole benefits from this mineral wealth of metals, oil and gas? Unfortunately, in the case of Latin America, their contribution to the national economy and society is often equally volatile and disappointing. What is considered to be mineral wealth is in fact exported as raw materials, while the more labour-intensive and profitable steps of refining, processing and manufacturing take place in other parts of the world. Moreover, the revenues that do stay in the country often end up in the wrong projects, or the wrong pockets, as a result of weak institutions and strong elites. And this reality is not just an unfortunate mishap. As comparative analyses and case studies have demonstrated, mineral wealth can, in fact, slow down economic development, poverty alleviation and democratic institution-building. While some call it the paradox of plenty<sup>2</sup>, this tendency has become best known as the resource curse.

There are other plans, however, for El Mutún. Bolivia’s government, since 2006 under the presidency of Evo Morales, wants to break with the customary “mining-as-usual” that the country has experienced since colonization. Morales himself is indigenous, he grew up in a poor Aymara family, and he led the union of coca farmers. Supported by anti-neoliberal protests against the privatization of water and the rapid export of Bolivia’s gas in the years before his electoral victory, Evo Morales introduced a mineral agenda directed at state control, redistribution and inclusive and sustainable development. He picked the first May 1 celebration of his presidency to nationalize Bolivia’s gas sector. He also proposed not simply to export the large lithium reserves of Uyuni, but to build a refining industry and even factories to manufacture lithium-ion batteries for electric cars within Bolivia itself. The international community was impressed: in the case of a small and poor country like Bolivia, it showed guts to walk off the beaten track and not to opt for the rapid export of raw materials. Less attention has been paid to the equally revolutionary plan not



to export El Mutún's iron as a raw material but to develop a national metal industry, using Bolivia's natural gas as the energy source. Instead of a simple mining concession, Bolivia is aiming to find foreign partners willing to invest both in El Mutún and in Bolivia's industrialization.

This is a new example of the recurring Latin American attempts to escape from the century-old trap of mineral extraction that has generated dependency relations, economic instability, social inequality and ecological destruction. Yet even with a more economically, socially and environmentally sound approach, the local impact would still be huge. If the plans for El Mutún do materialize, the area will rapidly change from a remote rural area with small communities into a buzzing urban mining zone, transforming the heart of South America once and for all. When companies from northern industrialized countries showed no interest in investing in these ambitious plans, Bolivia granted a mining concession to the metal multinational Jindal from India, but this did not result in concrete activities, either. In 2015, a new South-South deal was made, this time with a Chinese company. Around the same time, Bolivia received a one-billion-dollar loan for the development of infrastructure and hydroelectric power stations. With such Chinese interests and capital inflows involved, El Mutún might become operative soon. But will the Chinese involvement also help Bolivia to realize its revolutionary development plans? If we look at the experiences of other countries in the region, can we say that China is a game-changer for Latin America?

#### *China as a game-changer?*

Some ten years ago, when China rapidly became a prominent economic partner for Latin America, there were alarmist reactions from two sides. Some western media, and especially the US, used headlines like "hungry dragon" and "the new colonizer". Interestingly, some Latin American progressive intellectuals and activists also saw China as a neo-imperialist power that would be no better than the United States. These economic trends and political debates triggered Alex Fernández and me to start a research project on the emerging China-Latin America relations. Alex – who came from Chile to the Netherlands in 1973 as political refugee – had been my master's and PhD supervisor at the political science department of the University of Amsterdam, and afterwards we continued to collaborate. We identified three benefits of China's new

presence in Latin America.<sup>3</sup> First of all, the China-related "multipolarization" of world politics offered new opportunities for the Global South agenda. In 2002, for instance, Brazil (under President Lula) and China took the lead in uniting a group of over twenty developing countries against a US-European proposal for deeper global trade liberalization. This joint action effectively stopped a plan that would have been more beneficial for countries of the North than for those of the South. Second, China's rise produced new opportunities for the region. Rapid Chinese development led to more demand and higher commodity prices. During the commodity boom in the first decade of the 21st century, prices even tripled. When the American and European financial markets crashed in 2008, China's on-going economic growth saved Latin America from being automatically dragged down with them, as would have happened in the era before the rise of China.

And third, China became an alternative source of capital for Latin America. As emerging global players, Chinese state-owned companies and banks were eager to become active in the region and, with the support of the Chinese government, made many deals with Latin American governments. The Chinese approach differed from that of the United States on an essential point: there was no neoliberal agenda like there was with the United States and the powerful international financial institutions – the IMF, the World Bank and the InterAmerican Development Bank – based in Washington. And furthermore, it was never an issue whether the Chinese model market was socialism or state capitalism. In particular for countries where the population had voted out the neoliberal model, and progressive governments wanted to change macro-economic policies, China's rise was a window of opportunity. In no time, Chinese banks obtained a prominent role as provider of development loans. After a century in which the United States had asserted its power in the region through gunboats, CIA infiltration, economic warfare and conditional loans, Alex Fernández and I considered this a positive development – partly "made in China".

#### *The example of oil*

The rapid changes since then, however, have made me rethink my early positive assessment of the "China factor". My doubts developed especially when a joint Dutch-Chinese project allowed me to study the oil relations

between China and three Latin American countries: Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil.<sup>4</sup> Even more than in the case of metals, oil is a strategic resource and oil relations are equally strategic. “Oil is blood”, an official of the China Development Bank said in an off-the-record interview in a bar in Beijing. Oil is indeed the lifeblood, not only of the Chinese economy (and of course any economy), but also of China’s political regime. China’s involvement in Latin American oil countries consists of a mix of deals with the Chinese state and various large state-owned entities, including investments by Chinese oil companies, loans from Chinese banks, and infrastructure contracts to Chinese construction companies.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese development loans that are to be paid back through oil deliveries over long periods of 20 to 30 years involve especially complex contract arrangements between governments, banks and oil companies. Notwithstanding that these are billion-dollar deals, the details have remained by and large unknown to the citizens and even the members of congress of Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil.

The question arises whether or not the states of Latin American oil-producing countries have gained more control over their oil resources and their development model as a result of the rise of China. In contrast with Latin American and Chinese government discourses on their “South-South relations” and “win-win deals”, the answer seems to be an emphatic “no”. In the case of Ecuador, two books on its international oil relations, both written by a journalist, indicate that historical problems have appeared again under new circumstances. In *El Festín del Petróleo* (The Feast of Oil), published in 1974, Jaime Galarza shows that the early years of oil discovery and exploitation were far from festive.<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s, the so-called “big seven” of American and European companies that controlled the world of oil had a perverse influence on Ecuador. These foreign oil companies had convinced Ecuadorian government officials to lie about the oil reserves for speculative reasons that went against the national interests of Ecuador. Forty years later, Fernando Villavicencio published *Ecuador: Made in China*, in which he maps the new asymmetries and shady and corrupt oil arrangements with China.<sup>7</sup> Based on a bilateral agreement for South-South cooperation, for example, Ecuador gave China a discount of \$ 2 per barrel of oil. While this gift came at the expense of the Ecuadorian people, Chinese companies made good money by selling part of Ecuador’s cheaper oil to the nearest big oil market – indeed, the United States. Another remarkable continuity is that – in line with

Eduardo Galeano’s warnings – revealing oil-related abuses and injustices was and still is not without risk. Jaime Galarza, who would later become Ecuador’s first Minister of Environment, was imprisoned at the time of publication of his book, and Fernando Villavicencio was accused of terrorism.

In addition to these empirical signs of the downside of the Chinese influence in Latin America’s mineral sectors, my concerns have increased after reading and rereading the work of Stephen Bunker.<sup>8</sup> Based on his studies of the century-long underdevelopment of the Brazilian Amazon, Bunker found that the subordination of a resource-exporting country to importing nations only deepens over time. Ever since the arrival of Dutch and Portuguese colonizers, each new global power has entered the Amazon with more advanced technologies. Together with local elites, the state, companies and banks, the new hegemon developed new infrastructure and financial instruments, allowing for greater volumes of natural resources to be transported over greater distances.<sup>9</sup> Bunker did not live to see the full rise of China, but China’s current role in Latin America confirms his critical theory. As a new core economy, China has not really been a game-changer for the region. With its economic rise, China has become the “factory of the world”, while Latin America’s industry has weakened. Rather than making a break with historical patterns, the region continues to serve as a “mine and oil well of the world”, and foreign actors and interests still play a major role in Latin America’s mineral governance.

### *The New Left as a game-changer?*

The other remarkable rise of the 2000s was that of the New Left in Latin America. It involved both an ideological shift and the entry of a new political elite, with presidents such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Lula da Silva in Brazil, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Like Evo Morales, they reacted to civic discontent and decided that in order to end structural foreign dependency and social inequalities, the state had to take more control over the mineral sectors. They raised taxes on minerals, renationalized oil and gas operations and invested in social programmes. I have conceptualized this process from popular discontent to regime change and policy reforms as the repoliticization of mineral resources.<sup>10</sup> While it seemed to have faded away under neoliberal governments, resource nationalism has returned throughout Latin America.

This notion that natural resources should be controlled by the state in the interest of “the people” and “the nation”<sup>11</sup> again has proved to be alive and kicking.

Parallel to this renewed focus on minerals, the nation and the people, the new political elite has seemed to be more serious about protecting the environment. In their discourses they have embraced indigenous and environmentalist ideas about respecting Mother Earth (Pachamama), and about thinking beyond development as economic growth, stressing the importance of living well (*vivir bien*) in harmony with nature. So one might have expected their sympathy for protests against mining, for instance. In practice, however, the New Left governments have found the revenues from minerals to be a quick solution for other demands, especially for social spending. In effect, mineral extraction has only expanded. This neo-extractivism, or what Murat Arsel, Lorenzo Pellegrini and I have called the extractive imperative,<sup>12</sup> came quite unexpectedly. “Si eres tan progresista, ¿por qué destruyes la naturaleza?” (If you are so progressive, why do you destroy nature?), was the title of an article by Eduardo Gudynas,<sup>13</sup> one of Latin America’s leading environmental experts. Politicians who claimed to respect nature and the rights of indigenous peoples and poor peasants in reality allowed mineral extraction to expand into new territories, causing a growing number of local conflicts with communities.

The best example of this paradox may be Ecuador, a country on which several PhD candidates at CEDLA have done interesting research. Under president Rafael Correa, Ecuador became the first country in the world to grant Rights to Nature, and the national development plan was called *Buen Vivir*, that is *The Good Life*. But at the same time, more oil concessions were handed out and mining was encouraged, ironically in the name of *Buen Vivir*, and criticism and protest were suppressed.<sup>14</sup> For a scholar like me, who started doing fieldwork twenty-five years ago analysing the struggle of environmental organizations in then neoliberal and semi-authoritarian Mexico, the instances of environmental injustice under progressive governments in the region have been sobering.

Even more sobering is the way in which the number one oil country of the region has developed over the past twenty years. What started as an interesting break with an elitist oil regime has turned into a deep crisis in which the

economy of Venezuela has been destroyed, the poor suffer more than ever, and the government only manages to stay in power with extra-legal measures, repression of protest and the support of a corrupt army. In the first years of Hugo Chavez’s presidency, my attention was mainly drawn to his breaking with neoliberal policies and traditional ties with “big oil” and the US, and to his use of oil revenues for new regional organizations and national pro-poor programmes. And while his populist style was evident from the start, Chavez’s creeping power accumulation initially seemed somehow less undemocratic because frequent referendums showed strong electoral support. However, as the state took control of the Central Bank and the national oil company PDVSA and created new centralized institutions, inefficient investments and corruption flourished. As CEDLA’s visiting fellow Javier Corrales had warned early on, and as we all know by now, Venezuela’s radical shift under Chávez has ended in a disaster.<sup>15</sup> When the commodity boom ended and oil prices fell, it turned out there were hardly any buffers to protect the economy and the poor. Rather than solving the country’s resource curse and structural problems, Chavismo has resulted in an enormous economic, political and humanitarian crisis. While the end of the commodity boom has also hit the rest of the region since 2014, and most Latin American countries have seen either a democratic or not-so-democratic transition away from the left, Chávez’s successor Maduro and the army cling on to their power and oppress the majority of Venezuelans who want another government.

Power corrupts, I was taught when studying political science at this university. And looking at Venezuela’s recent trajectory, and at the academic literature on the resource curse, it is clear that minerals corrupt, too.<sup>16</sup> I think I had already picked up this core message as a teenager simply through watching the soap series *Dallas*. The power struggles and intrigue within the Ewing family showed the perverse side of oil wealth, with JR as the embodiment of immorality. In contrast with the exceptional situation of the United States, where a private landowner also owns the oil reserves below the surface, in most other parts of the world, subsoil minerals are national property. Yet also under public ownership, mineral wealth often corrupts individuals, institutions and systems. In Latin America, corruption has happened for centuries and continues to be widespread: at the local and the national level, among politicians of the right, the left and the centre, and even in countries that score high in transparency rankings, such as Chile and Uruguay.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, as the region-wide Odebrecht



scandal around infrastructural projects shows, corruption is not limited to the extractive sector. Among the long list of recent corruption cases, many are related to mining and especially oil, such as Brazil's Lava Jato scandal. All in all, apart from some temporary changes, many expectations of the New Left as a game-changer have simply not materialized.

*Minerals, imagination and society*

Now that the economic and political shifts of the past twenty years have offered no real ways out, I propose we look to other directions to understand what helps and what hinders the escape from the resource curse. I agree with Anthony Bebbington et al.,<sup>18</sup> that beyond interests and power relations, we also have to understand and study how natural resource politics are shaped by the nature of the resource itself and by ideas about that resource. We need to get a better sense of how people think about minerals, and about the role of ideas in how societies relate to minerals. In the case of Venezuela, oil is deeply engrained in collective imaginaries and socio-cultural patterns. Despite all the problems, most citizens in this highly divided society feel an affective relationship with oil, and they assume that national development has to be oil-based. Recent studies convincingly argue that, more than just a rentier state, Venezuela is also a rentier society.<sup>19</sup> For poor people in the popular barrios of Caracas, oil has socio-cultural properties related to citizenship, nationhood and justice.<sup>20</sup> Yet also among the middle and upper class, oil has shaped collective thinking in such a way that hardly anyone can imagine a national development model that is not based on oil.<sup>21</sup>

A society's attitude towards national mineral resources is, of course, not fixed. We have seen this here in the Netherlands with the ideas and feelings about the extraction of gas in Groningen Province. These ideas and feelings have shifted dramatically from positive to negative in the past few years, and this has contributed to the radical political decision to slow down and eventually stop extraction altogether. In Latin America, there are many interesting initiatives being taken to raise mineral consciousness, and to show that resource nationalism has problems of its own, but they are up to quite a challenge. National imagination and cultural expressions around minerals have always been strong in Latin America, especially in relation to resource nationalism. Sculptures in public spaces and mural paintings in national government

buildings depict minerals as potential sources for national progress that, from colonialism to today, have had to be protected against greedy foreign powers.<sup>22</sup> Since the discovery of oil, politicians and oil worker unions have fed the imagination of oil and gas as sources of national wealth, development and social justice with slogans and images, some of which have been remarkably persistent over time. In Venezuela the idea of *sembrar el petróleo* – sowing oil, using a catchy agricultural metaphor – remained popular long after it was launched in the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> In other countries popular slogans about we-the-people owning the minerals appear time and again in marches and protests (“o petróleo é nosso”, “el gas para los bolivianos”). And several presidents had their pictures taken with their hands dripping with oil. Historical and contemporary imaginaries of minerals as either national wealth, or as a curse instead, can also be studied in street art, songs, books, films and, of course, in social media expressions of all sorts. It is my firm belief that by engaging more with approaches from the humanities we can better understand the persistence of extractivism in Latin America, and support initiatives to overcome the resource curse.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the studies on the culture of oil assert that the way people think about it has to do with the invisibility of oil.<sup>25</sup> Oil is hardly visible during transport and refinement, and even as consumers of gasoline we do not actually see the resource when we fill up the tank of our car. According to David McDermott, oil is most dangerous when “people treat it as ordinary – that is, as neither moral nor immoral, but amoral”.<sup>26</sup> The fact that oil is so common and at the same time almost invisible makes it harder to raise the much-needed awareness about the many problems of oil. Now that we can feel and see climate change, global awareness about fossil fuels is slowly increasing, people are starting to change their consumption patterns and young people especially are mobilizing to demand a safer future. In contrast, awareness about the enormous local impact of oil extraction has remained low because only the people directly living in oil zones actually see and feel this impact. In these extraction zones, oil is neither invisible nor normal. In Ecuador's Amazon, for instance, you can see and smell the oil everywhere; it is exposed in open oil basins, burned in flaring pipes, and floating around in natural water streams – and not just hidden inside pipes, separation units and storage tanks. Even decades-old pollution continues to affect nature and its inhabitants. Incidences of cancer in these areas are two to three times higher

than the national average. Yet the people who live in these areas are torn between their concerns for the health of their family and the need to provide for them. Even the woman who showed us around in the toxic oil zone, and whose husband is imprisoned for mobilizing against irresponsible oil drilling, has sons that work for the company. In short, inside the zones of extraction, oil is visible and immoral, but outside, we are hardly aware of these realities. And the lack of awareness about this local ecological and social resource curse is also true for the extraction of gas and shale gas, and for mining.

*What is to be done?*

In spite of the sobering lessons that I have shared here with you, I believe that there are good reasons to remain optimistic about the possibilities to end problems and injustices around mineral wealth in Latin America and elsewhere. In the past, major systems of injustices such as colonization and slavery, the subordination of women, and the repression of indigenous peoples have successfully been countered by mobilizing people and ideas. Even though such injustices still persist in more subtle shapes, these historical changes do remind us that critical thinking and collective initiative can help to bring about social and systemic change.

To counter injustices and change power relations we need imagination. In Latin America, intellectuals, activists and local communities that try to change dominant ideas on mineral extraction are very aware that influencing society is as important as influencing policy-makers. And that bringing an end to social and environmental injustice requires more than resistance alone. Eduardo Galeano and fellow journalists realized in the 1970s that next to writing articles about inequality or the power of oil cartels, they had to engage with culture in the broadest sense: culture in the sense of identity, collective memory and creating space where different peoples come together. And as my inspiring and dear colleague Rutgerd Boelens says with respect to water struggles and the strategies of people creating rooted water cultures, “They resist to be able to create, and they create to be able to resist, giving form and substance to Latin America’s water societies”.<sup>27</sup>

We can learn a great deal from the creative ways in which Latin American communities, activists, artists, scholars, journalists and even some officials

shape spaces and communicate information, criticism and proposals for alternative futures. I am very impressed by how environmental and indigenous organizations in Ecuador have managed to convince and mobilize many fellow citizens for the revolutionary idea that protecting the pristine rainforest around Yasuní-ITT is more important than pumping up the oil that lies underneath. Although the government let go of the plan to leave these oil fields untouched, there is still strong civic support for it, especially among younger generations. Thus, among other things, culture has helped to reach the minds and souls of people that have never been to the protected natural area of Yasuní-ITT or to the polluted oil zones in the Amazon, and has convinced them of the idea to leave the oil in the soil. The relevance of such initiatives is not only local or national, they also influence ideas and actions across borders and continents, also here in Europe.

Other inspiring Latin American initiatives range from municipalities in Argentina that declare themselves free of fracking, to a national moratorium on oil extraction in Costa Rica. In the project Leave Fossil Fuels Underground, we are studying these and other local-to-global strategies to halt fossil fuel extraction in Latin America, in Africa, and also here, in the case of Groningen Province. With a team of UvA colleagues from CEDLA and from Joyeeta Gupta’s International Development Studies group, together with academic and activist partners in Ecuador, Argentina and South Africa, we are looking into the politics of ideas to overcome our global fossil fuel addiction and build better local society-nature relations. Simultaneously, if funding permits, I hope to collaborate with Marjo de Theije and Eva van Roekel of the VU University on the local to transnational realities of Venezuela’s crisis and the profound impact on society and mineral resource appropriation.

In teaching and research, I plan on focusing more on how ideas and culture interact with politics and economics, how the immaterial and the material interact, and how such interactions shape Latin American societies and struggles. These interactions are relevant for many subjects in Latin American Studies. Beyond mineral and natural resources, students and colleagues working on themes such as the right to the city, security and violence, gender relations, identity or cultural recognition often analyse similarly creative interactions and how they reshape society in Latin America. Thus, working across these different themes and processes will also be valuable for research



and teaching. In the summer of 2018, a team of seven CEDLA colleagues made a start with an interdisciplinary pilot study in and around the city of Xela (Quetzaltenango), in Guatemala. This is the first step in CEDLA's research programme on processes of commoning, decommoning and recommoning, which we will be working on in the coming years.

Finally, I hope to collaborate on the topic of the Rights of Nature. Together with Rutgerd Boelens and other colleagues from CEDLA and Wageningen University, we have found an international group of researchers, environmental organizations and journalists willing to study and stimulate initiatives to grant rights to nature in Ecuador, Colombia and the Netherlands. It is my sincere hope that granting Rights to Nature will eventually allow societies to better protect nature and all its resources and inhabitants, even in such remote places like El Mutún.

*Cantón Xecaracoj, Quetzaltenango,  
Guatemala (Barbara Hogenboom)*



*Acknowledgements and collaborations*

Dear all,

I will close by expressing my gratitude to a few institutions and persons that have been very important to my work and me. Let me start by thanking the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities for nominating me, and the Board of the University of Amsterdam for appointing me professor of Latin American Studies. I am grateful for the trust placed in me. I also want to praise the Dean and the Board for their efforts to address the gender imbalance among professors. While early on in life, my feminist mother showed me that women can be both a university lecturer and a caring parent, as a young student I missed such female role models, so hopefully I can now make a small contribution. But above all I aim to contribute to research, teaching and engagement with society, and to provide an enabling environment for these concerns in CEDLA – the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation. I look forward to continue working at this wonderful university that offers the open, stimulating and lively environment which is fundamental for curiosity-driven and collaborative learning.

This reminds me of the education that I received as a child at the Montessori elementary school, and at the secondary school in Wageningen. At the Wageningen Lyceum, my world opened up to activities that have remained important to me ever since such as solidarity with Latin America (at that time with revolutionary Nicaragua) and the joy of singing together in a choir. Additionally, progressive teachers had initiated an open project education, a great method to which I owe my first research experience. At the age of twelve we were already doing interviews, having group discussions and making reports. Two years later, with a group of five girls, we decided to look into the highly debated topic of pornography. Our supervising male teacher was not so happy about our choice of subject, but he stuck by us during our research trips to feminists, a transsexual and sex shops. That was also the first time that I learned that doing joint fieldwork is a bonding experience, and I am happy that my dear friends Olga, Miriam, Dorrit, Silvia and Johan are all here today.

I feel I am also a child of this university, where I studied political science and carried out my PhD research on Mexico, NAFTA, and the transnational

politics of trade and environment. I am pleased that my supportive supervisor Gerd Junne is here today. He set an example to me as a rebellious professor that would not wear an academic gown; I admired him for that, but as you have noticed, in the end I decided not to follow his example. I have already mentioned the most influential professor of those years, the late Alex Fernández. For twenty years he was my invaluable mentor, co-author and friend, and he would have been proud to see me standing here today. He also gave me the excellent advice to work on my MA thesis project together with Jolle Demmers. After our joint research in Mexico, she switched to Utrecht University, but we have sustained our friendship and supported one another throughout the parallel steps in our careers, and I look forward to her inaugural lecture next January.

Even after 18 years, it continues to be a professional and personal pleasure to work at CEDLA, a centre with a rich variety of research and activities. The pleasure has, of course, a lot to do with the people I work with. I thank Annelou, Arij, Bente, Bestanist, Christien, Fabio, Gaya, Gerson, Jolanda, Julienne, Kees, Michiel, Rebeca and Rutgerd for being such great colleagues and such a close team. I also thank our fifteen enthusiastic PhD candidates – sorry, I won't mention each one of you – for being such a lively group, working on such a fascinating topics. Together with a regular flow of visiting fellows, CEDLA is a dynamic institute, full of initiative and interdisciplinary collaboration. Serving as its director is truly an honour. And I am especially grateful to my predecessor Michiel Baud for having set a good example, for continuing to offer advice and support, and for the joint projects and our friendship.

As of 2015, CEDLA integrated with the Faculty of Humanities. While this transition has been intensive and sometimes even befuddling, I am pleased that it has brought us closer to colleagues at the Bushuis and PC Hoofthuis. In particular I want to thank the boards and colleagues of the Faculty's office, the research school ARTES (Amsterdam School for Regional, Transnational and European Studies) and the department GER (History, European Studies and Religious Studies) for welcoming us. I also thank our colleagues from the Department of Spanish Language and Culture for the collaboration in our joint bachelor programme Spanish and Latin American Studies. Fortunately, our integration with the Faculty of Humanities has not weakened the good



relations with colleagues and friends at the FMG (Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences); for education and research on Latin America we need close cooperation with the social sciences and humanities. It is also fortunate that CEDLA's integration with the University of Amsterdam has not ended the interuniversity ties that have continued since 1964, and that now form the foundation for our national graduate research Latin American Studies Programme – LASP.

Finally, and above all, I am so very grateful for my family. I have been extremely lucky with my father Nic and my mother Beatrice: two warm, open, clever and assertive people, who of course in part owe these traits to the families they grew up in. Together with my dearest sister Janneke, Beatrice and Nic have always encouraged and supported me. Dear Beatrice and Janneke, I am so happy that you are present, now and always. Nic died four years ago, but he was present in this hall twenty-one years ago when I defended my PhD dissertation,<sup>28</sup> and wherever I am, he is always close by. Later in my life I was fortunate to become a part of my second family, the Hubers. It is wonderful that so many of you are here this afternoon.

The two most important people in my life are sitting here in front of me: my daughters Hanna and Freija. Dear girls, I don't think I need to say here how much you both mean to me. But I do want to thank you for your assistance in getting everything ready for this inaugural lecture. And I'm glad that you are willing to accompany me to a distant corner of Bolivia, purely and simply because I have an inexplicable drive to visit El Mutún.

Ik heb gezegd.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These effects can also occur at greater distances, such as safety problems in the communities along the hundreds of kilometres of railroad from Brazil's large Carajás iron mine to the Ponta da Madeira Port on the Atlantic coast, over which mega-trains full of iron ore roar on a daily basis.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Lynn Karl (1997), *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Fernández Jilberto and Barbara Hogenboom (eds) (2010), *Latin America Facing China: South-South Relations beyond the Washington Consensus*, CEDLA Latin America Studies no. 98, Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books.

<sup>4</sup> My participation in a KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) funded research project with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), coordinated by Mehdi Amineh and Yang Guang, allowed me to make two research trips to Beijing where I spoke with academic colleagues and people from oil companies, banks, thinktanks and NGOs. See: Barbara Hogenboom (2017). 'Chinese Influences and the Governance of Oil in Latin America: The Cases of Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador', in: *Geopolitical Economy of Energy and Environment*, Mehdi P. Amineh & Yang Guang (eds), Leiden: Brill, pp. 172-211 (Chapter 6).

<sup>5</sup> The large and powerful state-owned entities have substantial power vis-à-vis Chinese government institutions, and have ample room to manoeuvre in their transnational operations. Although not centrally controlled, there is a coordination among these powerful Chinese actors. And in case of an energy emergency, the Politburo can intervene in these transnational affairs.

<sup>6</sup> Jaime Galarza Závala, *El Festín del Petróleo* (1974), Quito: Ed. Universitaria.

<sup>7</sup> Fernando V. Villavicencio V (2013). *Ecuador made in China*. Quito.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen G. Bunker (1986), *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure Of the Modern State*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press; Stephen G. Bunker (2003), "Matter, Space, Energy, and Political Economy: The Amazon in the World-System", *Journal of World-Systems Research* 9(2): 219–258; Stephen G. Bunker & Paul S. Ciccantell (2005), *Globalization and the Race for Resources*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>9</sup> And as Bunker wrote with Ciccantell in *Globalization and the Race for Resources*: each time the state, firms, and financial institutions of the new global power "devised newer, denser, more closely connected forms of collaboration and monitoring" (2005: 222).



<sup>10</sup> Barbara Hogenboom (2012), “Depoliticized and Repoliticized Minerals in Latin America”, *Journal of Developing Societies* 28(2): 133-158 (in special issue: The New Politics of Mineral Extraction in Latin America, edited by Barbara Hogenboom).

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Bebbington et al. (2018), *Governing Extractive Industries : Politics, Histories, Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 207-208.

<sup>12</sup> Murat Arsel, Barbara Hogenboom & Lorenzo Pellegrini (2016), “The extractive imperative and the boom in environmental conflicts at the end of the progressive cycle in Latin America”, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3:4, 877-879; and Murat Arsel, Barbara Hogenboom & Lorenzo Pellegrini (2016), “The extractive imperative in Latin America”, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3:4, 880-887 (both in the special issue we jointly edited: The Extractive Imperative in Latin America.)

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Gudynas (2010) “Si eres tan progresista, ¿Por qué destruyes la naturaleza? Neoextractivismo, izquierda y alternativas”, *Ecuador Debate* 79: 61-81.

<sup>14</sup> Karolien van Teijlingen & Barbara Hogenboom (2016), “Debating Alternative Development at the Mining Frontier: Buen Vivir and the Conflict around El Mirador Mine in Ecuador”, *Journal of Developing Societies* 32(4): 1-39; Carolina Valladares & Rutgerd Boelens (2017), “Extractivism and the Rights of Nature: Governmentality, ‘Convenient Communities’ and Epistemic Pacts in Ecuador.” *Environmental Politics* 26(6): 1015–1034.

<sup>15</sup> See Javier Corrales & Michael Penfold-Becerra (2013) *Dragon in the Tropics : the Legacy of Hugo Chávez*, Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press; and Guillaume Fontaine & Cecilia Medrano Caviedes (2016) “How resource nationalism hinders development: the institutional roots of the economic recession in Venezuela”, *Rev. Serv. Público* (Brasília) 67(4): 671-696.

<sup>16</sup> See Terry Lynn Karl (1997).

<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Gudynas (2018), *Extractivismos y corrupción. Anatomía de una íntima relación*, Valparaíso: Quimantú.

<sup>18</sup> See p. 204 of Anthony Bebbington et al. (2018).

<sup>19</sup> See p. 53 of Stefan Peters (2017), “Beyond Curse and Blessing: Rentier Society in Venezuela”, in: *Contested Extractivism, Society and the State*, Dietz & Engels (eds.), London: Palgrave: 45-68.

<sup>20</sup> Iselin Asedotter Stronen (2017), *Grassroots Politics and Oil Culture in Venezuela: The Revolutionary Petro-State*, Cham: Springer Open: p. 323

<sup>21</sup> See p. 62 of Stefan Peters (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Some of these artistic expressions reflect the idea of a bleeding country or region, which Eduardo Galeano also used for the title of his famous book *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971; translated as *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> Miguel Tinker Salas (2009), *The Enduring Legacy : Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 12.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Lorenzo Pellegrini’s study of the impressive 1956 mural “History of Bolivian Petroleum” in the headquarters of Bolivia’s national gas and oil company YPF points out numerous similarities between the ideas expressed then and those of the Morales government discourses. After having worked extensively on the contemporary politics of extractivism in Andean countries, interestingly his “side-trip” to another era and the humanities makes Pellegrini profoundly question the novelty of neo-extractivism. See Lorenzo Pellegrini, “Imaginary of Development through Extraction: The ‘History of Bolivian Petroleum’ and the Present View of the Future” (2018), *Geoforum* 90: 130–141.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance David McDermott Hughes (2017), *Energy Without Conscience : Oil, Climate Change, and Complicity*, Durham: Duke University Press; and Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (eds) (2014), *Oil culture*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

<sup>26</sup> In his fieldwork in oil nation Trinidad & Tobago, David McDermott Hughes (2017) is surprised by the invisibility and ordinariness of oil – both and in real life and in cultural expressions.

<sup>27</sup> Rutgerd Boelens (2015), *Water Justice in Latin America: The Politics of Difference, Equality, and Indifference*, Inaugural Lecture 21 May, University of Amsterdam & CEDLA: 35.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Hogenboom (1998), *Mexico and the NAFTA Environment Debate. The Transnational Politics of Economic Integration*, Utrecht: International Books.



Latin America's vast reserves of minerals (metals, oil, coal and gas) have often proven to be a curse instead of a blessing for its development. The region's mineral wealth has generated international dependency relationships, economic instability, elite capture, social inequality and ecological destruction. Have recent economic and political shifts changed these patterns? What is the role of minerals in Latin American imaginary and society? And what can we learn from new bottom-up initiatives to escape the mineral resource curse and protect nature and communities? Barbara Hogenboom discusses pro's and cons of the rise of China and of the phase of new left dominance in the region. These trends coincided not only with the global commodity boom but also with a region-wide protest boom against environmental injustices of mining and oil drilling, and with a deepened dependency on minerals. In order to better understand contemporary resource dependency, she proposes to look beyond economic and political dimensions, and to also study social and cultural attitudes towards mineral wealth in Latin America, such as deeply engrained ideas and collective imaginaries. Through new research and co-creation projects, her aim is to study and support Latin American initiatives for alternative approaches to living with minerals, such as leaving fossil fuels underground and granting more rights to citizens and even to nature.

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