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Magalhaes Teixeira, Barbara

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PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



the nature of peace

and the Continuum of Violence
in Environmental Conflicts

Barbara Magalhães Teixeira

The Nature of Peace

and the Continuum of Violence in Environmental Conflicts

Bárbara Andrade Magalhães Teixeira



LUND
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

In this dissertation, I aim to explore the links between nature, conflict, and peace building on literature from peace and conflict studies and environmental peacebuilding. I argue that environmental issues, especially related to the distribution of natural resources, are central to understanding structural conditions allowing for both conflict and peace. In order to answer the research question, I explore how nature is understood, valued, and exploited and how this contributes to the creation of unjust structures that promote conflict and violence. I center resource inequality at the root of environmental conflicts, thus providing a structural account of how they affect violence through the idea of the continuum of peace-violence. Ultimately, I show that building sustainable peace requires reshaping structures of distribution of both resources and power to promote not only negative peace but also create the conditions for positive peace.

This dissertation engages both quantitative and qualitative methods embedded into feminist and decolonial methodologies. By integrating these methods, the thesis provides a more holistic view that bridges macro-level patterns with micro-level intricacies, thereby advancing the field of environmental peacebuilding through a more systematic and comprehensive methodological framework. It also addresses recent calls in the field for a more methodologically plural approach to environmental peacebuilding by employing feminist and decolonial methodologies with attention to power dynamics with the aim of negating simplistic narratives.

The papers in this thesis provide not only empirical evidence to substantiate and challenge environmental peacebuilding's pathways and mechanisms but also help further develop the framework for a more comprehensive and transformational approach to building peace in times of environmental breakdown and climate change. The results of this dissertation highlight the need for a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of peacebuilding that considers the complex interplay between environmental, economic, and social factors. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the underlying structural issues that perpetuate conflict and hinder sustainable peace. By challenging the existing paradigms and proposing alternative frameworks, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on effectively fostering sustainable peace in post-conflict countries.

Key words: nature, peace, conflict, environmental peacebuilding, continuum of violence, Global South

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The Nature of Peace

and the Continuum of Violence in Environmental Conflicts

Bárbara Andrade Magalhães Teixeira



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*but man is a part of nature,
and his war against nature
is inevitably a war against himself*

Rachel Carson

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Popular summaries

English

The Nature of Peace and the Continuum of Violence in Environmental Conflicts

In this dissertation, I aim to explore the links between nature, conflict, and peace building on literature from peace and conflict studies and environmental peacebuilding. I argue that environmental issues, especially related to the distribution of natural resources, are central to understanding structural conditions allowing for both conflict and peace. In order to answer the research question, I explore how nature is understood, valued, and exploited and how this contributes to the creation of unjust structures that promote conflict and violence. I center resource inequality at the root of environmental conflicts, thus providing a structural account of how they affect violence. Ultimately, I show that building sustainable peace requires reshaping structures of distribution of both resources and power to promote not only negative peace but also create the conditions for positive peace.

Svenska

Fredens natur och våldets skepnader i miljökonflikter

I denna avhandling syftar jag till att utforska sambanden mellan natur, konflikt och fredsbyggande utifrån litteratur inom freds- och konfliktstudier samt miljöfredsbyggande. Jag hävdar att miljöfrågor, särskilt de som rör fördelningen av naturresurser, är centrala för att förstå de strukturella förhållanden som möjliggör både konflikt och fred. För att besvara forskningsfrågan undersöker jag hur naturen förstås, värderas och exploateras och hur detta bidrar till skapandet av orättvisa strukturer som främjar konflikt och våld. Jag sätter resursolikhet i centrum för miljökonflikter och ger därmed en strukturell förklaring av hur de påverkar våld. Slutligen visar jag att hållbar fredsbyggande kräver omformning av fördelningsstrukturerna för både resurser och makt för att främja inte bara negativ fred utan även skapa förutsättningar för positiv fred.

Español

La naturaleza de la paz y el continuo de la violencia en los conflictos ambientales

En esta disertación, tengo como objetivo explorar los vínculos entre la naturaleza, el conflicto y la construcción de la paz a partir de la literatura de estudios de paz y la construcción de la paz ambiental. Sostengo que las cuestiones ambientales, especialmente relacionadas con la distribución de los recursos naturales, son fundamentales para comprender las condiciones estructurales que permiten tanto el conflicto como la paz. Para responder a la pregunta de investigación, exploro cómo se entiende, valora, y explota la naturaleza y cómo esto contribuye a la creación de estructuras injustas que promueven el conflicto y la violencia. Centrar la desigualdad de recursos en la raíz de los conflictos ambientales proporciona una explicación estructural de cómo afectan la violencia. Finalmente, demuestro que la construcción de una paz sostenible requiere reformar las estructuras de distribución de recursos y poder para promover no solo la paz negativa, sino también crear las condiciones para una paz positiva.

List of papers

Paper I

Negotiating natural resources conflicts: provisions in peace agreements and prospects for building sustainable peace

Article manuscript. *Under review.*

Paper II

From peace agreements to sustainable peace? A framework for the analysis of land issues in Guatemala's peace process

Article manuscript.

Paper III

Beyond the boom: assessing the effect of extractive industries on development and violence in post-conflict countries

Article manuscript. Co-authored with Jakob Molinder. *Under review.*

Paper IV

Room to grow and the right to say no: theorizing the liberatory power of peace in the Global South

Magalhães Teixeira, Barbara (2024) *Geopolitics*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2286287>

Preface

I still remember the look on the face of Onofre – one of my favorite teachers from college – when I told him I had gotten a scholarship to study peace in Sweden. He pondered on that information for a while, and finally, he let out: “of course, they study peace in Sweden... they have nothing to worry about, so they have time to think about peace!” His characteristic skepticism has followed me throughout my academic journey as I question the scientific and real-world necessity of ‘knowing’ peace.

While discussing peace with land and environmental defenders in both Brazil and Guatemala, this distrust in peace was also something that came forward. They questioned the existence of peace, as their everyday lives were filled with so many different types of violence and threats. As Ailton Krenak (2019), an Indigenous leader and philosopher from Brazil, has affirmed, “there is no peace anywhere. It is war, everywhere, all the time” for Indigenous and campesino peoples in the Global South. My personal experience as coming from a region rich in mineral and agricultural resources in Brazil and experiencing the violent extractive model of economic development that plows over both people and nature has made me critical of how such strategies can be conducive to building peace. This distrust in peace has served as inspiration, or rather, it has served as restlessness as I try to navigate peace studies in Western academia while completely committed to the liberatory power of theory and knowledge. I have understood that there is a big gap between how peace is theorized in the ivory tower and how it is experienced in the frontlines of environmental and climate change. This is informed by conversations with Indigenous and campesino leaders and environmental defenders, as they have told me that the hegemonic idea of

peace in its neoliberal terms is not only useless for their own organization and strategies, but it is also seen as politically nonprogressive and obedient to neoliberal and neocolonial processes. Since then, Prime Ragandang (2021) question of “what are we writing for?” in peace studies has been haunting every scientific choice I make while studying peace.

I have come to understand that my work needed to be oriented toward the radical transformation of our societies. As bell hooks (1994) affirmed, theory is not inherently healing or liberatory, but we must actively make it so. Paulo Freire (2005) also taught me that we need to place ourselves in the middle of the process of transformation – it is only when we think and learn *with* the world, and not outside of it, that we can harness the creative power to actively transform the world towards liberatory visions of peace.

I owe a great deal to the works of bell hooks and Paulo Freire, as their writings inspire and guide me in my work. This is why I have chosen to approach this research project from a feminist and decolonial perspective, as it guides the whole research process to promote inclusivity, reflexivity, and social justice. Throughout my academic career, it has been through exposure to feminist and decolonial epistemologies that I have begun to scientifically question the colonial, capitalist, and extractivist assumptions inherent in dominant paradigms of peace and conflict research and practice. Taking this point of departure, the design of this dissertation follows a process of questioning analytical categories and theorizations that sustain the field of environmental peacebuilding, with the aim to theorize a politicized approach to how nature relates to the violence-peace continuum. Here, I am inspired by the idea of ‘the feminist politics of naming violence’ (Frazer and Hutchings 2020) where the aim of my research is to highlight the different and often hidden types of violence that affect both people and nature, even during *peacetime*.

This has also inspired my choice of using quantitative methods and data, even though it might be easy to criticize how they are not supposed to work within feminist and decolonial frameworks. However, I rely heavily on Sandra Harding (1987) argument that there is no such thing as a ‘feminist’ method; there is only feminist methodology, which guides the research process and orients it towards liberatory goals. This is also related to my decolonial commitment in this research. As Nego Bispo (2023) affirmed, if you have been colonized and that bothers you, then you need to fight to decolonize yourself and your people, and this is the function of decoloniality.

This combination of methods and approaches also reflects my own education journey, which has been marked by a plurality of knowledge, traditions, and tools to better understand and represent our social realities. Here, I am thankful to my teachers during my bachelor’s degree in international relations at PUC Minas in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, for planting these seeds. I owe a lot of my scientific curiosity to them, who first introduced me to the world and who inspired me to be a teacher as well. I want to thank Onofre dos Santos for being a constant source of inspiration and fountain for critical engagement with the world; Rodrigo Teixeira for the friendship throughout the years and the constant reassurance on the importance of our role as academics and educators; Geraldine Rosas for supporting my interest in ‘weird’ research topics, and for introducing me to the beautiful world of incorporating geography into political research; and Chyara Sales for serving as a constant source of support and excitement in academic projects.

My maternal grandmother, Vó Chica, loves to tell the story of when she asked my cousins and me what we wanted to be when we grew up. They all had normal answers: engineer, veterinarian, football player. But when she asked me, I replied: “I want to be intelligent.” She always thought this was such an amusing answer because, in her reality, it was impossible for someone to be paid just to be intelligent. It was only when I

moved to the ‘big city’ and got into university that I realized an academic career was an option.

While access to education in Brazil has become more accessible in recent years, this has not always been the case. The history of social spending on education has reflected the country’s economic and political instability and priorities. My grandmothers never had the chance of finishing school, as they had to join the workforce at a young age to help their families. Unlike in Europe and Sweden, where education is recognized and protected as a fundamental right, in Brazil, people have historically had to fight hard to secure their right to education. My father, João Luiz, was the vice president of the regional student association during the military dictatorship, a time when such organizations were forbidden. My mother, Margarete, had to drive 80 km alone every evening after work to attend university when I was young. I am extremely grateful to my family for the importance that they have put on education and for the sacrifices they have made in order for me to be here today. I would have never made it this far in my academic journey without the love, care, support, and strength of my family. This book is also theirs.

I also owe a great deal of my strength and courage to live so far away from my own people to my wonderful friends, Marina, Dani, Camila, Fabi, Elora, and Caro, who teach me how to live and resist as a woman every day. My life in Sweden has also been made easier by my Brazilian friends, who remind me of who I am. A special thanks to Joyce for organizing so many of our hangouts and being such a cherished friend. I also want to express my gratitude to my Swedish family for welcoming me and teaching me so much about their culture – summers on Gotland have been invaluable and have played a crucial role in my adjustment here.

I have been so fortunate to go through this crazy PhD experience with some of the coolest and smartest women around. I want to thank Georgia de Leeuw, Caroline Karlsson, and Christie Nicoson for their companionship on this journey. In Christie, I also found an intellectual soulmate with whom I have shared research projects, classrooms, conferences, offices, and even a cottage. Together with Clara Dallaire-Fortier, they have given me the courage and the support to not only envision a different world but also to make that world our everyday reality. I am also deeply grateful to the universe for bringing Agnese Pacciardi and Priscyll Anctil Avoine into my life. While the roads we have traveled might have been bumpy, your continuous support and encouragement have been fundamental during this time.

At the Department of Political Science, I want to thank many of the colleagues who have helped me throughout my PhD journey: Hanna Bäck and Agustin Goenaga for being trustful reviewers of my work not only during the green reading but throughout my PhD education; Markus Holdo and Margaux Dandrifosse for valuable engagement during my manuscript seminar; and the peace girls, Lena Kempermann, Margaux Dandrifosse, Bibi Imre-Millei, and Agnese Pacciardi for believing in my pedagogical projects. I have been extremely fortunate to have great colleagues who helped me navigate and discover my love for teaching: I thank Klas Nilsson, Johanna von Bahr, Hedvig Ördén, Jenny Lorentzen, Daniel Møller-Ølgaard, and Sindre Gade Viksand for our teaching collaborations. I also want to thank Simon Davidsson, Sarai-Anne Ikenze, Katren Rogers, Helena Gonzales Lindberg, Fredrika Larsson, Jana Wrangle, Esther Calvo, and Katja Zhukova for their friendship and pep talks throughout the years. I want to extend gratitude to Björn Badersten and Tina Jönsson for their support as head of department and to Douglas Brommesson and Magdalena Bexell as head of PhD studies. To Amir Parhamifar, Kristina Gröndahl Nilsson, Helen Fogelin, and Daniel Alfons - I would have never survived at Eden without your assistance.

My passion for teaching has also played a central role in the development of my PhD research. Although my first job teaching was as a tutor high school, it has been through teaching at the university level that I have really grasped the transformative power of education. I am deeply grateful to all my students in the various courses I have had the privilege to teach: *The Environment in Peace and Conflict; Diplomacy, Negotiation, and Mediation; Conflict and Cooperation in International Politics; Peace in the 21st Century; and Methods in Peace and Conflict Studies*. Your engagement and relentless curiosity have continually challenged me to rethink the foundations of peace and conflict studies, as we explored together the complex nature of peace. I am especially thankful to the students I have supervised and to those who brought the PRAXIS Magazine to life. Your unwavering belief in this project, along with your sharp mind and critical view of the world, inspire me and give me hope for the future. Through the PhD journey has been challenging, my time in the classroom has made it worthwhile.

I would have never made my way to Sweden if it wasn't for Liana Lopes caring for me and believing in me. I also want to thank Ashok Swain for introducing me to the field of environmental peacebuilding and igniting the spark that has led to this research project. And Desirée Nilsson, Isak Svensson, Luís Martínez, and Anton Ruus, for teaching me first-hand the amount of work and care that goes into producing large datasets. I am enormously thankful to the Institute for Degrowth Studies, especially Chaïm de Mulder, Sara Gottschalk, Katya Chertkovskaya, Leon Auty, and Aitzkoa Lopez de Lapuente Portilla, for being my second institutional home. To the Decolonizing Degrowth group, Morena Henbury Lemos, Karen Waneska, Gabriel Trettel Silva, and Fabian Cantieri, thank you for the powerful and radical space we have created. To Camila Freitas and Iury Salustiano Trojaborg for helping me navigate Swedish academia as critical scholars from Brazil. Thank you also to the 'Women Caring for Science' group, Márcia Camargo, Tamikuã Pataxó, Ana Cristina Suzina, Bartira Fortes, and Juliana Porsani for constantly educating and inspiring me on other ways of doing science. Throughout this time, I have also been inspired by the incredible

commitment and kindness of Rafael Albuquerque and Jairo Fúnez-Flores, who have believed in me and given me hope to continue this journey.

Fieldwork in Guatemala would not have been possible without the guidance of three wonderful people: Thaís Arriola, Hilda Mansilla, and Juan Pablo Romero. Thank you for welcoming me into your home and showing me your beautiful country. I also want to especially thank Leocadio Juracán, Lesbia Artola, Imelda Teyul, and everyone from CCDA Guatemala for teaching me so much about your strength and resistance. To every research participant who took the time to share their stories with me, thank you! I extend gratitude to Helge Ax:sson Johnsons stiftelse, for funding fieldwork in Guatemala and making this research possible. I also spent time in Brasília with the Movimento Bem Viver, which has completely changed how I understand the work necessary for the radical transformation of our worlds.

Scholarship from the Swedish National Data Service (Svensk nationell datatjänst) allowed me to take part in the ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods at the University of Michigan in the US. I thank the Department of Political Science and the Faculty of Social Sciences for funding conference participation and research stays. I am enormously grateful to colleagues from the Department of Economic History, Institutions, Policy, and World Economy at the University of Barcelona for welcoming me in 2022 during my research stay.

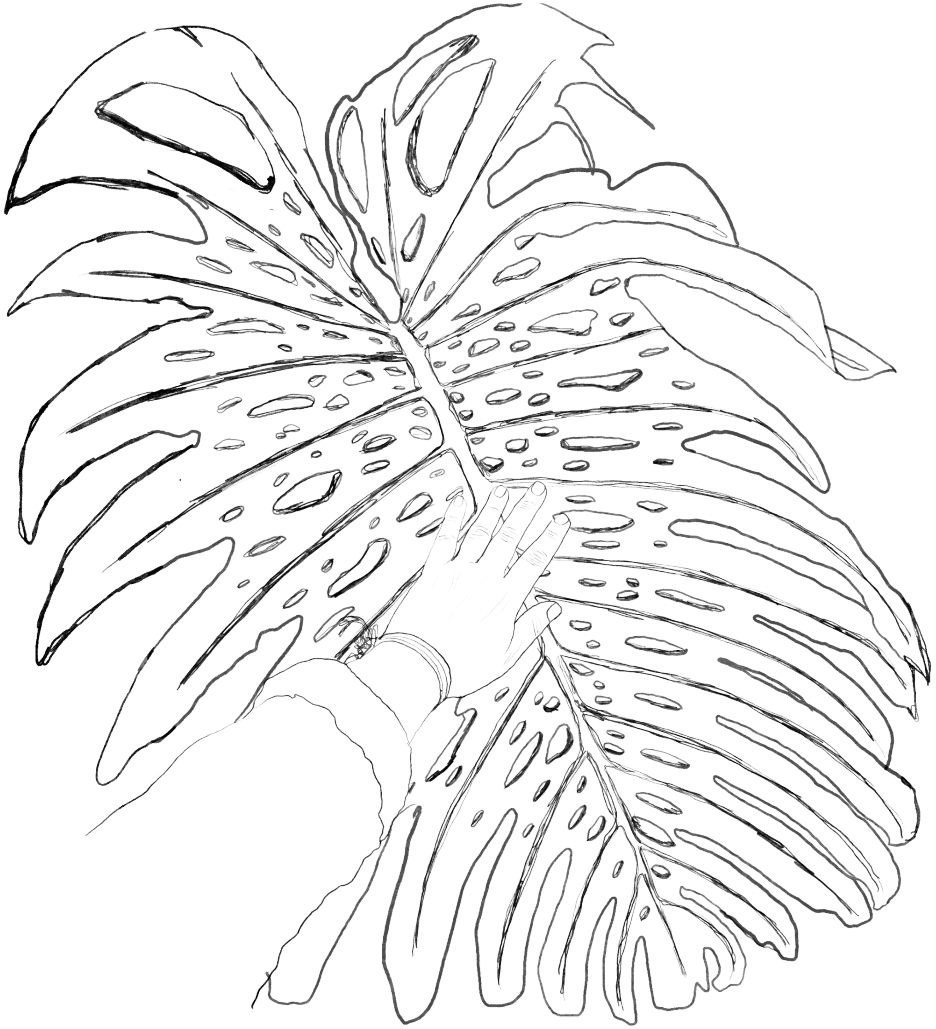
Most importantly, I want to thank my supervisors, Roxanna Sjöstedt and Oriol Sabaté Domingo, for being incredible guides during this journey. Choosing the two of you as supervisors has been the best choice I made during this PhD. I am deeply grateful for your insights and vision, but even more so for your unwavering dedication and encouragement along the way. Roxanna has been an outstanding mentor in both research and teaching. You have taught me to pay attention to the details without losing

sight of the big picture in academia. Oriol is the toughest reader but the kindest commentator. Your feedback consistently raises the bar for my work and inspires me to be better. Because of both of you and our work dynamic, I have never left our meetings doubting myself or my capabilities. You have expected a lot from me, but you have been kind in showing me how to reach those expectations while allowing me the freedom to choose my own path. Your guidance and support have been instrumental in giving me the confidence I needed to do this PhD.

In the last few months, as I finish up this book, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by the love of my family. This academic work would not be possible without their care work. To my sister, Bruna, for always keeping up with the schedule for the Olympics so I always knew when to take a break. To my mom, Margarete, for teaching me to be strong and loving at the same time. To my husband, Jakob, for choosing me every day, even though sometimes it can be a hard choice. And finally, to Rio – my dog and project manager – who reminded me every day that there was life and joy outside the computer screen.

Malmö,
August 2024

Resistência, resistência
Força, sabedoria, inteligência, coletividade
Serenidade em tempos de tempestade
Liberdade sempre
Salve
Baiana System



Introduction

In the field of peace and conflict studies, the role of the environment and natural resources as a catalyst for peace has progressively become a topic of study (Magalhães Teixeira 2021a; Brown and Nicolucci-Altman 2022; Dresse et al. 2018; Conca 2002). Understanding the relationship between nature and peace is increasingly necessary not only because of the emergency of climate and environmental changes as security threats (von Uexkull and Buhaug 2021) but also because the fight over natural resources – such as oil, land, and minerals - is seen as one of the major drivers of intra-state conflicts in the 20th century (UNEP 2009; Guterres 2018). Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, environmental changes have been considered a threat to security and instability (Floyd 2012), and natural resources have been connected to at least 60% of all internal armed conflicts. More than that, climate and environmental changes are also increasingly affecting the conditions under which peacebuilding takes place (Cohn and Duncanson 2020).

In this context, it is important to understand not only how the environment affects conflict but also how it affects the conditions for the construction of peace. Championed primarily by studies in environmental peacebuilding (EPB), research has explored how, given the interdependent nature of environmental issues, it can be utilized as a catalyst for peace instead of being a determined sign of violent conflict (Conca and Dabelko 2002). The field of environmental peacebuilding has long argued that natural resources can positively affect peacebuilding through three main pathways: promoting dialogue, addressing root causes of conflict, and fostering sustainable development. A broad understanding of EPB often focuses on its role in providing an

inclusive framework linking the potential of environmental cooperation and resource management strategies to various phases of the conflict life-cycle – be it for conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and/or recovery (Ide et al. 2021). These strategies are based on a range of diverse mechanisms that aim at transforming conflict identities away from violence and toward building peace instead – such as reduction of grievances, identification of opportunities for joint gains, strengthening trust and relationships, and building strong institutions (Conca and Beevers 2018). Figure 1 illustrates how different mechanisms are theorized to target different stages of the conflict cycle in response to specific conflict manifestations and in order to build sustainable peace.

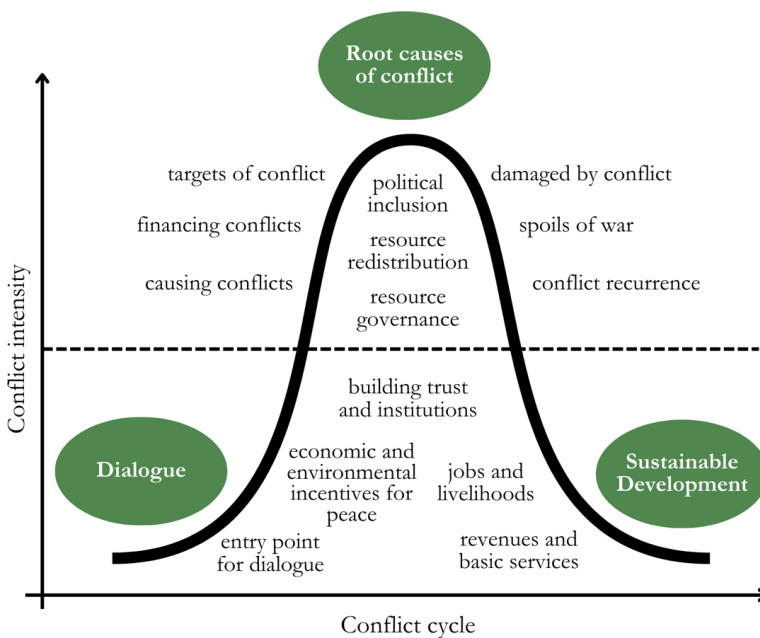


Figure 1 Environmental peacebuilding's phase-based approach to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. Adapted from UNEP (2009) and Conca and Beevers (2018).

At the beginning of a conflict cycle, conflict can arise from issues such as targeting of resources, financing of conflicts through resource exploitation, and disputes over resource governance, access, and control. As conflict intensifies, resource-related issues like political inclusion and resource redistribution become critical, often exacerbating tension. However, at this stage, negotiating these issues in peace agreements can serve to address the root causes of conflict and serve as a stepping-stone towards moving into sustainable peace. In the post-conflict phase, the focus shifts towards rebuilding trust in society, establishing transparent and efficient institutions, and providing economic incentives for peace. The transition towards sustainable development and peace involves creating jobs and livelihoods, ensuring revenues from resource exploitation are used to finance basic services, and that resources are managed in a responsible way to prevent conflict recurrence. In this dissertation, I focus on two pathways most connected to internal armed conflicts: addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable development.

Given the centrality of natural resources issues in armed conflicts, EPB's theoretical framework rests on its capacity to address these issues satisfactorily during peace negotiations in a way that sets a new framework and institutional designs capable of managing resource distribution equitably, promoting inclusive political and economic governance, and ensuring sustainable utilization of resources (Brown and Nicolucci-Altman 2022). This approach aims to prevent the recurrence of conflict by building robust institutions that can mediate resource-related disputes, foster economic opportunities, and support environmental sustainability (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beevers 2018). By integrating resource management into the peacebuilding process, EPB seeks to transform natural resources from sources of conflict into foundations for sustainable development and peace.

However, critics of this approach have highlighted that the field is mainly theory-driven and overly deductive, often lacking empirical evidence to support its theoretical claims (Dresse et al. 2018; Ide et al. 2021). They point to EPB's mechanisms, causes, and effects being poorly specified, which makes assessing their contribution and impact difficult (Johnson, Rodríguez, and Quijano Hoyos 2021; Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021). More than that, critics have shown how EPB's framework is constrained by rational choice and circumscribed into neoliberal paradigms, reducing complex environmental and social issues to mere economic value, thereby reinforcing a capitalist, growth-oriented mentality that exacerbates climate change and perpetuates cycles of violence (Bliesmann de Guevara, Budny, and Kostić 2023; Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024).

Additionally, the EPB approach often overlooks the underlying social, political, and economic drivers of conflict by focusing on its physical manifestations (Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024). Critics also highlight that this approach depoliticizes environmental issues by adopting a neoliberal perspective, aiming to make resource management less contentious and thus more negotiable or agreeable (Aggestam 2018; Ide 2020; Davis et al. 2023). This depoliticization strips away the intrinsic values of natural resources and how different groups relate to them, enforcing a market-driven approach that ignores critical political, gendered, racial, and class-based issues at the core of natural resource conflicts (Lahiri-Dutt 2006; Escobar 2006; Selby and Hoffman 2014; Le Billon and Duffy 2018).

Research question and aims

While there has been a massive surge of research in environment peacebuilding, there still needs to be more theoretical understanding of how nature, the environment, and natural resources might be necessary for building peace. More than that, there is a need for more empirical research that can provide the foundations for the theoretical claims

on how nature can promote peace. Based on this, the overall research question guiding this dissertation is:

How does the distribution of and access to natural resources shape conflict and how can it serve to build sustainable peace instead?

I argue that environmental issues, especially related to the distribution of natural resources, are central to understanding structural conditions allowing for both conflict and peace. In order to answer the research question, I explore how nature is understood, valued, and exploited and how this contributes to the creation of unjust structures that promote conflict and violence. I center resource inequality at the root of environmental conflicts, thus providing a structural account of how they affect violence. Ultimately, I show that building sustainable peace requires reshaping structures of distribution of both resources and power to promote not only negative peace but also create the conditions for positive peace.

In this thesis, I respond to calls from critical voices from within and outside environmental peacebuilding's framework for more empirically grounded theoretical development (Ide et al. 2021), for understanding peace beyond only war and armed conflict (True 2020; Cockburn 2004; Sharifi, Simangan, and Kaneko 2021), and for a plural approach to studying peace based on feminist and decolonial epistemologies that are attentive to biases, exclusions, and power dynamics and imbalances (Confortini 2010; Wibben et al. 2019; Rodríguez et al. 2021; Cruz 2021; Hsiao et al. 2022; Brown and Nicolucci-Altman 2022; Davis et al. 2023). Based on this, I take a critical stance on how I theorize the relationship between natural resources and peace, as well as on how I understand and conceptualize conflict, nature, and peace. This critical approach also motivates the methodological choices and empirical material used to assess and analyze such a complex relationship.

In essence, the central aim of this dissertation is to provide a politicized theoretical understanding of environmental conflicts and how they can be transformed into sustainable peace based on a strong empirical foundation. In order to do that, I am guided by feminist curiosity (Enloe 2004) and a decolonial commitment to questioning the ordinary, examining power structures, and challenging simplistic narratives (Curiel 2014; Palermo 2010; Espinosa Miñoso et al. 2013a; Sultana 2022). This is done as a conscious effort to address and dismantle intertwined systems of oppression related to the domination over nature, colonialism, race, gender, and other forms of hierarchy, including that of knowledge. This approach enables a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between nature, conflict, and peace to develop more effective and inclusive strategies for building sustainable peace that does not reproduce violent and oppressive structures.

Throughout the papers, I question and challenge common measures and operationalizations of violence and peace and their implications. I argue that to understand the full complexity of the relationship between nature, conflict, and peace, it is necessary for empirical studies to move beyond the focus on measuring peace in its negative sense as the absence of violence. While I understand that ensuring negative peace is crucial and a necessary step in the transformation from conflict to peace, there is still the need to move beyond the symptoms of conflicts to investigate social, economic, and political structures that both shape and perpetuate them. Building on feminist peace literature, I view peace and violence not as dichotomous and opposite categories, but I consider how they exist in a continuum, how they co-exist and co-produce each other (True 2020; Cockburn 2004; Yadav and Horn 2021).

The peace-violence continuum guides the empirical strategy of this thesis, which explores different instances and stages of the continuum in the specific papers. By merging conceptual and theoretical aims with methodological and empirical rigor, I aim

to test claims from EPB theory and practice to contribute a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the interplay between nature, conflict, and peace.

Presenting the papers

This dissertation is comprised of four papers, each advancing theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical aims through their own approaches and perspectives. Figure 2 provides an overview of the papers, their main approach, the type of conflict and peace they focus on, the methodological approach, as well as the empirical context. The papers in this dissertation are organized following the process of transition in post-conflict societies from the initial stages of resolution of armed conflict to building sustainable peace, as indicated in the environmental peacebuilding framework. Their disposition also illustrates the peace-violence continuum from negative to positive peace. Papers I and II test and further develop environmental peacebuilding's pathway 1, 'addressing root causes of conflict.' Papers II and III test and further develop pathway 2, 'sustainable development.' Paper IV develops a feminist and decolonial critique of the entire EPB framework based on shortcomings identified and on results from previous papers.

Paper I investigates the negotiation of natural resources provisions in peace agreements, focusing on the initial stage of the transition from armed conflict to peace. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study is based mainly on primary data production to test the first stage of the conflict cycle in EPB's framework: how the negotiation of natural resources in peace agreements can affect the duration of post-conflict peace. While working with the concept of sustainable peace, the design of Paper I measures peace in its negative sense, as the absence of armed conflict. For its empirical context, Paper I focuses on natural resources conflicts in the Global South, zooming in on the cases of Nepal, El Salvador, and Sudan to more clearly identify the mechanism connecting natural resources provisions in peace agreements and post-

conflict peace. The results of this paper show that including natural resources provisions in peace agreements can positively affect post-conflict peace duration, especially if it includes provisions on land ownership.

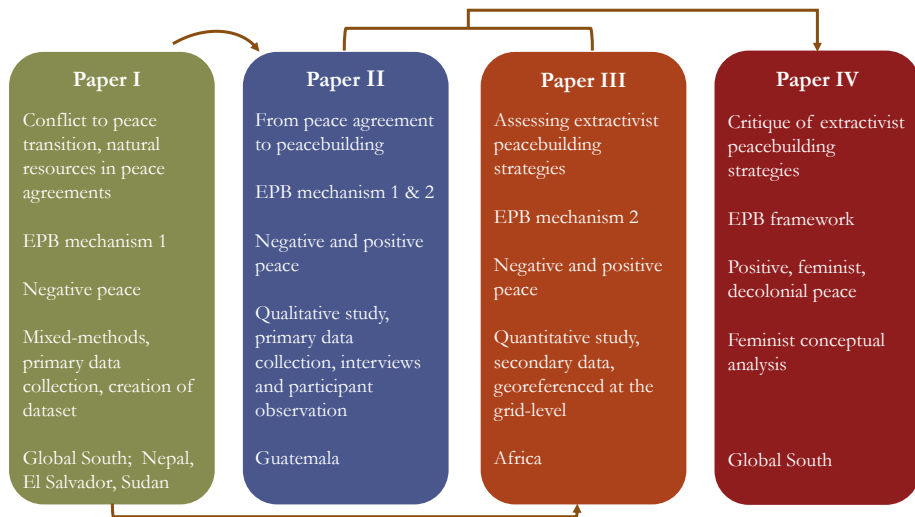


Figure 2 The papers in this dissertation

Moving along the post-conflict cycle, Paper II builds directly on the design and results from Paper I. In this paper, I use a qualitative approach to further test and develop the theoretical expectation that natural resource provisions in peace agreements positively contribute to post-conflict peace. This analysis focuses on the case of Guatemala, investigating how land issues were negotiated in the peace agreement and how it was consequently addressed in the post-conflict phase. This study broadens the perspective of peace to include both negative and positive conceptualizations and measurements of peace, focusing on economic, social, and political structural transformations aiming to build sustainable peace. Paper II builds on rich and unique primary data on land issues and peacebuilding in Guatemala collected through interviews and participant observations during fieldwork. This paper finds that the inclusion of land issues in the

peace negotiations was not substantial, and it led to problems in the implementation of the overall peace agreement. The analysis shows that without a clear and straightforward framework for dealing with natural resources issues during peace negotiations, it is difficult to assess how environmental peacebuilding's framework can address root causes of conflict and promote sustainable development.

Paper III tests the effectiveness of intensifying extractive industries as a peacebuilding strategy. This study provides a micro-level analysis of the effects of extractive industries on both economic and human development levels, as well as different types of violence and conflict, accounting for both negative and positive conceptualizations and measurements of peace. The study follows recent empirical strategies in peace and conflict studies that use georeferenced data at the grid-cell level to show highly disaggregated impacts of extractive industries on post-conflict peace in sub-Saharan African countries. The findings indicate that while extractive industries boost short-term economic growth, they have no discernible impact on human development. Instead, they are associated with increased violence, particularly against civilians. Additionally, state capacity mediates these effects: high-capacity states experience more protests and state repression, while low-capacity states see increased direct violence.

Finally, Paper IV builds on the results from previous papers and provides a critique of the overarching framework of environmental peacebuilding. Building on feminist and decolonial readings of peace and violence, this paper conceptually deconstructs the ideological and political motivations hiding beneath EPB's focus on championing extractivist strategies to promote development through economic growth and how that can harm sustainability and peace aims. Focusing more broadly on Global South countries' shared history of colonization and dependency, Paper IV also provides alternatives for the extractivist-colonial-capitalist approach, focusing on degrowth propositions.



Main concepts

In reviewing the literature on nature, conflict, and peace, I have found that existing studies typically examine the relationships between the three separately or in dyadic relationships, with limited exploration of the intricate linkages among all three elements. Scholarship on the effect of natural resources on conflict is extensive, and environmental peacebuilding literature on how natural resources can affect peace instead is also growing. However, there is little critical conversation about how the way that these fields understand the value or potential of natural resources in impacting both conflict and peace is marked by a capitalist and colonial view of nature. By reading across diverse fields, including political geography and ecology, post-development studies, and based on feminist and decolonial approaches, I have identified significant conceptual and empirical limitations. The goal of this section is to introduce the different concepts of nature, conflict, and peace and how they are addressed in the field of peace and conflict studies. This allows for conceptual openings to develop a more integrated framework for understanding how they influence each other.

On nature

The terms “nature,” “environment”, and “natural resources” each refer to different aspects of the natural world. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they carry different implications and scopes, which influence how we interact with and relate to them. Nature is the broader category and represents the entirety of the physical world, including all living and non-living things. The environment refers to the specific surroundings or conditions in which life operates, like air, water, soil, climate, and

infrastructure. In this sense, the environment encompasses the interactions between living organisms and their physical context, emphasizing the dynamic relationship and mutual influence between humans and their surroundings. Natural resources are specific components of nature that are valuable to humans for economic or survival purposes. These include raw materials like minerals, timber, water, fossil fuels, and fertile land. Natural resources are often classified into renewable resources (such as water, wind, forests, and land) and non-renewable resources (such as oil, coal, and gas). The category of natural resources is based on their utility for human use and consumption, highlighting their role in economic development and industrial transformation.

Literature in peace and conflict studies broadly, and environmental peacebuilding specifically, have focused their theorizing and analyses on the effect of natural resources (mainly non-renewable and high-value) like oil, diamonds, and minerals affect the onset of civil war because of their economic potential (Collier and Hoeffler 2000, 2005; Wennmann 2012; Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni 2011) and that natural resources are essential for peace because reactivating extractive industries would jump-start economic recovery in countries affected by armed conflict (Johnson 2017; Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beevers 2018). This approach views nature as a source of natural resources, raw materials, or ecosystem services, emphasizing its subordination to human wants and needs (Hickel 2020). Nature is valued for its economic potential, and environmental degradation, waste, and pollution are considered externalities of human activities. This perspective abuses ecosystems, treating nature as both a resource pool and a waste bin, expecting it to provide resources for wealth generation and to absorb our waste and pollution (Patel and Moore 2018).

In Paper I, identify how the fields of peace and conflict studies and environmental peacebuilding favor this conceptualization of nature. I show that this narrow perspective limits theoretical frameworks by failing to explore how natural resources can promote sustainable peace beyond economic pathways, such as through securing ownership rights and access to decision-making. By broadening the conceptualization of nature, I argue that we can develop a better theoretical understanding of strategies for achieving sustainable peace that goes beyond economic development and that aim at addressing structural inequalities in the access and control of natural resources. For this, I challenge prevailing assumptions in the literature that natural resource conflicts are not only about economic grievances but also because of political, cultural, and spiritual relationships of Indigenous and traditional groups with nature. For example, the 1996 peace agreements between the government of Mexico and the EZLN emphasized the “indissoluble unity between man, land, and nature,” (San Andrés Accords 1996, 15) which points to an ontologically different way to understand man’s relationship to nature than only through its economic and profitable potential. In Paper II, this is also made apparent from the different ways that Indigenous Maya and campesino communities in Guatemala explain their relationship to nature and their resistance against neoliberal and capitalist extractivist projects that not only do not provide any economic development to the host communities, but reproduce violence, discrimination, and inequality.

However, this economic view of the environment has been a recent development in historical terms. For most of human history, humans have viewed nature as an organic and living organism, akin to a nurturing mother that provides sustenance and care. They saw the earth as a living being that organized the relationship between self, society, and cosmos through interdependence and communal purposes. Human activities were thus connected and dependent on maintaining the living world in the spirit of reciprocity (Merchant 1980). However, the advancement of the Scientific Revolution in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries mechanized and rationalized the

world, effectively separating society from nature. Descartes' dualism stripped nature of its soul and agency, viewing it as an inert matter to be controlled and manipulated. Bacon's idea of science as a tool to dominate and exploit nature for human benefit was seen as a means to "torture nature's secret out of her" (Merchant 1980).

This mechanistic view of nature facilitated the rise of capitalism, which commodified ecosystems into resources for profit, prioritizing economic growth and capitalist accumulation (Patel and Moore 2018; Hickel 2020). As Europeans expanded their empires, they applied the same logic of domination to colonized lands and peoples, treating them as extensions of the natural world to be controlled and exploited, a process Cesáire (1972) called 'thingification.' Capitalism and colonialism played a fundamental role in universalizing Cartesian scientific reason and the concept of modernity (Alimonda 2011; Escobar 2011). The coloniality in the appropriation of nature not only provided justification for territorial expropriation but also represented the annihilation of subaltern ways of coexistence with nature (Porto-Gonçalves 2012; Assis and Franco 2018). Bispo (2021) describes this through a Euro-Christian-Monotheistic framework, which has suppressed diverse Indigenous beliefs, practices, and knowledges. This worldview justified the domination and exploitation of both nature and non-European cultures, reinforcing racial, gendered, cultural, and environmental oppression.

The coloniality of nature thus involves three mechanisms: the epistemic violence against Indigenous knowledge, the degradation of life and territory through resource exploitation, and the imposition of a dualist human-nature ontology (Cubillos, Quintero, and Perea 2023). While it was born out of the first colonial encounters, the coloniality of nature has defined not only our ecological past but also our ecological futures in what Francis (2020) calls the 'tyranny of the coloniality of nature'. This is because this process continues to shape current discourses on environmental ethics

and sustainability, and it has manifested most recently through the idea of sustainable development, which reproduces colonial patterns of domination and exploitation of nature (Porto-Gonçalves 2012). Sustainable development elevates economic goals to the same level as social and environmental goals, suggesting that economic growth through resource extraction can be pursued alongside environmental and social objectives. This model frequently endorses market-based solutions and technological innovations as primary tools for addressing environmental issues without challenging the economic structures driving environmental degradation and inequality (Hickel 2017). This economic-centric view perpetuates the commodification of natural resources, treating ecosystems as assets for economic gain rather than parts of a balanced human-nature relationship. Consequently, development projects and environmental policies often benefit powerful Global North actors at the expense of marginalized communities, especially in the Global South.

This model of sustainable development is closely linked to sustainable peace, as strategies for building peace often aim to provide the stable context necessary for sustainable development to thrive. Environmental peacebuilding extends the logic of commodification of nature by framing natural resources and ecosystems as economic assets that can drive peace and development. This is seen in Papers I, II, and III, where previous literature on the topic has narrowly focused only on the economic benefits of natural resources for sustaining post-conflict peace, disregarding the multiple political, cultural, and religious values that nature might have for different groups and how that affects their motivations and incentives for peace. By focusing on the economic value of nature, environmental peacebuilding overlooks the intrinsic value of nature and reduces complex social and environmental processes to mere economic aspects. This commodification leads to theoretical pathways and policies that prioritize economic growth and resource extraction, which reinforce the colonial-modern capitalist mentality that exacerbates climate change and perpetuates cycles of violence. Thus,

these strategies end up intensifying global inequalities and conflict instead of ameliorating the oppression of people and nature.

This is shown in Papers II and III, where the neoliberal approach to building peace was based on the ability of the market to correct structural inequality in the distribution of land in Guatemala, and the intensification of extractive industries is supposed to promote increased economic and human development in sub-Saharan Africa. The results from these studies highlight the limitations of current sustainable development and peacebuilding frameworks in addressing underlying inequalities and instead exacerbating social tensions. In Guatemala, market-based land reforms did not lead to equitable land distribution but instead consolidated land ownership among elites, perpetuating historical injustices and social divisions. Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, the focus on extractive industries has led to environmental degradation and social conflict, as local communities are displaced and deprived of their livelihoods without fair compensation or participation in the decision-making process.

This approach reproduces the coloniality of nature, which is not only based on the commodification and appropriation of resources but is also predicated on the understanding that local communities are unable to manage and care for their own resources effectively and sustainably. This perspective inherently devalues Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, assuming that external Eurocentric interventions are necessary to achieve sustainable development and peace. This is explored at length in Paper IV, where I challenge this colonial and Eurocentric argument and theorize the contributions of degrowth to peace through the ideas of ‘room to grow’ and ‘the right to say no.’ These propositions aim at addressing the material dimensions of the structures and systems of oppression and violence imposed on the Global South by the global capitalist-extractivist system and at furthering the right of the oppressed to decolonize our societies and our minds away from pursuing the aspirational project of

development in Western/Eurocentric molds. The decolonial and liberatory praxis necessary for this is based on the resistance of Indigenous, peasant, quilombola, and other groups at the margins of modernity and progress that have resisted colonial expansion and protected ancestral ways of seeing, experiencing, valuing, understanding, and interacting with nature.

On conflict

While the main focus of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the environment and peace, I argue that the way we understand the possibilities for peace is directly connected to the way that we understand conflict.

Research in peace and conflict studies extensively explores the relationship between natural resources and conflict. Previous studies have shown that the presence of high-value natural resources can influence the onset (Ross 2004a; Fearon 2005; Humphreys 2005), duration, and intensity of civil wars (Lujala 2010; Le Billon and Nicholls 2007), as well as their recurrence (Rustad and Binninsbø 2012). This literature emphasizes the negative impacts of resource abundance, based on the resource curse theory, which applies particularly to non-renewable resources like oil, gas, and minerals. The resource curse posits that countries rich in these resources, which depend heavily on export-driven sectors generating significant state revenues, often experience underdevelopment, corruption, economic stagnation, social grievances, political instability, and environmental degradation (Auty 1993). In 2013, the OECD reported that over 80 percent of the 47 fragile states listed by the organization are rich in one or more natural resources of global economic importance. However, they largely represent the pool of low-income and economic performance countries (OECD 2013).

Dependence on natural resource extraction weakens a state's capacity to redistribute wealth and provide public goods, which makes weak states more susceptible to civil war (Fearon 2005). This vulnerability arises because valuable resources like oil, gas, diamonds, and minerals generate unearned income – excess revenues and profits – referred to as rents. Rentier states, characterized by weak state-society relations and semi-authoritarian governments, grant disproportionate power to government elites who capture these rents (Wennmann 2012). This reliance on resource rents instead of taxation reduces the government's accountability to its population, potentially leading to conflict due to the lack of public trust and service provision. The resource curse is not inherent to abundant natural resources but results from irresponsible management, poor governance, and weak institutions (Hendrix and Noland 2014). Additionally, economies with larger agricultural sectors and smaller industrial sectors are more prone to conflict (Humphreys 2005).

It is, however, not only the presence of high-value natural resources that can lead to violent conflict. The scarcity theory argues that increasing demand for renewable resources like water and land, exacerbated by climate change, can also lead to violent conflict. Scarcity is argued to generate competition, frustration, grievances, and ultimately conflict. Research in the 1990s and 2000s focused on how environmental stress and resource scarcity increased insecurity, particularly concerning fresh water, leading to predictions of 'water wars.' In the context of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that it "may exacerbate resource scarcities in developing countries" and then lead to "scarcity disputes between countries, clashes between ethnic groups, and civil strife and insurgency." Recent studies have examined the impact of climate events, such as rainfall variability and extreme events like droughts and floods, on conflict. However, findings are mixed, and a direct link between climate change and conflict onset remains questionable (von Uexkull and Buhaug 2021; Hendrix et al. 2023; Selby 2014).

Both theoretical strands have significant weight on current policies on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as natural resources are often seen as ‘root causes’ of conflict (Guterres 2018; UNEP 2009; Conca and Beevers 2018). However, critics have identified that the theories feel deterministic and suggest a kind of fatalism where countries of the Global South rich in resources are doomed to conflict due to the resource curse, but those facing resource scarcity are equally destined to conflict due to competition over limited resources (Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni 2011; Magalhães Teixeira 2021b). This deterministic outlook overlooks the potential for agency, resilience, and effective governance, as it ignores the complex interplay of political, social, and economic factors that can influence conflict. More than that, it employs a depoliticized use of scarcity and abundance to explain the occurrence of violent conflicts without linking it to larger historical and socio-natural processes.

Selby and Hoffman (2014) argue that categorizing natural resource conflicts solely as issues of scarcity or abundance is paradoxical and flawed, as these should be seen as relational concepts that only make sense in relation to each other. Scarcity should not be viewed as an objectively small amount of resources but rather as a situation where some groups have less than others socially, spatially, or temporally. For instance, in civil wars like those in Angola and Sierra Leone, the presence of diamonds has often been associated with abundance and the resource curse. However, through a relative approach, this local abundance of diamonds exists only relative to global scarcity. This perspective helps situate local conflicts within larger global dynamics, highlighting that violent conflict is shaped by political, economic, and cultural factors rather than being a natural outcome of environmental conditions. Indeed, Selby and Hoffman (2014) argue that it is actually the economic and political value of natural resources, rather than their relative scarcity or abundance, that influences the potential for conflict. In peace and conflict scholarship, non-renewable resources like oil, diamonds, and

minerals are often linked to conflict through the abundance mechanism, while renewable resources like land and water are associated with conflict through the scarcity mechanism (Koubi et al. 2013). However, it is not the abundance of diamonds that determines the high potential for conflict but their high value. For example, oil's strong link to violent conflict stems from its critical economic and political significance as a key resource for a global mass-consumer society and a source of wealth and power for elites. In contrast, renewable resources do not offer the same pathways to wealth and power (Selby and Hoffman 2014). In this context, the emphasis put on the scarcity and abundance mechanisms to explain different natural resource conflicts presents to be unhelpful as an analytical tool.

Thus, it is important to approach the relationship between the environment and conflict as based on various historically and socially specific political, ideological, economic, and identity factors that go well beyond resource availability and distribution. By situating scarcity, abundance, and dependence within uneven power relations and resource distributions, it is possible to see how it reflects the antagonizing effects of conflicts on social identities (Le Billon and Duffy 2018). It is, however, important to notice that these non-resource factors structure how resources are approached and valued, which is what determines the conflict risk. Selby and Hoffman (2014, 362) thus argue that if scarcity-abundance as a mechanism is important in causally explaining conflicts, it is not because "it mechanically determines behavior, but to the extent that it is deemed and interpreted as important by parties to the conflict, within the context of global political, economic structures."

In this sense, it is important to not only recognize the chronic nature of many environmental and natural resources conflicts but it is also necessary to understand that they unfold at different scales. Research in peace and conflict studies has been fundamental in providing a systematic understanding of violent conflict. However, this

literature lacks a multi-scalar approach that is able to address both the symptoms of conflict as well as its structural root causes. This could be done by focusing not only on direct violence measured as battle-related deaths (Pettersson et al. 2021) but also by integrating other types of violence, such as structural violence (Galtung 1996; Nicoson 2021), slow violence (Nixon 2013), and corporate violence (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson 2020). A more structural view of conflict as a process exposes how different types of violence, such as structural and slow violence, are taken as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ and how the complex web of relations that surround environmental conflicts affect not only the active conflicting parties but different local, marginalized, racialized and gendered groups.

Integrating approaches from political ecology and geography to peace and conflict studies can provide a much-needed critical reading of the implications of mainstream theories of conflict. Many of the assumptions that build the theories of scarcity and abundance in relation to armed conflict come from an essentially normative rather than analytical understanding of the role of weak and disintegrating state institutions in so-called ‘failed states.’ For example, Le Billon (2015, 604) argues that a focus on resource abundance as a paradigm ends up “pathologizing resource-producing regions (as being under the supposedly inescapable negative influence of resource sectors), the social conduct in relation to resource control (people being “naturally” driven to fight over resources rather than find cooperative solutions), and the conduct of belligerents (resources shaping their motivations and behaviors).” For Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (2006, 15), this understanding of conflict resources perpetrates:

“a picture of complete lack of control and disorder in the Third World, whose inhabitants – by some irrational logic of nature – have found themselves endowed with resources that they cannot or do not know how to deal with in an orderly manner. They envisage a paranoid fear about the unruly Third World, a landscape of apprehension, risk, and insecurity where conflicts could only be resolved for one and all if

either state-owned or multinational corporations take over the control and ownership of mineral resources and manage them in a systematic manner – in the process putting their profits first and taking over the control of what should rightfully belong to the communities”.

This view of the relationship between the environment and conflict is deeply anchored in neo-colonial mindsets (Le Billon 2015), and it reproduces an ‘Orientalist’ (Said 2003) tendency within the field wherein the Global South is seen mostly as violent-prone and unruly. This construction of a cartography of violence works to promote capitalist expansion, liberal democracy, and human rights as the ultimate path to rationality and peace (Springer 2009, 2011). This geographic imaginary ties violence and insecurity to the Global South, portraying it as irrational and ‘uncivilized’ while justifying the Global North’s military interventions as rational and necessary for development and progress (Laliberté 2016). This idea of development as ordering implies that without Western/Eurocentric rule, the world would descend into chaos (Smith 2020), reproducing the colonial matrix (Quijano 1988, 2000; Esteva, Babones, and Babicky 2013).

This approach reproduces a methodological nationalist tendency in peace and conflict studies, which detaches conflicts from their historical and structural positions in the global system and fails to account for how processes of capitalist expansion, colonial legacies, and militarised histories of nation-building are responsible for the many insecurities faced by the Global South (Stavrianakis and Selby 2012; Jaime-Salas et al. 2020; Magalhães Teixeira 2021b). More than that, these insecurities have important international and structural dimensions: underdevelopment, for example, is not a mere internal characteristic of poor countries but a product of their structural position in an unequal system of international division of labor (Rodney 1972; Marini 2005; Amin 1976). However, most academic and policy discourse fails to recognize the exploitative global and structural dimensions of resource-related conflicts, often opting to address these issues through the same capitalist extractivist structures that perpetuate inequality

and violence. By ignoring these critical aspects, current approaches fail to address the root causes of resource conflicts and instead, reinforce the very structures of domination and exploitation that they aim to resolve.

Based on this, I propose rethinking conflict as an unfolding process rather than as an outcome or a physical manifestation of violence, as this can be symptomatic and often fails to theorize why incompatibilities arise in the first place or how this process unfolds. Inspired by scholarship in political ecology and geography, I focus on ‘sites of violence,’ where even the most seemingly place-bound manifestations of violence should be understood within the wider context of historical processes and structural constraints (Springer 2011). This represents a shift from the narrow conceptualization of conflict present in mainstream peace and conflict literature towards understanding it as a “recurring historically-driven and multi-scalar socio-environmental process.” This approach focuses on understanding a material manifestation of violent conflict not only through the spaces and local contexts where it unfolds but also as a reflection of larger structural and macro processes (Riofrancos 2021).

In Paper I, this is reflected in my critical approach to understanding how a utilitarian and market-based view of natural resources inputs high economic value and how this, in turn, might affect armed conflict but also peace. In Papers II and III, the approach focuses on opening up the definition of conflict to include different types of political violence connected to natural resource extraction and inequality in its distribution and access. In this dissertation, the integration of a political ecology approach is shown to assist environmental peacebuilding theories in decolonizing their understandings of resource conflicts by challenging a mechanistic view of nature that reproduces colonial systems of oppression towards both people and nature.

In this way, rather than naturalizing environmental conflicts, I explore the politicization of the environment through conflicts (Martínez-Alier 2009; Robbins 2012). This perspective reveals that environmental and natural resource conflicts are not solely about access and control over resources but also about different epistemologies and ontologies concerning our relationship with nature (Assis and Franco 2018; Cubillos, Quintero, and Perea 2023). Environmental conflicts encompass social, political, and cultural dimensions beyond only the economic one. Viewing natural resources as the material basis of societal functioning links rights, ownership, and access to exercising different spheres of power, which manifests in political participation and representation beyond only economic status. Understanding conflict in this way shows how they are historical processes that mask structures of power that have determined not only how groups relate to each other but also how they see, experience, value, understand, and interact with the natural world (Francis 2020).

This is why this dissertation proposes a political theorization of natural resource conflicts by providing an account of how grievances arise and conflicts unfold, based on the idea that the environment and natural resources are often the root causes of conflict. This approach does not aim to simplify a very complex process but to show how conflicts are not only about access and control over natural resources but about the impacts that resource inequality has on economic, social, political, and environmental inequality, reproducing systems of violence and oppression.

On peace

As a starting point, it is necessary to highlight that ‘peace’ is not a neutral concept but imperatively political, ethical, and ideological. Peace is a concept that is derived from the different ways of seeing the world, of understanding the relations between people and between people and nature, as well as a diversity of values, interests, and political agendas (Jaime-Salas et al. 2020). In this sense, it does not fit one single definition, but

it is subject to political debate between different ways of understanding peace and the processes of peacebuilding.

A very central definition of peace is the one conceptualized by Galtung (1996) that differentiates between negative and positive peace. Negative peace is related to the absence of physical violence, generally connected to armed conflict. Positive peace, on the other hand, is a much more ambitious project based on overcoming the three types of violence defined as 1) direct or physical violence, 2) structural violence (in the way of injustice and oppression, derived from political and socioeconomic structures), and 3) cultural violence (related to ideologies, theories, and discourses that justify the other types of violence). In this sense, the idea of peacebuilding is related to the process of overcoming all types of violence and achieving both negative and positive peace.

While sustainable peace is a concept that has been widely used in both scholarship and practice, its definition is often loose. In many cases, sustainable peace means a peace that is not only durable, which means that it is measured not only by the duration of absence of conflict after the signing of a peace agreement, for example, but also that it contains an added dimension of resilience. Sustainable peace often means a peace that is resilient to the long and complex process of building peace after an armed conflict and that tries to promote not only a negative sense of peace but also a positive one. Within environmental peacebuilding, sustainable peace is often conceived as a spectrum or a continuum that ranges from the absence of violent conflict to the unimaginability of destructive conflict (Conca and Beevers 2018; Ide et al. 2021).

While this definition moves toward a more positive conceptualization of peace, it lacks a clear integration of sustainability in the environmental sense. Krampe (2016, 13) argues that “to build peace, we need to acknowledge and understand the long-term interplay of social, political, and ecological processes in post-war countries.” In this

definition, the idea of ‘sustainable’ peace comes from the political debate around the idea of sustainable development, which defines sustainability as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (WCED 1987).

Here, there are two important limitations in this understanding of peace that affect the way that we might effectively build peace that is equally positive and environmentally careful. First, these definitions focus on building peace only in relation to armed conflicts, which masks a myriad of other types of conflicts and violences connected to resource inequality. More than that, this narrow conceptualization constrains the possibilities for building peace only in societies that have gone through a civil war and that follow a specific peacebuilding package based on liberal ideals of institution-building and good governance. The argument is that the responsible and transparent management of natural resources can shift their negative connection to armed conflict into a positive connection toward peace (Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021). Indeed, the revitalization of extractive industries in post-conflict countries has been argued to be a powerful tool in jump-starting the economy and promoting sustainable development (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beever 2018).

However, I argue that this understanding reproduces an ‘Orientalist’ view on peace and peacebuilding, in which peace interventions are seen as necessary to advance Eurocentric/Western values and institutions. This combined approach of *peace and development* not only perpetuates unequal social and power relations (Laliberté 2016; Hettne 1983, 2001) but also reinforces violence that is inherent to the structure of the capitalist system and processes of extractivism (Escobar 1995; Kothari and Harcourt 2004; Gudynas 2015; Dunlap and Jakobsen 2020; Magalhães Teixeira 2021b).

Second, this definition of peace is limited to its negative conceptualization as the absence of organized physical and direct violence through a binary relationship. The dichotomous way in which peace and violence are understood masks many other types of violence that happen outside the battlefield, as well as more invisible types of violence like structural or cultural forms of violence (Cockburn 2004; Wibben et al. 2019; True 2020). In order to remedy this, I build on a feminist perspective and understand peace and violence as existing in a continuum, in which both peace and violence can exist simultaneously, and that different types of violence happen even during *peacetime*. For example, understanding violence and conflict connected to the environment through a narrow understanding would only account for overt violence connected to armed conflict and civil wars over natural resources (Le Billon 2014). However, there are many other forms of conflict and violence that happen around sites of extraction of natural resources (Temper, del Bene, and Martinez-Alier 2015; Navas, Mingorria, and Aguilar-González 2018) as well as along supply chains (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson 2020).

This approach also accounts for how state repression is used to suppress protests around mining sites (Wegenast and Schneider 2017; Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024), how the modernization of agriculture contributes to the land dispossession of small farmers (Maher 2014; Assis and Franco 2018), as well as the systematic assassinations of environmental and land defenders (Scheidel et al. 2020; Le Billon and Lujala 2020). Other more traditionally invisible types of violence are also highlighted, like the slow violence of climate change (Nixon 2013), as well as other types of structural violence in the form of political, social, and economic marginalization of local populations in extractive zones (Zarsky and Stanley 2013; Socioambiental 2021).

From a feminist perspective, it is very important to name different types of violences that might become naturalized in our societies and that are not seen as violent or as

oppressive because they are built into the structures of our societies and are part of ‘the way things are’, or because they harm the most marginalized groups in our societies. It is important to name and understand how these violences interact and reinforce each other so we can have clearer visions for how to overcome them. Figure 3 below illustrates the feminist continuum of violence, building on Galtung’s categorizations and placed along the continuum from ‘more visible’ to ‘more invisible.’

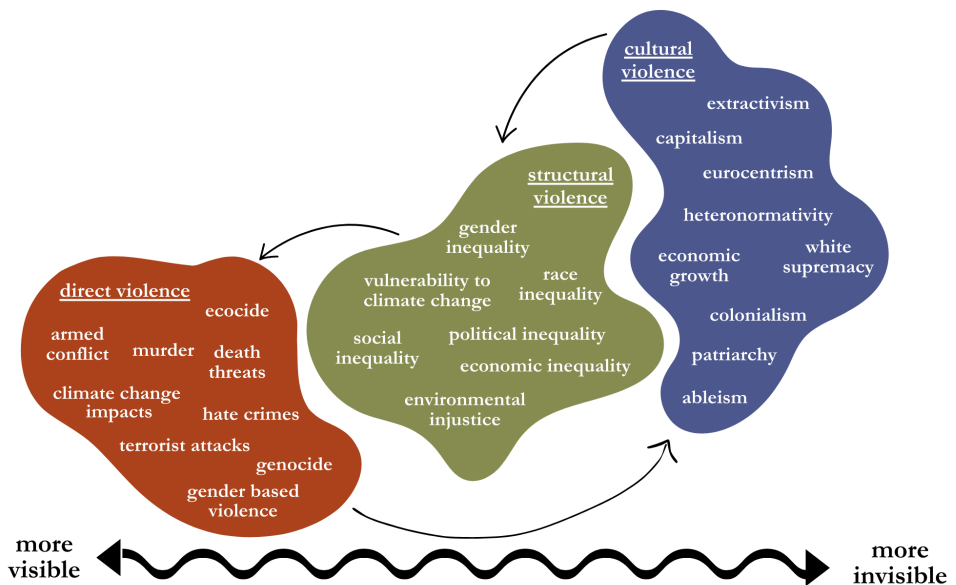


Figure 3 Proposed visualization of the feminist continuum of violence

The first type of violence, physical and direct violence, is understood as the most visible type of violence because we can easily observe them as their effects. Moving along the continuum, the second type of structural violence is the violences that are built into the structures of our societies and that have become naturalized and are seen as ‘normal’. In this category, we have different types of inequality, like social, political, and economic, as well as vulnerability to climate change – which happens at the intersection

of the other inequalities. The third type is cultural violence, which consists of the values, norms, and ideologies that serve as the basis for the structures in our society and can legitimize different types of structural and direct violence. This is because it is impossible to understand these violences as happening in a vacuum or as isolated cases. A feminist understanding of the continuum of violence shows that physical violence happens because of structural patterns of violence that are legitimized by cultural values, norms, and ideologies that are violent in nature. As True (2020, 86) argues that it is important to understand violence not as a series of random and isolated events but as a reflection of a “predictable and explicable pattern of violence by a group of perpetrators, and which has a basis in social structures.” In this sense, we can understand how climate change or ecocide are violences perpetrated by multinational corporations, billionaires, and states, with a basis in social structures of capitalism, extractivism, and economic growth.

Understanding physical and structural violences as being embedded in a complex system of cultural violence that legitimizes them necessitates questioning ideas, values, and norms that we take as normal and natural in our theorizations about what is necessary to build peace that does not further reproduce these systems. To do this, I argue for the need to understand peace as a praxis of liberation, which is rooted in the commitment to the radical transformation of the structures in our societies. Based on the theoretical discussions and the empirical results shown throughout the papers in this dissertation, I understand the connections between the environment and violence and consider how environmental harms such as climate change are produced by the same violent structures that pose a challenge to peace. Ultimately, I argue for a liberatory perspective on peace to ensure that it does not further reproduce structures of violence to both people and nature.

Based on a positive and intersectional approach to peace, I understand that peace is fundamentally concerned with power structures and hierarchies building on the idea of climate-resilient peace (Nicoson 2021). This conceptualization sees peace as an iterative process with the aim of changing the unequal distribution of power and resources, which are markers of structural violence. More than that, the liberatory approach to peace understands how ‘peace’ has been used in connection with development, extraction, and economic growth to reproduce the civilizational matrix of the West through violent structures of both material and symbolic domination (Jaime-Salas et al. 2020). Instead, a liberatory approach to peace focuses on negating both symbolic and material structures that produce and reproduce violence and domination, focused on the dialectic relationship between theory and praxis (Freire 2005).

Ultimately, I argue for peace to be understood and practiced as something bigger than just the reproduction of violent strategies for development through economic growth and extractivism, moving it from an oppressive toward a liberatory process. More than that, to speak of peace, it is necessary to highlight the historical struggle of marginalized groups that have been put on the outside of modernity and who have been organizing to promote and provide alternatives to the contemporary system of capitalist development and Western civilizational projects. In the words of Parrado Pardo (2020, 137):

“to speak of peace from a decolonial perspective implies approaching those organizational, communitarian and popular processes whose goals are to subvert the economic, political, cultural, and social structures that are excluding, racist, patriarchal and neoliberal, through the implementation of peaceful action where the struggle for the wellbeing and alternative projects to the hegemony are highlighted.”

For peace to be liberatory, it must center the experiences, conceptualizations, and theorizations of marginalized communities in order to envision that **another world is possible** “where our imagination is let loose outside the bounds of the colonial order.”



Theoretical framework

Building on the previous conceptual discussion, in this section, I propose a new framework for understanding how natural resources serve as root causes of conflict and can be catalysts for building peace. The challenge here is to move beyond the mechanistic view of nature present in much of the literature, overcome the deterministic expectation of natural resource conflicts in underdeveloped countries, and provide a pathway to peace that does not further structures of violence to both people and nature.

First, I begin by acknowledging that conflicts are rarely if ever, caused by a single factor. Whether natural resources are connected to conflicts through the abundance or the scarcity mechanism, this approach can oversimplify the complex socio-political and historical dynamics that contribute to conflicts. This is because while natural resources play a significant role in conflicts, their impact is always mediated by political, economic, and social factors (Le Billon and Duffy 2018). Studies have shown that the effects of natural resources and conflict remain sensitive to specifications and are often mediated by intervening variables such as institutional capacity, democratic oversight, transparent revenue-sharing, and ethnic and economic inequality (Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni 2011). Thus, attributing the root causes of conflict primarily to natural resources neglects the broader complex historical and political dynamics and the underlying social, political, and economic structural drivers of conflict (Woodward 2007). More than that, conflicts are also dynamic phenomena that evolve and develop over time. This means that issues that were seen as root causes of conflict at its onset can change, and new issues can emerge (Brosché and Sundberg 2023).

While considering all these aspects, I still argue for the importance of approaching natural resources as root causes of conflict. My proposition here is to show that carefully prioritizing this approach does not reflect a simplification of the conflict process – which would be counterproductive to the central aims of this study. Instead, I see the exploitation of natural resources as the material basis of the functioning of our society, which connects the right, the ownership, and the access to those natural resources as means of exercising power, and not only for survival or subsistence (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). This power manifests in political power through participation and representation, as well as economic power. Marginalized communities in both the economic, political, and social sense are those dispossessed of the right to access natural resources and the economic benefits of their exploitation (Scheidel et al. 2023; Scheidel et al. 2020). If we approach control over natural resources as the basis of power, then approaching natural resources as the root causes of conflict is not a simplification of complex political and historical processes, but it is an attempt to show how natural resources are usually connected to the structures that make conflict possible.

My proposition, however, does not focus on the sole abundance or scarcity of natural resources as root causes of conflict. Instead, building on the ideas of how these mechanisms are relative to each other, I choose to focus on resource inequality as the mechanism that connects to conflict. I theorize that resource inequality lies at the center of modern capitalist societies, with direct implications for other types of structural inequalities: social, political, economic, and environmental – which, in turn, reinforce each other. Figure 4 below illustrates this relationship. Political inequality arises in this context as those who control significant natural resources often wield substantial political power, influencing policies to their favor and subverting efforts toward fairer redistribution (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). This control can foster corruption,

undermine democratic institutions, and weaken governance (Ross 2004a; Ross 2012). This can lead to political instability as repression is used as a means for social control and for dominating labor, as well as for coercing people away from democratic participation (Kay 2007). Socially, unequal access to essential resources like water, land, and energy exacerbates poverty and exclusion, impacting gender and health inequality, as well as intergenerational injustice (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020).

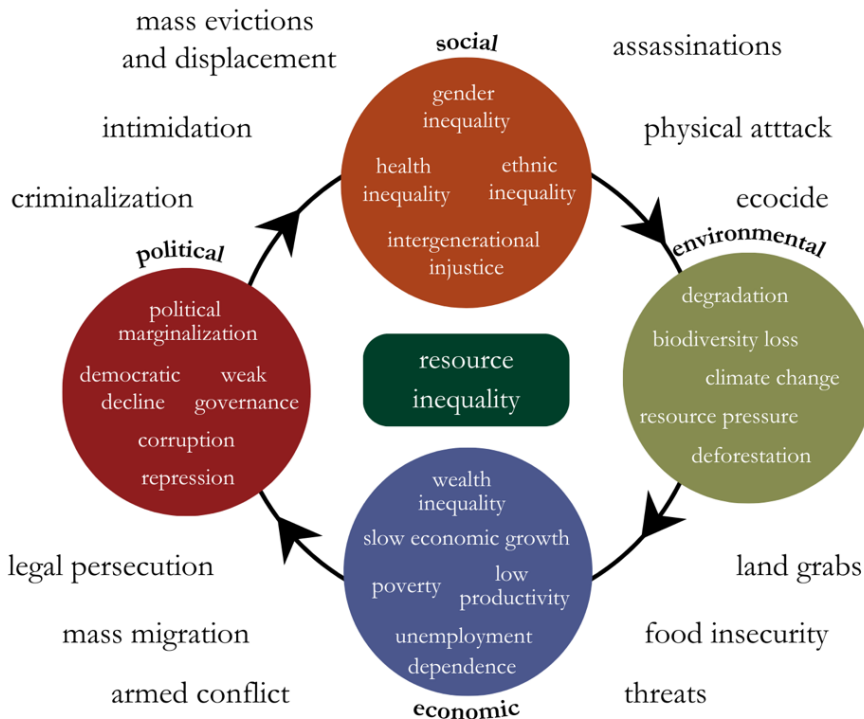


Figure 4 Resource inequality as root causes of conflict and violence

Resource inequality concentrates wealth in the hands of a few, reducing access to employment, limiting broader economic opportunities, and stifling social mobility (Piketty 2014). It also negatively impacts economic growth, particularly in less

developed countries, which are dependent on a narrow range of resources and face vulnerability due to global market fluctuations (Cipollina, Cuffaro, and D'Agostino 2018; Roe and Dodd 2017). Globalization and large-scale land acquisitions, or 'land grabs' often for agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure projects, are legitimized in the name of economic development (Le Billon and Lujala 2020; Thomson 2011). They frequently disregard local land rights and customary tenure systems, leading to forced evictions and displacement of communities (Dell'Angelo et al. 2017).

Environmentally, resource inequality is linked to higher deforestation rates (Ceddia 2019). Large-scale industrial farming exacerbates climate change by threatening the sustainable practices of small-scale farmers and Indigenous peoples through evictions, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and excessive resource pressure (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). As global demand for natural resources grows, so does the pressure on land, intensifying conflicts and endangering land defenders (Balestri and Maggioni 2021; Scheidel et al. 2020). The involvement of powerful international actors adds a layer of complexity and impunity, as local governments, eager for foreign investment, often turn a blind eye to the violence perpetrated against those who resist these projects (Wegenast and Schneider 2017).

Consequently, land and environmental defenders face increased risks of assassination, physical attacks, and legal persecution as they challenge powerful economic interests that benefit from land accumulation (Scheidel et al. 2023). Indeed, these inequalities often manifest as violence, threats, and repression toward land and environmental defenders who face physical violence, including murder and assault, as well as legal harassment and criminalization aimed at silencing their work (Global Witness 2020; Navas, Mingorria, and Aguilar-González 2018). In Figure 4, the outer layer represents the many types of physical manifestations of conflict connected to a system of entrenched inequalities. Here, armed conflict and civil war are seen as one type of

manifestation, accompanied by a myriad of other types of violences that are either masked or naturalized in our societies.

Understanding resource scarcity at the root of this model also has implications for theorizing pathways toward peace. A second critique of EPB's framework is that it often depoliticizes environmental issues by adopting a neoliberal perspective, aiming to make resource management issues less contentious and thus more negotiable or agreeable (Aggestam 2018; Ide 2020). This depoliticization strips away the ontological values of nature and how different groups relate to it, enforcing a market-driven approach that ignores critical political, gendered, racial, and class-based issues at the core of natural resource conflicts. By reducing these complex environmental and social issues to economic values, EPB's framework reinforces a capitalist and growth-oriented mentality that exacerbates climate change and perpetuates cycles of violence (Bliesmann de Guevara, Budny, and Kostić 2023; Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024).

The idea of sustainable peace rests strongly on the argument that in order to build a peace that is sustainable not only in its robustness but also in its environmental approach, it is necessary to address issues of peacebuilding and environmental changes simultaneously. For this, much of the literature in the field of environmental peacebuilding approaches the complex task of combining issues of building peace and caring for the environment based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The Agenda 2030 seeks to build peace through a holistic approach that advances economic growth alongside social and environmental goals. In this context, the goals of promoting peace are interlinked with not only the idea of environmental responsibility but also with the promotion of sustainable development and economic growth. This is why, I argue, sustainable peace is not sustainable.

Sustainability is often portrayed by the conversion of its three pillars: social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and serves as the basis for most contemporary policies around sustainable development today (Purvis, Mao, and Robinson 2019). This conceptualization promotes environmental goals as equally important as social and economic goals, emphasizing the environmental dimension of building peace (Conca and Beevers 2018). It integrates environmental objectives with traditional post-conflict priorities, suggesting that sustainable peace requires efforts across social, economic, and environmental aspects (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016). Thus, sustainable peace is seen as part of a continuum, aiming for a holistic and positive peace that can address these dimensions comprehensively.

However, critics argue that the three pillars model masks inherent trade-offs in trying to balance especially environmental and economic goals, often at the expense of environmental sustainability as economic goals take precedence in policy-making (Purvis, Mao, and Robinson 2019). The model suggests that economic development based on economic growth can coexist harmoniously with social equity and environmental protection, which oversimplifies and overlooks the inherent conflicts between these goals. It also results in compromises where economic development is pursued at the cost of environmental degradation, under the assumption that social and environmental harms can be mitigated or compensated later. This can lead to unsustainable practices being justified under the name of economic progress (Hickel 2019).

This focus on economic goals is not only harmful to environmental goals but can be detrimental to peace as well. Literature in peace and conflict studies builds largely on this idea of the need to secure economic growth in order to maintain peace through raising living standards and reducing poverty (Gartzke 2007), and also by reducing the risk of conflict recurrence (Collier et al. 2003; Collier and Rohner 2008). However,

studies have shown that the pathways to sustaining peace might be more complex than that. Miguel, Satyanath, and Sergenti (2004) show that a decrease in economic growth of 5% increases the likelihood of conflict by one-half in the following year. Dahl and Høyland (2012) show that instead of reducing the risk of civil war, economic growth actually increased the risk of post-conflict peace collapse. The authors point out that the positive results found in previous studies by Collier and friends might be due to the way the data is coded and how variables are operationalized. On the same topic, Ray and Esteban (2017) and Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni (2011) also point out methodological flaws in earlier studies that pointed to the centrality of the greed mechanism in showing the relationship between natural resource abundance and conflict onset. The recent study by Denly et al. (2022) using georeferenced data for natural resources shows that different ways of operationalizing armed conflict have a significant result on whether the presence of natural resources is positively correlated with violence.

More than a critique of the methodological approaches, there are also other works that point out the mistake of attributing a causal relationship to economic growth and peace when this effect might come from other variables. This means that while most studies attribute the effect on peace as coming from economic growth, it might be the case that activities that contribute to economic growth, like the construction of infrastructure, people's ability to have decent work, to secure capital, to have access to social services and resources, economic activity, and democratic institutions are the ones affecting both economic growth and the sustainability of peace simultaneously (Hegre and Nygård 2014; International Alert 2015). More than that, there are many critical studies both in and outside of peace and conflict studies that point to the harmful patterns of economic growth to both people and the environment, focusing on topics such as the practice of land-grabbing of communal and ancestral lands for monoculture commercial farming (Dell'Angelo et al. 2017). Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas (2015) show how the introduction of large monoculture crops like Palm

Oil in Colombia might be seen from far away as benefitting economic growth and post-conflict recovery, by jump-starting the economy. However, this process is based on the violent dispossession of small-scale subsistence farmers, usually from Indigenous and marginalized peasant groups, and on the increasing deterioration of the environment.

Other studies focusing on capitalist systems and their relationship to the environment also show that the expansion of capitalist activities is extremely detrimental to both people and the environment, as it is based on the exploitation of women, colonies, and nature, as well as the undervalued labor of men (Mies 1986; Rodney 1972; Patel and Moore 2018). Chertkovskaya and Paulsson (2020) put forward the concept of ‘corporate violence’ to describe violence motivated or caused by material interest, profit-seeking, and economic expansion. The idea of ‘market violence’ is also used to reflect the physical harm to people, the social and economic vulnerability, and the environmental damage that market localities and global supply chains impose under the capitalist system (Firat 2018). These types of violence pose harm not only to humans but to non-human animals and the environment as well. This means that not only the outcomes of economic growth are marked by the effect on armed conflict, but also the process of resource and labor exploitation, as well as of capital accumulation, are inherently violent processes (Dunlap and Jakobsen 2020; Dunlap 2024). Thus, while environmental peacebuilding’s framework might promise peace and development through intensifying extractive industries to promote economic growth, the destructive nature of this model remains hidden, leaving the violence unnoticed and taken as natural in the current structures.

By understanding peace and violence as existing in a continuum, as posited by feminist peace research, the goal here is to highlight how this presents fundamental limitations to EPB’s scholarship and practice. Guided by feminist and decolonial ethics to contribute to a liberatory approach to peace - one that is rooted in a commitment to

transforming the violent structures of material and symbolic domination and oppression – I argue for a framework to further climate-resilient peace through a positive peace and degrowth approach. Together, they can promote the negation of violent structures and a more egalitarian sharing of resources, wealth, and power in order to foster greater well-being. Here, degrowth can be a powerful ally in building peace because it understands that the roots of conflict and violence are the oppressive and unequal systems of accumulation, and it aims at addressing this problem at the same systemic level (Nicoson 2021). Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to transform the structural and cultural forms of violence that produce resource inequality and legitimize it as a natural and normal feature of functioning and peaceful modern societies. By aiming at transforming the structures of resource inequality, I argue that it is then possible to address the root causes of environmental conflicts and violences, especially in countries of the Global South.



Research design

The overall empirical aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of natural resources in peace processes and the transformation from violent conflict to peace. This investigation follows the pathways and mechanisms from environmental peacebuilding's framework and organizes the conflict cycle following the feminist continuum of violence-peace. While the object of study – namely peace – remains more or less constant throughout the papers, but it is conceptualized and operationalized differently to fit the specific aims and goals of each study. This design provides a broad understanding of the post-conflict cycle while attending to the intricate dynamics of violence and peace.

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research addresses previous critiques of environmental peacebuilding, which often focused on single case studies and faced difficulties in systematically comparing results and approaches (Dresse et al. 2018; Ide 2020; Ide et al. 2021). Through this approach, the work in this thesis provides a more holistic view that bridges macro-level patterns with micro-level intricacies, thereby advancing the field of environmental peacebuilding through a more systematic and comprehensive methodological framework. It also addresses recent calls in the field for a more methodologically plural approach to environmental peacebuilding by employing feminist and decolonial methodologies with attention to power dynamics with the aim of negating simplistic narratives (Rodríguez et al. 2021; Hsiao et al. 2022; Davis et al. 2023; Amador-Jimenez, Baron, and Richter 2024; Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024).

Contrary to the perceived divide, scholars argue that combining feminist research ethics with quantitative methods is not only feasible but beneficial for scientific development (Caprioli 2004; Parisi 2009; Apodaca 2009; Stauffer and O'Brien 2018). As Harding (1987) argues, there is no such thing as a 'feminist method,' but rather a feminist methodology, making quantitative research compatible with feminist inquiry. What makes any type of research feminist or decolonial is not the particular tool or method used but the underlying understanding of how research should be conducted and what its aims should be (Curiel 2014; Ackerly and True 2020).

In this dissertation, feminist peace theory and the conceptualization of the peace-violence continuum were essential for guiding the process of data creation. This was aimed at improving the available data needed for the quantitative modeling of the relationship between natural resources and the different understandings of violence and peace. Throughout the research project, I have employed a dialectical process where feminist and decolonial scholarship is used to disrupt dominating narratives and conceptualizations, which requires rethinking and improving empirical strategies and practices for generating data to better reflect the social realities we are trying to represent (Pugh 1990; Caprioli 2004). In turn, this data is used to empirically show how methodological and theoretical limitations within mainstream approaches. In this sense, my goal with using quantitative research and data within feminist and decolonial methodologies is to subvert research agendas from within peace and conflict studies broadly and environmental peacebuilding specifically.

This is based on the understanding that a feminist methodology is problem-driven and encourages the use of the method that is best suited to answer the research questions with emancipatory goals (Stauffer and O'Brien 2018; Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2021). This is why I apply different types of methods and employ different kinds of data and analyses in different papers to answer different questions. However,

all papers share the same goal of identifying dominant assumptions within peace and conflict theories and explanations and uncovering how they have been limited by rational choice and neoliberal paradigms, which contribute to climate change and reproduce structures of violence in conflict-affected countries, making a positive and liberatory peace impossible.

Empirical context

The empirical scope of this dissertation has been defined by its focus on natural resource conflicts terminated by a peace agreement. Through the construction of the Natural Resources in Peace Agreements (NAPR) Dataset, I have identified 86 peace processes connected to natural resources conflicts between 1976-2018, distributed between 30 countries. Figure 5 shows an illustration of the global distribution of natural resource conflicts that have undergone a peace process per country. The NRPA dataset records 54 peace processes in 15 countries in Africa, 18 peace processes in 8 countries in Asia, and 11 peace processes in 4 countries in the Americas. Data from the NRPA dataset is used to inform case selection strategies for all empirical papers in this dissertation.

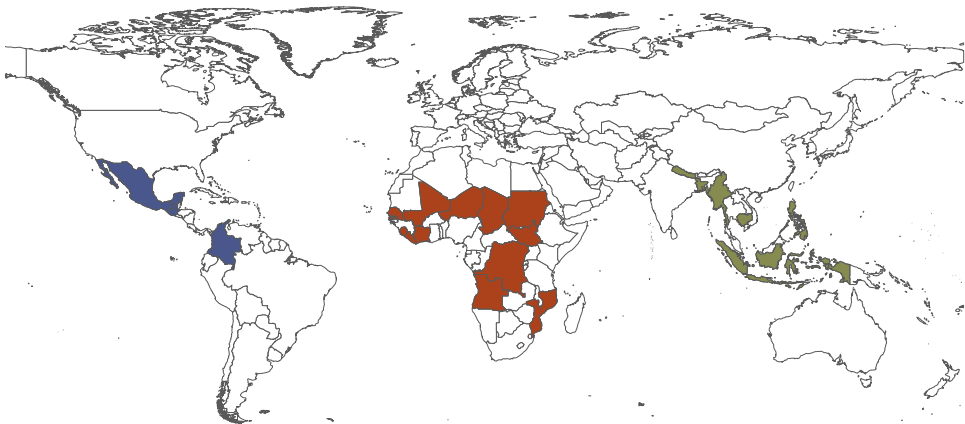


Figure 5 Global distribution of natural resources conflicts

The data from the NRPA dataset shows that natural resource conflicts that have been through a peace process between 1974-2018 are all located in countries of the Global South. Paper I uses the broader category of Global South as the empirical scope for the quantitative study, which looks at the overall patterns and trends in negotiating natural resources across the universe of cases present in the NRPA dataset. The cases chosen for the qualitative analyses – El Salvador, Sudan, and Nepal - were selected based on modeling the different levels of recurrence risk and whether conflict reoccurred or not. The three cases were also chosen to show regional variation within the Global South.

In Paper II, the case of Guatemala was selected based on a predictive model using data from the NRPA dataset. Since the research design for Paper II also required carrying out fieldwork through in-depth interviews and participant observation, the case selection strategy was also informed by feminist reflexivity, which considers practical issues for carrying out data production, such as the researcher’s language skills, travel prospects, familiarity, identity, and personal connections to the site (Nagar 2014). The choice of Guatemala also stems from its relative understudy within the field of peace and conflict studies. This decision aligns with the goal of avoiding further reproducing “street-light” biases, where research is disproportionately focused on a small number of cases (Adams et al. 2018) and burdens already marginalized communities (McMullin 2022). Additionally, as the peace agreement in Guatemala was signed almost 30 years ago, the long post-conflict timeline allows for a comprehensive and long-term analysis of the process of building sustainable peace.

In Paper III, the empirical scope of the study is limited to countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This is done for several reasons. First, as part of the overall design of this dissertation, showing regional variation within natural resource conflicts in the Global

South is an important methodological and empirical goal. Second, given the design of the study, the empirical strategy was constrained by the availability of secondary data. Highly disaggregated panel data on both economic and human development, as well as on different types of conflict and violence, is scarce, and in order to minimize the amount of missing data for several cases, we chose to focus on the region the most amount of data for the longest period of time. Third, even though natural resources conflicts in Africa are some of the most over-researched in peace and conflict studies, and this might contribute to the street-light biases mentioned above, the regional cut is selected in order to make the study comparable and able to dialogue with previous research (Berman et al. 2017; Wegenast and Schneider 2017). In Paper IV, I provide a critical discussion of the *Global South* as a geopolitical site of both domination and resistance.

Overall, the empirical scope of this thesis is driven by robust theoretical and methodological considerations, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced analysis. By showcasing regional variation within the Global South, the thesis broadens the universe of cases under study, moving beyond the often narrow focus of previous research. This expanded scope not only enhances the depth and breadth of understanding in the field but also offers fresh insights into the unique aspects of natural resource conflicts and peacebuilding processes that have been previously overlooked. Consequently, this work contributes to a more diversified and representative body of knowledge, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that shape conflict and peace in the Global South.

Data

The empirical work in this dissertation relies on a broad range of data from both quantitative and qualitative sources. Depending on the design of each paper within this dissertation, different types of data were necessary to address the specific research

questions and analytical frameworks employed. This dissertation contributes extensive new and unique data, both quantitative and qualitative, that informs the different scientific papers. Papers I and III required extensive quantitative data to perform large-scale statistical analyses in order to uncover broad patterns and trends (Halperin and Heath 2020). Paper II required qualitative data to provide in-depth understandings and contextual insights, offering a richer and more nuanced view of the dynamics at play (Ackerly and True 2020). The strategic use of varied data sources ensures that each paper is methodologically sound and tailored to its specific objectives, enhancing the overall robustness and comprehensiveness of the dissertation.

Quantitative data

This dissertation introduces the Natural Resources in Peace Agreements (NRPA) Dataset, which is used for empirical analysis in Paper I and to drive case selection in Papers II and III. This dataset provides highly disaggregated data on different provisions regarding natural resources in peace agreements connected to natural resource conflicts from 1946-2018. The creation of the dataset aims to fill gaps in previous literature on natural resource conflicts and provisions in peace agreements that tended to aggregate all natural resources into one single category or to focus only on high-value non-renewable resources like oil, gas, or diamonds (Lujala and Rustad 2012; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005; Ross 2012).

The NRPA dataset disaggregates natural resources by type – land, oil, water, minerals, gems, or forests – as well as by the kind of mechanism it aims to address – ownership or wealth-sharing. Dominating literature in the field fails to account for how natural resources can affect both conflict and peace through other mechanisms beyond only wealth-sharing. By providing data on how different types of natural resources are connected to issues of ownership, the NRPA contributes to the development of nuanced theoretical propositions based on methodological and empirical rigor.

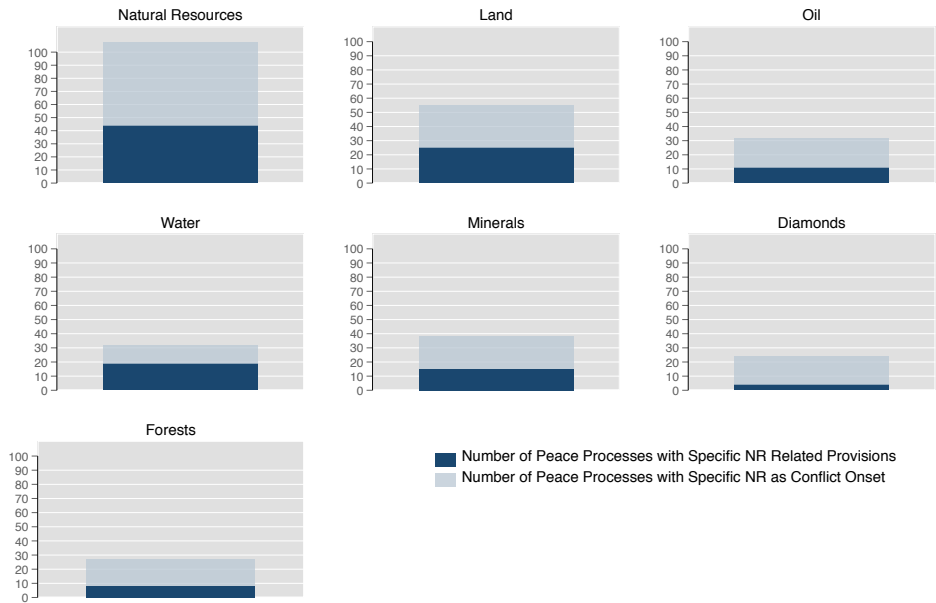


Figure 6 Number of natural resources provisions in peace agreements by type (Paper I)

Paper III relies on a selection of secondary data from reliable datasets on the location of natural resource extraction sites (Denly et al. 2022), the incidence of different types of conflict and political violence (Raleigh et al. 2010), nighttime lights, and other economic development measures (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012), as well as demographic and health data to measure human development (Croft, Marshall, and Allen 2018). Data used in Paper III is georeferenced at the grid level, which involves the spatial disaggregation of data into uniform grid cells, allowing for a more precise analysis of conflict dynamics and their geographic distribution following the PRIO-GRID (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012).

Using such a refined level of analysis poses significant challenges. Disaggregating data into grid cells or specific geographical locations can introduce uncertainties if the original data sources are not precise, and high-resolution data might not be available for all regions or countries, leading to potential gaps and missing data. In Paper III, we address these challenges by focusing only on sub-Saharan African countries, by attaching the health and survey data to the grid cells, and by using multi-level models to include different control measures, such as state capacity, which is only systematically available for sub-Saharan countries at the country-level (Dahlberg et al. 2023). By combining all these different sources and relying on a highly disaggregated level of analysis, we provide a more detailed and nuanced view of the impacts of natural resource extraction on conflict and development measures.

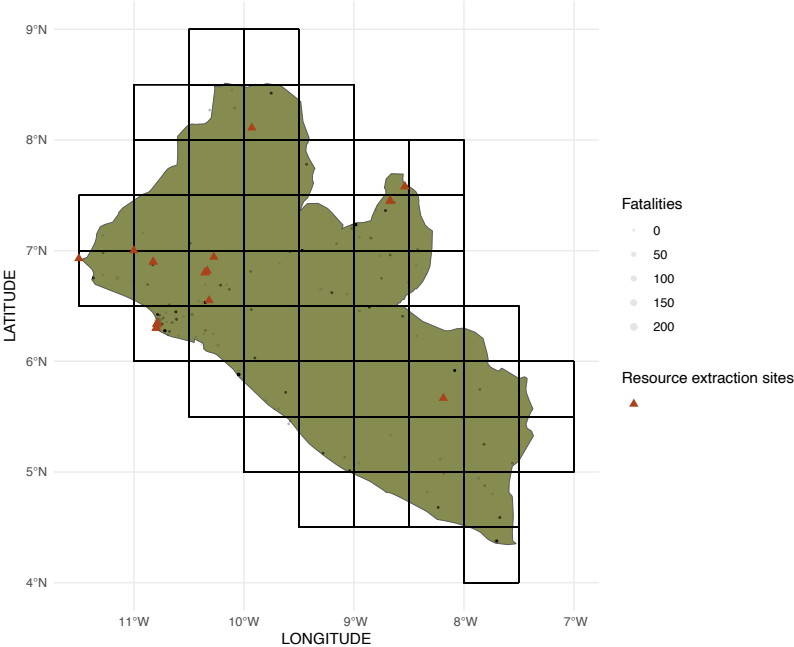


Figure 7 Georeferenced data on resource extraction sites and incidence of violence, example of Liberia (Paper III)

Qualitative data

Paper II provides extensive qualitative data produced through fieldwork in Guatemala in 2022. Data was generated through standard ethnographic methods, using in-depth site visits and participant observation, as well as semi-structured interviews and informal conversations (Millar 2018; Krause 2021). Interviews were recorded with the consent of the research participants and then transcribed with their integrity. As the sole researcher in this study, I recorded the conversations first-hand in Spanish and translated the transcriptions into English afterward. As a fluent but non-native speaker of both languages, this influences not only my translations of the conversations but also my own interpretations of them. Data from the interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations with the Q'eqch'i community were kindly translated by Imelda Teyul and Lesbia Artola in real-time. Data was also recorded through field notes, audio recordings, photos, and videos. These were used not only for complementing interview data but also as a personal exercise to familiarize the researcher and to contextualize the historical, social, political, and cultural processes related to the land question, environmental conflicts, and the struggle for peace in Guatemala through my own lived experience during fieldwork (Elliott and Wolf-Meyer 2024).

Methods

Studying peace is a challenging and complex endeavor. I have chosen to approach the issue differently in each paper and to rely on different methods to answer different research questions. This thesis relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods, which, when put together, can hopefully complement each other and contribute different insights to the study of the overall research puzzle.

Quantitative methods

In Paper I, I employ a durational analysis to investigate the effect of including natural resources provisions in peace agreements and the duration of post-conflict peace. Durational analysis, or survival analysis, is a technique used to examine the time it takes for a particular event to occur and how various factors influence this timing (Box-Steffensmeier, Reiter, and Zorn 2003). This method is useful in peace and conflict studies to study time and political change related to the dynamics of conflict and factors that influence the duration and resolution of conflicts (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). In Paper I, I use the Cox Proportional Hazards Model, which allows me to model the effect of negotiating natural resources on the duration of peace before a new conflict event erupts while allowing for control of time-varying factors.

The Cox Proportional Hazards Model is the most used in political science, given its semiparametric function that does not assume a parametric shape for the baseline hazard. This is important when making inferences about relative failure rates because duration dependency should be treated as model-specific and should not be parameterized (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). The use of proportional hazards means that the magnitude of the effects of covariates on the duration of a state remains proportional across the life of the process (Box-Steffensmeier, Reiter, and Zorn 2003). For theoretical reasons, it is possible to expect that the relative effect of an independent variable will vary over time: it can be stronger at the beginning and fade with time, or it can be small at the beginning and grow stronger with time. When analyzing post-conflict peace duration, I expect that the effect of signing a peace agreement will be stronger at the earlier stage and will diminish over time, like when the peace agreement is implemented. However, the effects of independent factors on the hazard function may not always be proportional. Figure 8 below illustrates the distribution of the density of the survival rates and how it changes over time.

It is essential to test for proportional hazards to avoid biased estimates and incorrect standard error, which can skew inferences about the impact of variables on the duration analysis (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). To address this, I run a Schoenfeld residuals test to determine if nonproportional effects are present: if residuals vary significantly with time, it indicates a violation of the proportional hazard’s assumption. In Paper I, the test is not significant, which means that the independent factors follow the proportional hazard assumption, and the model is fit to analyze this relationship.

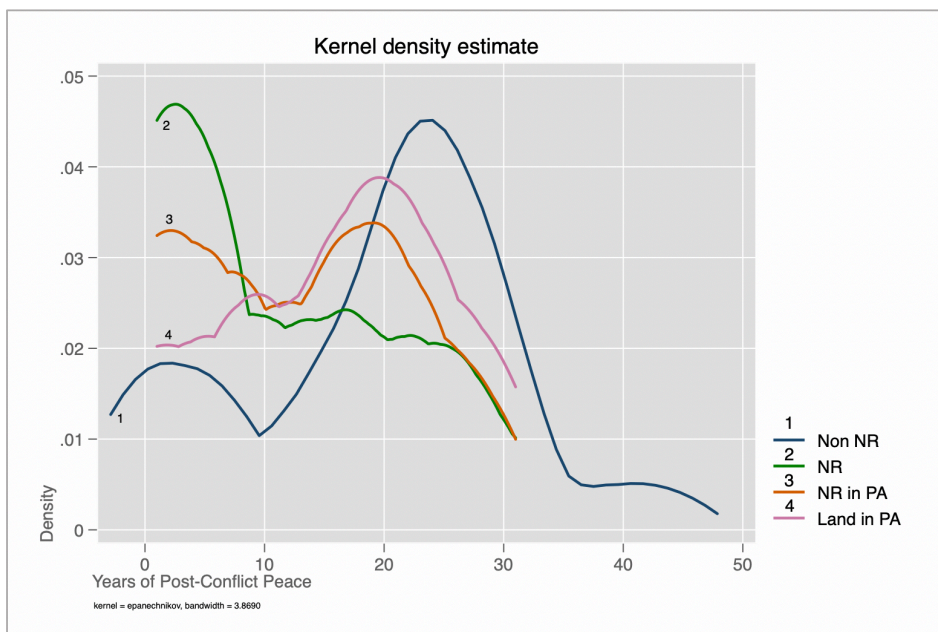


Figure 8 Kernel density estimate of the distribution of survival rates over time (Paper I)

In Paper III, we employ a Spatial Heteroskedasticity and Autocorrelation Consistent (HAC) model to investigate the presence of resource extraction sites and the micro-level effects on local development measures and different types of violence and conflict. A spatial HAC model can account for spatial dependence by incorporating

spatial lags or spatial error terms and adjust heteroskedasticity by allowing for varying error variances across different regions (Hsiang 2010). In our study, we specify a spatial correlation cutoff of 500km for the Conley (1999) standard errors that account for spatial dependence. When investigating the effect of resource extraction, the model analyzes how the presence of resource extraction sites in a grid cell correlates with economic and human development outcomes and the incidence of conflict and different types of violence. To facilitate comparison across models, we standardize all variables to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The interpretation of the coefficients is then the impact on standard deviations of the dependent variable of a one standard deviation change in the independent variable.

Since we are leveraging high levels of variation at a fine-grained geospatial level, we use grid-cell fixed effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity across regions that are fixed over time. In this sense, our analysis only shows changes in the presence of natural resource extraction sites and their association with different levels of economic and human development, as well as different types of conflict and violence. In the model that uses health survey data, we cannot estimate the models using the spatial HAC model since the unit of observation is individual births rather than grid cells by year. Instead, with the data available, we can control for mother characteristics at the time of birth or mother-fixed effects.

Qualitative methods

In Paper II, I employ a qualitative case study to investigate how land issues have been negotiated in the peace agreement in Guatemala and how it has shaped post-conflict peace. During fieldwork, I used a multi-sited ethnographic approach to conduct research in multiple sites and locations within Guatemala. In contrast to traditional ethnography, which typically focuses on a single site or community, multi-sited ethnography recognizes that cultural, social, economic, and political phenomena span

multiple locations (Marcus 1995). The selection of multi-sited ethnography was accompanied by the choice to approach Guatemala not as a *case* to be studied but as a *site* where I can study global systems and how they unfold locally, focusing on the co-constitution of micro and macro processes (Riofrancos 2021). Land inequality, environmental conflicts, and peace processes are seen as outcomes of complex interactions between domestic and international actors, structures, and systems shaped by interests, ideologies, and asymmetric power relations. I understand that these issues do not manifest in Guatemala because of inherent domestic conditions, but they are produced and reproduced by structural conditions of the creation of the Global South as a geopolitical space. The aim, thus, is not only to generate contextual knowledge but to explore this interaction as a process of general theoretical interest for the field of environmental peacebuilding (Soss 2022).

During fieldwork, I used three different methods for generating data. First, I carried out participant observation, where I engaged in the everyday life, routine, and activities of the partner organizations and movements in the context of the study (Ackerly and True 2020). For example, I joined a community reforestation activity in Sololá, listened in community meetings on strategies for protection of territory and resources with the Q'eqch'i community by the River Dolores, joined CCDA members in an official event funded by the European Union where they exposed their agricultural products, and followed Leocadio Juracán in his work to engage people in local elections. Image 1 below illustrates some of these activities.

Second, I carried out semi-structured interviews aimed at capturing the research participants' lived experiences of conflict and peace, land struggles, and environmental peacebuilding, as well as their views and visions on the agrarian question and the pathways to peace in Guatemala. The interviews were semi-structured because they followed a pre-determined interview guide but were flexible enough to follow the lead

of participants and their choice to focus on specific points or topics. Interviews lasted, on average, around one and half hours and happened in formal settings like around a table with a cup of Guatemalan cocoa or by walking around Indigenous territories and planted fields, as research participants explained the relationship between the desire for peace and their connection to nature. Third, data was also generated through informal conversations throughout fieldwork. Informal conversations differ from semi-structured interviews because they do not follow a pre-determined interview guide but occur naturally, often following my curiosity for background and tangent stories and context. Research participants and organizations were selected based on purposive sampling at first and then based on snowball sampling following participants' suggestions (Halperin and Heath 2020).



Image 1 Participant observation as method in Guatemala (Paper II). (Left) Joining a community reforestation activity in Sololá. (Right) Joining a meeting to discuss resistance strategies to protect their Indigenous territory and the local river in Alta Verapaz.

Ethics

Ethical considerations throughout the research process have been central to this study. I recognize my central role as the researcher and seek to use this positively in the research process by questioning previous concepts and measurements and improving data generation strategies. I understand that I am not a neutral observer in the process of data production or interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative material used in this dissertation. However, by acknowledging my subjectivity and influence, I have aimed to make the research process, results, and limitations transparent.

Research that deals with sensitive personal information, such as ethnic background, political, religious, or philosophical views, is required to apply for an ethics review by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority¹. While the aim of this thesis is not to engage with this type of information, the nature of the topic of the dissertation is inherently sensitive and contested and is likely to touch on such subjects. A central aim of the design of fieldwork has been to make sure that participation in the study does not lead to any security risks to the participants. Indigenous peoples and campesino communities are often persecuted, targeted, and criminalized because of their struggles to defend their land and territories (Scheidel et al. 2020). Thus, it has been central that participation in the study does not further the marginalization of these groups or the intensification of their vulnerable situations. Research practices aimed at minimizing such risks often focus on making sure research participants are not identifiable and their contribution is anonymized. However, these practices have been critiqued by feminist and decolonial scholars as they reproduce extractivist practices and reinforce colonial structures (Espinosa Miñoso et al. 2013a; Curiel 2014). While data produced collectively through fieldwork and interviews are mostly based on participants' own knowledge, worldviews, and lived experiences, it is the researcher that most benefits

¹ Ethical approval granted on 2022-06-21, case number 2022-02841-01. This was required for qualitative data produced for Paper II, but not for the quantitative data for Papers I and III.

from that process as academic articles are published under their single name and used to advance their individual academic careers. Based on this, it has been extremely important for me to distance myself and my work from these extractivist research practices (Tuhiwai Smith 2021; Betasamosake Simpson 2013; Curiel 2014; Grosfoguel 2016).

Based on a feminist research ethic, I understand that while I am interpreting the information and knowledge produced by formal interviews and informal communication, the research participants are also themselves interpreting and analyzing their social world and reality (Ackerly and True 2020; Söderström and Olivius 2022). The research participants named in this study are all public figures, community leaders, and/or local politicians who work with land issues and peacebuilding in their everyday lives. After a careful discussion about the possible risks of participation in the research project, we have decided to name the research participants in this study in order to correctly attribute the origin of their own concepts, theorizations, and analyses (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Research participants who did not feel comfortable with this practice have remained anonymous.

Positionality

Based on feminist and decolonial research ethics, I acknowledge the influence of my own situatedness (Haraway 1988) as a researcher and an active political agent in how this process has developed. In conducting this research, I understand and recognize that my identity and experiences significantly influence not only what I have chosen to study but also how I interact with research participants and interpret and analyze data and results (Curiel 2014; Espinosa Miñoso 2014; Espinosa Miñoso et al. 2013b; Anctil Avoine 2022). Coming from a region rich in mineral and agricultural resources in Brazil, I have always intimately understood the efforts of local communities to defend their territories and build alternatives to the current extractivist model. Being formally

trained in peace and conflict studies in Western academic institutions, however, often conflicted with the lived realities and experiences of peace and conflict, violence, and extractivism of the people I worked with within and outside this research project. This dissonance created confusion and raised critical questions about the applicability and relevance of academic theories to real-world issues. My role, therefore, became one of bridging these gaps, striving to honor the voices and knowledge of the communities while critically engaging with academic discourse. This positionality underscores the complexity and ethical considerations inherent in research deeply intertwined with personal and collective struggles for environmental justice and peace.

From previous experience carrying out fieldwork in conflict-affected societies, I learned that community members are usually skeptical of outsiders asking too many questions about their experiences of violence and resistance strategies. During fieldwork in Guatemala, my identity as a young woman from Brazil was useful in establishing a common experience based on a shared history of colonization, underdevelopment, and violence in Latin America. Combined with my personal engagement with the landless movement in Brazil, this provided me with unique access and acceptance within local organizations. This allowed me to embed my research within the work of these Indigenous and campesino organizations, aligning our goals and creating mutual trust. I was also fortunate to be welcomed into friends' homes and stay with them during my fieldwork, which not only provided me with a close connection to everyday life in Guatemala but also strengthened our bond.

However, this closeness also posed challenges in maintaining distance from both the research participants and the topic of study and an irrational fear of being 'unobjective' and methodologically biased. During fieldwork, I was usually called a 'compa' – an affectionate term for a comrade sharing the same struggle and vision – and this blurred the lines between researcher and participant. This emotional and cultural connection

has definitely influenced my writing, especially while working on Paper II, which made it difficult to refer to participants by their full or last names, as is customary in Western academic contexts. Instead, the more familiar and respectful approach common in Latin American contexts felt appropriate, reflecting the deep bonds and shared commitments that characterized our interactions. In this sense, I never felt out of place or unwelcome, despite clearly not being an Indigenous Maya person but a tall white foreigner. The communities I engaged with were incredibly welcoming and open, allowing me to immerse myself in their daily lives and struggles. However, I acknowledge that my presence introduced additional challenges for these communities, particularly regarding security and visibility.

However, these risks were mitigated by the duality of my identity: not only a comrade from Brazil but also a researcher from a respected academic institution in Sweden. I realized how this reputation elicited respect and pride among local research participants. This perception also somewhat obscured the true aim of my research. Sweden frequently leads development projects funded by the European Union in Central America, assisting local organizations in processing and commercializing their agricultural products. This common association with development work softened my presence and facilitated smoother interactions, as my affiliation with a Swedish institution was perceived as an extension of these initiatives. While this made my connection with movements and traveling around more feasible and safer, it also sometimes generated confusion in the communities, as it led them to believe that by contributing to the research, their struggle had reached an international audience, and I would be able to concretely help them change their current material situation. This left me with a profound sense of hopelessness regarding the impact of the research and made me constantly question the value of conducting this type of academic work if it does not directly improve the lives of people we claim to want to help. While colleagues have reminded me that it is naive to try to measure the impact of our academic work this way, this question weighs in my conscience.

Ultimately, I acknowledge that while this duality allowed me to be welcomed and included in the Indigenous and campesino communities in Guatemala, it also makes my life relatively easy, as I can go back ‘home’ to the comfort and safety of Sweden. In this sense, I am careful to consider my positionality so as to not reproduce and/or detach myself from the violent, extractivist, and oppressive structures that I study and to instead use my positions of privilege to radically transform them.

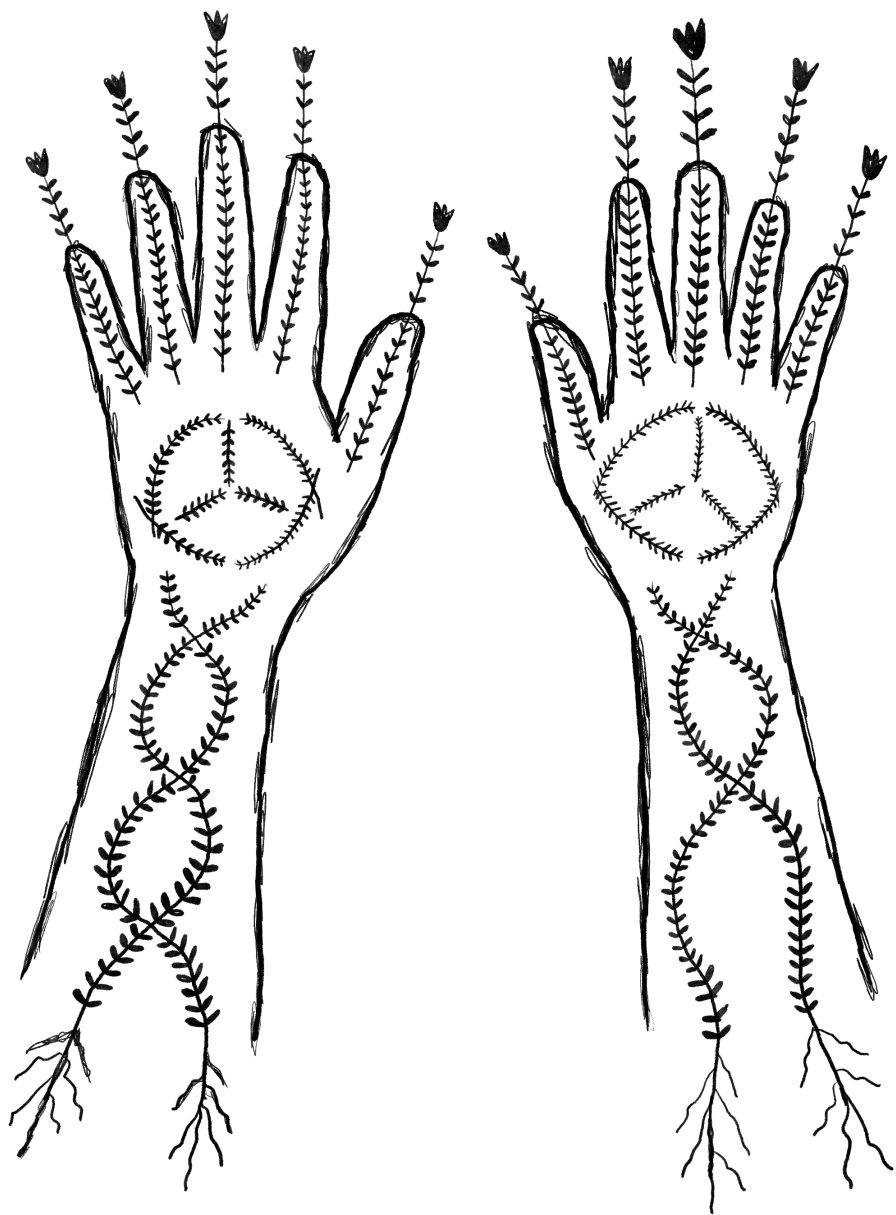
While being too close to research participants and the data production process poses ethical challenges, so does the over-distancing primed by the objectivity and neutrality of research principles. I have felt the effect of this opposite end of the spectrum while working on a previous project collecting large quantitative data on battle-related fatalities and conflict indicators. The separation of the researcher from the data being collected can generate an insensitivity to the fatalities, making it easy to forget that each number represents a person. This detachment poses significant ethical challenges as it can lead to the dehumanization and naturalization of violent processes and conflict events. Both being too close or too distant underscore the complexity of maintaining ethical integrity in research, balancing empathy with critical analysis, and ensuring that the human aspects of our research remain central to our scholarly pursuits.

Normativity

While this dissertation is guided by normative commitments to produce empirical evidence and theoretical knowledge that help advance the construction of sustainability, justice, and peace, the aim is not to advocate for a specific type of peace, claiming that it is ‘good’ or ‘better.’ Instead, my aim is to highlight the dissonance between the theoretical constructs of environmental peacebuilding and the lived experiences and aspirations of the communities these theories aim to serve.

Through my research, I reveal the inherent contradictions and inadequacies in the current theoretical frameworks and policy approaches that are embedded in rational choice and neoliberal paradigms and tend to obscure and marginalize alternative conceptualizations of peace. My role as a researcher, thus, is not to impose my own vision of peace but to amplify the theories and conceptualizations of peace from the communities I work with and how they envision the pathways to get there. By systematically gathering and analyzing evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative studies, the aim is to provide the empirical foundation and knowledge to show that current theories and policies around environmental peacebuilding are not able to deliver the type of peace and sustainability that communities want.

Building on feminist and decolonial research ethics, the scientific knowledge produced in this dissertation aims to describe and analyze the social world and provide tools that communities can use for their radical transformation (Ackerly and True 2020; Anctil Avoine 2022; Russell 2015). After all, radical simply means addressing issues at their roots (Davis 1990)



Contributions

The scientific work of this thesis is driven by the pressing nature of two compounding crises: the climate crisis and the crises of violence and conflict. I see these crises as deeply intertwined and reproducing each other, thus creating a complex web of challenges that exacerbate global inequality and instability. Considering the complexity of the compounding crises, strategies and tools necessary for addressing and transforming these issues need to be approached through a comprehensive framework that can deal with their dynamic and urgent nature. Thus, in its essence, the scientific work in this thesis is normatively oriented, guided by the imperative to foster both environmental sustainability and peace. Gerring and Yesnowitz (2006, 133) argued that “good social science involves a marriage of science and social importance”; the work in this thesis strives to be of societal relevance by providing a deeper understanding and more effective strategies for addressing these critical global issues.

The work in this thesis offers several contributions of a theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical nature. While each individual paper offers specific contributions, here I highlight the ones that contribute to the overarching goals of the dissertation. Methodologically, it employs rigorous empirical methods to uncover the complex relationship between nature, conflict, and peace. Theoretically, it challenges existing paradigms and assumptions by proposing innovative frameworks that bridge the gap between how peace and conflict are theorized and how they are experienced. Empirically, it provides new and unique data, both quantitative and qualitative, which allow for careful analysis of the relationship between nature, conflict, and peace.

Overall, the contribution of the thesis as a whole lies in its effort to bring together different methods to study the same question from several different angles. Thus, it is not my intention to reduce the contributions to any single paper, but the focus should be on the overall research project.

Theoretical contributions

Building on the results from the papers, the work in this thesis provides a nuanced theoretical framework that redefines the relationship between nature, conflict, and peace. This research builds on a relational approach between scarcity and abundance of resources (Selby and Hoffman 2014; Le Billon and Duffy 2018), arguing that it is the political structures of resource inequality, rather than the mere presence or absence of resources, that lie at the root of environmental conflicts. This perspective puts peace and conflict studies in conversation with political ecology by challenging fatalistic accounts that deterministically associate resource scarcity or abundance with the onset and duration of violent conflict. By emphasizing the relational aspects of resource inequality, it offers a critical perspective that encourages scholars to rethink simplistic causal links and to consider the broader socio-political contexts in which resource conflicts occur.

The introduction of the propositions of ‘room to grow’ and ‘the right to say no’ offers a novel theoretical lens to address root causes of conflict. These propositions advocate for the redistribution of both resources and power, suggesting that sustainable peace requires not only equitable access to resources but also the empowerment of communities to control their development pathways. This framework also aligns with recent critiques in peace studies (Krause 2019), which argue that traditional approaches may inadvertently reproduce violent structures by promoting peace through global capitalism and infinite economic growth (Bliesmann de Guevara, Budny, and Kostić 2023; Nicoson 2021; Lottholz 2018).

Conceptual contributions

This thesis makes substantial conceptual contributions by rethinking the interconnected concepts of nature, conflict, and peace. Shifting away from mechanistic and economic valuations of nature, this research advocates for a political understanding of peace and conflict that considers ecological, social, and cultural dimensions. The feminist continuum of violence and peace offers a dynamic approach that captures not just overt conflict events but also the subtle, ongoing violences that persist in peacetime. This perspective is critical for understanding the full spectrum of violence and the continuous efforts required to achieve liberatory peace.

Incorporating these nuanced conceptualizations into operational frameworks allows for more accurate and comprehensive measurements of both conflict and peace. Positive peace has been particularly difficult to measure. However, this thesis contributes to its study by providing tools to identify and quantify the hidden, structural, and cultural violences that traditional metrics often overlook. By focusing on the formation and evolution of incompatibilities and emphasizing the importance of addressing systemic injustice, this research helps to refine indicators and methodologies that can better capture the complexities of positive peace.

Furthermore, incorporating feminist and decolonial perspectives, the research contributes with a conceptual definition of the Global South as a geopolitical site of both domination and resistance, highlighting the dynamic nature of this region as being marked by resource extraction and violence but also in resisting capitalist expansion and providing systemic alternatives.

Methodological contributions

The work in this thesis makes significant methodological contributions through its pluralist approach, employing the methods best suited for each research question and aim in the specific papers. This methodological diversity allows for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between nature, conflict, and peace, capturing both broader patterns and intricate details. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research addresses previous critiques of environmental peacebuilding, which often focused on single case studies and faced difficulties in systematically comparing results and approaches (Dresse et al. 2018; Ide 2020; Ide et al. 2021). The use of quantitative methods provides the systematic analysis necessary for refining theoretical models, enabling the identification of broad correlations and patterns across different contexts. Simultaneously, the qualitative component of this thesis offers a methodological tool to empirically assess the pathways and theories of environmental peacebuilding from an in-depth perspective (Johnson, Rodríguez, and Quijano Hoyos 2021). This qualitative focus allows for rich, detailed analysis that can uncover the complex context-specific dynamics often missed by purely quantitative approaches.

By integrating these methods, the thesis provides a more holistic view that bridges macro-level patterns with micro-level intricacies, thereby advancing the field of environmental peacebuilding through a more systematic and comprehensive methodological framework. It also addresses recent calls in the field for a more methodologically plural approach to environmental peacebuilding by employing feminist and decolonial methodologies with attention to power dynamics with the aim of negating simplistic narratives (Rodríguez et al. 2021; Hsiao et al. 2022; Davis et al. 2023; Amador-Jimenez, Baron, and Richter 2024; Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024).

Empirical contributions

The empirical results from this thesis provide a robust foundation for theoretical advancements in the field of environmental peacebuilding, addressing key limitations identified in prior research – its predominantly deductive approach. This thesis contributes novel data that significantly enhance the empirical landscape of the field. First, the creation of the Natural Resources in Peace Agreements (NRPA) Dataset, presented in Paper I, offers a comprehensive resource for analyzing how natural resources are addressed in peace agreements through an expansive view. This dataset fills a critical gap, enabling more systematic and comparative studies on the role of natural resources in peace processes. Secondly, this thesis incorporates primary data produced through interviews and participant observation during fieldwork, presented in paper II. This rich qualitative data provides deep insights into the lived experiences of communities affected by environmental conflicts, offering nuanced perspectives that are often overlooked in purely quantitative studies.

Furthermore, this thesis advances the use of georeferenced data to study the microdynamics of natural resource extraction and its impacts on development and conflict outcomes, as presented in Paper III. This emergent approach in peace and conflict studies allows for detailed spatial analysis, revealing how resource extraction influences conflict dynamics at a granular level. The application of georeferenced data techniques in this research demonstrates their potential to uncover patterns and relationships that are crucial for understanding the complex interactions between nature, conflict, and peace. In summary, the empirical contributions of this thesis not only provide new data and insights but also pave the way for more integrated and detailed analyses in the field of environmental peacebuilding.

Epistemological contributions

The work in this dissertation contributes to a possible avenue for future research that aims at overcoming parochial epistemological divisions in the field of peace and conflict studies. Doing feminist and decolonial research necessitates a constant interrogation of power dynamics, privilege, and oppression in research practices and knowledge production (Curiel 2014; Espinosa Miñoso et al. 2013b; Betasamosake Simpson 2013). It requires constant reflexivity, humility, and commitment to ethical research practices that prioritize social justice and liberation. This approach acknowledges that knowledge is situated and partial and that researchers have a responsibility to critically examine their complicity in systems of oppression and hierarchy of knowledge (Väyrynen et al. 2021; Sultana 2007; Ackerly and True 2020).

The work in this thesis has shown how incorporating quantitative and qualitative research within feminist and decolonial methodologies can help form a strong base of empirical inquiry that is crucial for advancing both our understanding of the world and our normative reflections on it. While quantitative methods have been favored by the positivist paradigm, which strives to uncover universal and objective truths and infer causation based on the objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality of the researcher (Halperin and Heath 2020), these underpinnings are questioned by feminist and decolonial approaches that are skeptical of claims of universal and objective knowledge, arguing that they can perpetuate biases, exclusion, and power imbalances in the creation of knowledge (Tickner 2010; Curiel 2014; Tuhiwai Smith 2021).

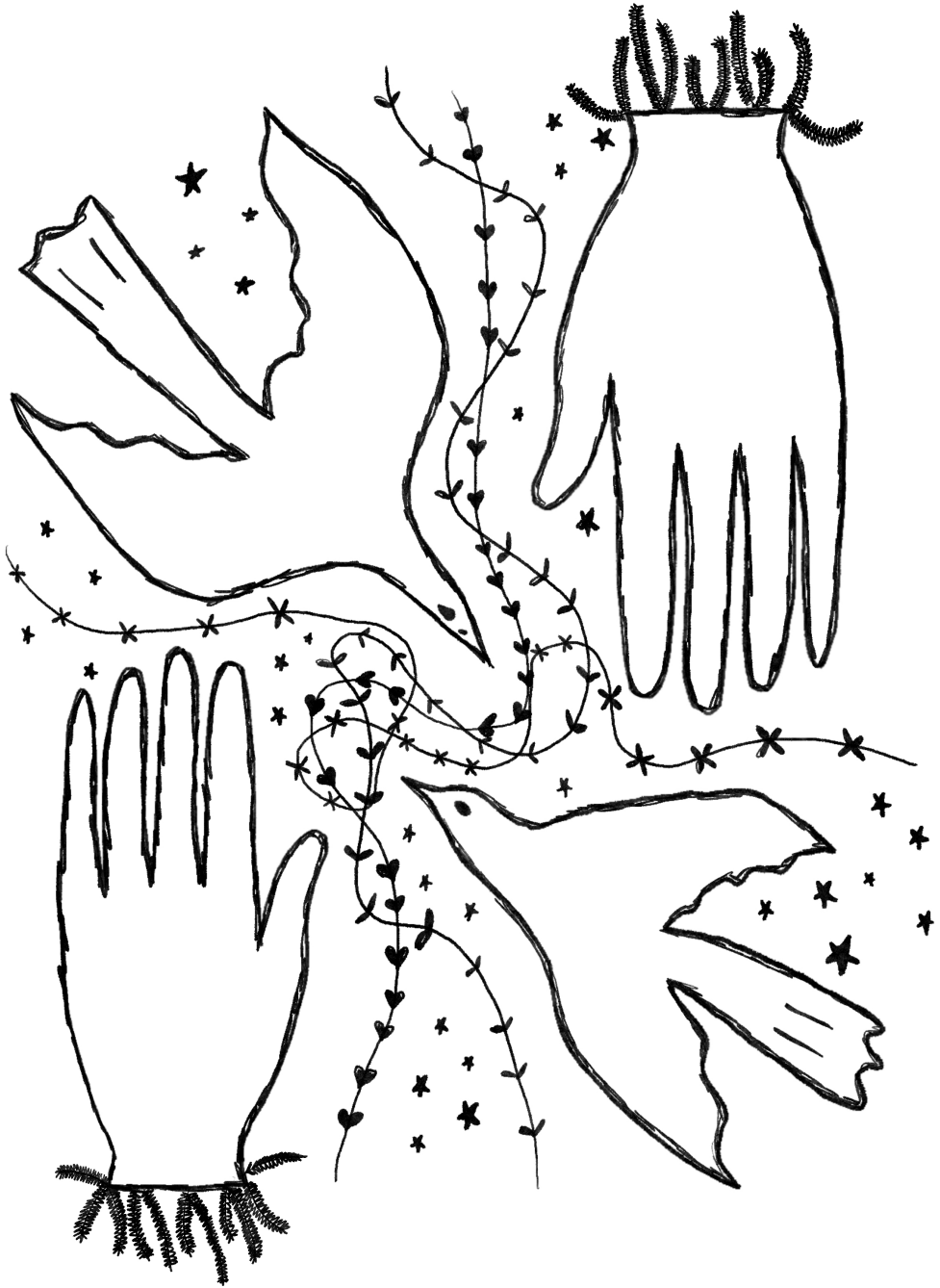
Here, my argument for the use of quantitative methods based on strong feminist and decolonial research ethics is grounded on my recognition that while I make use of quantitative tools, I accept that scientific inquiry can never be truly objective and impartial (Stauffer and O'Brien 2018). I also show that employing feminist and decolonial research ethics requires more than just including a gender lens to existing

methodologies or recognizing plural worldviews and knowledges. Instead, it requires a fundamental rethinking of research practices to promote inclusivity, reflexivity, and social justice (Curiel 2014; Ackerly and True 2020; Sultana 2007).

My work contributes to this discussion by challenging the ‘easy power’ that statistics and quantitative data command (Pugh 1990), as I understand that this creates a hierarchy of knowledge at the expense of other equally legitimate forms of knowledge production. I show the importance of being attuned to ‘the politics of data’: the inherently political choice that guides what data is collected and what data is not (Apodaca 2009). In this sense, it is important to understand that numbers are only numbers; their meaning and importance are constructed in the same way that words are in ethnography. And this is true whether the researcher openly recognizes it or not.

My goal has been to highlight that critical scholars should not be afraid of quantitative research, and quantitative researchers should not be afraid of asking critical questions. This is because what guides the research design should be the methodology and not the methods. What makes any type of research feminist is not the particular tool or method used but the underlying understanding of how research should be conducted and what its aims should be (Ackerly and True 2020).

This is why, in Paper IV, I contribute with a liberatory peace praxis, which is normatively oriented towards negating both material and symbolic systems of oppression that produce climate and environmental changes, as well as reproduce direct, structural, and cultural violence. This peace praxis is based on an epistemology of the Global South, which questions the limited understandings of violence and peace in Western ways of knowing and theorizing, with the aim of showing how different types of violence are not only connected but share their roots in deeper structural systems of extractivism, exploitation, and colonization.



Conclusions

The work in this thesis has examined the relationship between nature, conflict, and peace in post-conflict societies. Through employing the framework of the feminist continuum of violence and peace, the different scientific papers have explored different stages and contexts in the post-conflict and peacebuilding processes focused on addressing environmental issues and building peace simultaneously. The different papers in this thesis provide not only the empirical evidence to substantiate and challenge environmental peacebuilding's pathways and mechanisms but also help further develop the framework for a most comprehensive and transformational approach to building peace in times of environmental breakdown and climate change. Overall, the research presented here shows fundamental limitations in environmental peacebuilding's framework and proposes new ways of addressing these challenges in order to make sure that sustainable peace is not only environmentally sustainable but also just and liberatory for people and nature.

Summary of the research findings

The papers in this thesis have provided empirical evidence for environmental peacebuilding's theoretical claims, but they have also challenged the framework by providing critical reconceptualization of key concepts such as nature, conflict, and peace. Conceptually, I show how the current conceptualizations limit the analytical possibilities of understanding not only different types of environmental conflicts but also different types of violence in and around the battlefield. A mechanistic and economicist view of nature, as employed by EPB, is also shown to reproduce the violent and oppressive structures of natural resource extraction and capitalist

accumulation. I also show that approaching peace through a feminist and decolonial perspective highlights the necessity of engaging the different types of violence at physical, structural, and cultural levels in order to address root causes of conflict that do not further marginalize people and nature.

In **Paper 1**, I find support for environmental peacebuilding's theoretical claims that including natural resource provisions in peace agreements positively affects the duration of post-conflict peace. However, I show that previous studies have employed a narrow understanding of how natural resources could impact peace, focusing only on their potential to create economic incentives for peace through wealth-sharing. By incorporating other ways that groups can value natural resources – through their political, cultural, and religious values – I show that discussing the ownership of natural resources not only more directly addresses the root causes of conflict but also provides a more substantial effect on post-conflict peace. The empirical analysis in Paper 1 also shows the importance of disaggregating the category of “natural resources” and looking more specifically at the differentiated effects of each resource. By doing this, I show that while previous research had focused mainly on the effect of oil and mineral wealth-sharing provisions on peace, land is the most common resource included in peace negotiations and is important in shaping peace processes. While Paper 1 produces important results for environmental peacebuilding theory and practice, there is still the need to investigate the mechanism linking the inclusion of natural resources provisions in peace agreements and the sustainability of post-conflict peace.

Paper 2 builds directly on these results and aims to investigate the link between including natural resources in peace agreements and their connection to building post-conflict peace. By focusing on the case of land issues in Guatemala, the paper shows that more than the inclusion of natural resources in peace agreements, the framework and the way they are approached are important in shaping sustainable peace. While

land issues in Guatemala had been historically a political question, the peace accords sought to depoliticize the issue to make it more negotiable and agreeable. By relying on a market-based solution to the need for land redistribution, the land issue in Guatemala has not only not been solved, but it has further developed social, political, economic, and environmental issues that highlight the fragility of sustainable peace. By combining environmental peacebuilding mechanisms with parameters for evaluating the robustness of peace agreements, I show that there were early signs during the peace process that reflected the lack of commitment by both the government and the landowning elite to structural transformations necessary to address the problem of land inequality and lack of political representation.

By relying on a market-based and neoliberal approach to land inequality, the post-conflict context in Guatemala has been marked by an increase in environmental conflicts as well as violence and human rights violations against land and environmental defenders. This shows the need for a broad concept of peace that not only focuses on organized armed violence of civil war but also accounts for different types of violence and threats civilians face during times of *peace*. By learning from land and environmental defenders in Guatemala, I show how the model of development based on resource extraction poses a serious threat to sustaining peace in post-conflict countries because it not only fails to address root causes of conflict related to resource inequality but further reproduces social, economic, and political inequality, with harmful consequences to the environment.

In **Paper 3**, I investigate further EPB's strategy to foster sustainable development in post-conflict countries through intensification of extractive industries. Through a spatial analysis of the effect of resource extraction sites on both levels of human and economic development, as well as different types of conflict and violence, we show that while resource extraction might boost local economic development in the short-

term, in the long-term, it has no substantial positive effects on human development. Instead, we show that different types of conflict and violence are more likely to occur in and around extraction sites. While we show that civil war recurrence is less likely in this context, we demonstrate that there are other types of conflict and violence that still occur even during *peacetime*. By expanding the measurement of conflict beyond only looking at armed conflict between governments and non-state armed groups, we show that extractive industries are associated with increased violence, especially against civilians. This violence is driven mainly by grievances stemming from unfulfilled promises of development but also by environmental degradation and the socio-economic disruptions caused by resource extraction activities.

The results in this paper also highlight the role of state capacity in mediating the impact of extractive industries on violence. Low-capacity states experience more direct forms of violence, such as battles and strategic developments, reflecting the state's inability to manage conflicts arising from resource extraction. In contrast, in states with high capacity, protests are more likely to occur, and state forces are more prone to repress these protests, indicating a preference for maintaining order over addressing the root causes of grievances. In contrast, low-capacity states experience more direct forms of violence, such as battles and strategic developments, reflecting the state's inability to manage conflicts arising from resource extraction. The findings of this study challenge the prevailing assumption that intensification for extractive industries in post-conflict countries can serve as an effective peacebuilding strategy.

Based on these previous results, **Paper 4** proposes a critique of the overall framework of environmental peacebuilding, focusing on its reliance on market-driven and extractive strategies for building sustainable peace in post-conflict countries. The discussion in this paper engages both feminist and decolonial scholarship in conversation with political geography to rethink how peace and violence in the Global

South have been constructed and understood. I show how the aim of combining economic growth, environmental protection, and peacebuilding under one umbrella of sustainable development is contradictory instead of complementary. A focus on economic growth as the central strategy to promote economic and human development is not only harmful to the environment – as it is responsible for driving climate change – but it is also detrimental to peace – because it is built on violent structures of exploitation of both people and the environment. Building on the framework of climate resilient peace, where peace should be understood in its positive configuration where it does not pose harm to either people or the environment, it becomes necessary to rethink the strategies and pathways that could lead to such a configuration of peace with a focus on the Global South.

In this context, I propose that building peace that is coherent with planetary and ecological limits and that does not further direct and structural violence necessitates breaking with the extractivist model of development that benefits growth and accumulation over people's wellbeing. By proposing two strategies of 'room to grow' and 'the right to say no,' I aim at centering a liberatory peace praxis on the need to negate both material and symbolic systems and structures of oppression that produce climate and environmental changes as well as reproduce direct, structural, and cultural violence. Ultimately, I conclude that it is necessary to unmask how the different types of violence connected to climate and environmental changes and underdevelopment in the Global South are not only connected but also share their roots in deeper structural systems of extractivism, exploitation, and colonization. A liberatory peace praxis requires questioning the current economic, political, and social structures that reproduce violence in order to completely transform them at systemic levels.

When put together, the results from the papers in this dissertation show the feminist continuum of violence and peace in post-conflict countries and the current challenges

to building sustainable peace built on violent structures of extractivism and capital accumulation. The papers in this thesis provide not only empirical evidence to substantiate and challenge environmental peacebuilding's pathways and mechanisms but also help further develop the framework for a more comprehensive and transformational approach to building peace in times of environmental breakdown and climate change. The results of this dissertation highlight the need for a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of peacebuilding that considers the complex interplay between environmental, economic, and social factors. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the underlying structural issues that perpetuate conflict and hinder sustainable peace. By challenging the existing paradigms and proposing alternative frameworks, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on effectively fostering sustainable peace in post-conflict countries.

Avenues for future research

The research presented here shows fundamental limitations in environmental peacebuilding's framework and proposes new ways of addressing these challenges to ensure that sustainable peace is not only environmentally sustainable but also just and liberatory for people and nature. Scholars can hopefully build on the findings in this dissertation to advance the field of environmental peacebuilding and contribute to developing more effective and equitable strategies for fostering sustainable peace in post-conflict societies.

Firstly, there is a pressing need to further develop and apply the model of resource inequality as a root cause of conflict. While the work in this dissertation has highlighted the critical role that unequal access to resources plays in the onset and duration of conflict, more empirical studies are required for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how resource inequality translates into violent conflict. Longitudinal and comparative studies across different regions and types of resources could provide

novel insights, and in-depth qualitative studies could help refine conceptual definitions and theoretical models.

Secondly, future research should also focus on the role of civil society and grassroots movements in building sustainable peace. My research has shown that these actors operate at the forefront of peacebuilding actors, yet their contributions are frequently under-recognized and understudied. Investigating how local communities organize, resist, and collaborate to mitigate conflict and different types of violence in order to promote environmental sustainability and peace can reveal valuable lessons and strategies that top-down approaches might overlook (Hachmann et al. 2023; Jama et al. 2020; Ide, Palmer, and Barnett 2021). Engaging with literature on civil society inclusion in peace processes can help develop theoretical and empirical understandings of this relationship (Nilsson and Svensson 2023; Nilsson et al. 2020).

Furthermore, future research should broaden its scope to examine violence in relation to environmental and resource inequality beyond post-conflict countries to avoid sampling biases (Ide 2023; Adams et al. 2018). Many regions experiencing environmental degradation and resource inequality are not suffering or recovering from armed conflict but still face significant violence and insecurity. Future studies that include these regions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the links between environmental issues and conflict beyond the dichotomy of peace-violence.

Thirdly, engagement with recent studies on the field of degrowth and post-growth also offers another promising avenue for future research. As traditional growth paradigms are increasingly questioned, understanding how peacebuilding efforts can be shaped and affected by post-growth scenarios will be crucial (Nicoson 2021; Magalhães Teixeira 2021b; Simangan 2024). This includes exploring alternative economic models that prioritize ecological sustainability and social well-being over continuous economic

expansion and how these models can support sustainable peace (McAllister and Wright 2019; Chavez-Miguel et al. 2022; Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024). This can be done through further engagement with the propositions of ‘room to grow’ and ‘the right to say no.’ The results of this dissertation show that sustainable and liberatory peace requires not only the space for communities to develop according to their needs and aspirations but also the ability to reject development paths that are harmful or unjust. Investigating how these principles can be operationalized and integrated into peacebuilding frameworks will be critical for developing more inclusive and liberatory approaches.

From theory to practice

The findings in this dissertation can also serve to inform policy and practice strategies in order to build sustainable peace. First and foremost, it can serve to directly influence how environmental peacebuilding policies being implemented by large multinational agencies and local organizations frame the relationship between resource extraction, use, and management to both conflict and peace. By providing a strong empirical foundation showing the shortcomings and limitations of extractivist strategies for building sustainable peace in relation to environmental conflicts, the results in this dissertation can hopefully serve to inspire a more transformative approach to peacebuilding.

Translating the theoretical and empirical insights of this dissertation into practical policies and actions required a fundamental shift in how nature is valued and managed. This echoes broader calls from the climate justice movement that critique strategies for addressing climate change, prioritizing economic metrics and technological solutions. Policymakers must adopt a more holistic view that recognizes the intrinsic value of nature and its valuations in the policy framework. By doing so, resource management strategies can better reflect the true cost of resource extraction and use, accounting for

impacts on local communities, ecosystems, and long-term sustainability. By embracing holistic, inclusive, and transformative approaches, policymakers can develop strategies that not only address immediate environmental challenges but also foster long-term, sustainable, and just peace.

In this sense, the findings of this dissertation can also inform and support the struggles of local communities defending their land and territories. By showing the limitations of neoliberal and market-based approaches to addressing resource inequality, this research substantiates the claims of local communities advocating for alternative approaches to resource extraction, use, and management. The propositions of ‘room to grow’ and ‘right to say no’ can also be used to frame the ecological possibilities and limitations of peacebuilding strategies that rely heavily on resource use and extraction. These approaches not only aim to redistribute access and control over natural resources but also access to power and decision-making positions that shape the way we organize our societies toward sustainable peace.

Without creating binding mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consent, the involvement of local communities remains a formality that states and multinational corporations can easily overlook, perpetuating the violation of their rights. Policies should be crafted to support these communities in their efforts to achieve economic, social, political, and ecological goals in a way that centers their needs and aspirations. This involves further institutionalizing the right of local communities to free, prior, and informed consent in a way that recognizes and reinforces their right to self-determination and their role as stewards of their territories.

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Negotiating natural resources conflicts: provisions in peace agreements and prospects for building sustainable peace

Unpublished manuscript.

Paper II

From peace agreements to sustainable peace? A framework for the analysis of land issues in Guatemala's peace process

Unpublished manuscript.

Paper III

Beyond the boom: assessing the effect of extractive industries on development and violence in post-conflict countries

Unpublished manuscript. Co-authored with Jakob Molinder.

Paper IV

Room to grow and the right to say no: theorizing the liberatory power of peace in the Global South

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Negotiating Natural Resources Conflicts:

Provisions in Peace Agreements and Prospects for Building Sustainable Peace

Abstract

Does the inclusion of natural resources provisions in peace agreements affect post-conflict peace duration? Literature on civil war termination argues that provisions on wealth-sharing have no effect on the duration of post-conflict peace. In contrast, recent literature on environmental peacebuilding argues that natural resources are often root causes of conflict and, therefore, are key to building post-conflict peace. The aim of this article is to investigate the transformation of conflict resources into peace resources and to analyze the prospects for building sustainable peace after natural resources conflicts. First, I explore the role of natural resources provisions in peace agreements and their effect on post-conflict peace. Using newly collected and disaggregated data on natural resources in peace agreements from 1976 to 2018, the analysis shows that including natural resources provisions in peace agreements has a positive effect on post-conflict peace duration. Second, I complement the statistical analysis with a qualitative discussion of the cases of El Salvador, Sudan, and Nepal's peace processes that substantiate the claim that natural resources can also have a positive effect on peace. The results support the hypothesis that when natural resources are central conflict issues, their inclusion in the negotiation process is important in preventing conflict recurrence and promoting sustainable peace.

Keywords: natural resources, armed conflict, sustainable peace, peace agreement, conflict resolution

Introduction

The relationship between natural resources and armed conflict has been a foundational pillar in both the academic development of the field of peace and conflict research, as well as the practice of multilateral agencies and aid organizations like the UN and the World Bank. Natural resources, like minerals, land, water, and oil, hold significant economic, political, and strategic importance, making them both a source of wealth and a catalyst for conflict (Ross 2015; Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni 2011; Le Billon 2014). In contrast, in other instances, resource wealth has been considered to serve as a catalyst for post-conflict peace (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021).

While much attention has been devoted to understanding the causes and consequences of resource-driven conflicts, less emphasis has been placed on exploring how these conflicts can be transformed into sustainable peace. Scholarship on environmental peacebuilding argues that natural resources questions are often the root causes of internal armed conflict, and thus, an effective strategy for building post-conflict peace² must include addressing environmental and natural resources issues in order to build sustainable peace (Conca and Beevers 2018). Research on conflict resolution argues that root causes of conflict should be identified early on and confronted during mediation and negotiation stages to ensure an agreement tailor-made to the specific conflict and post-conflict contexts (Woodward 2007). Peace agreements are often the most critical document for a society coming out of armed conflict and frequently serve as a stepping stone to moving forward into sustainable peace.

² In this paper, post-conflict peace means the period of time after the signing of a peace agreement, which marks the end of the violent period of a conflict. This does not mean that the political and social aspects of the conflict have ended with a peace agreement, but it marks the shift from violent conflict to non-violent conflict – even if in some cases this period does not last long and violence resumes shortly.

Based on theoretical propositions coming more recently from environmental peacebuilding literature and building on a rich scholarship of natural resources and armed conflict, this paper's empirical strategy is based on quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research question. First, I employ a durational analysis to investigate whether the inclusion of natural resources provisions in peace agreements can have an effect on the duration of post-conflict peace. This is done based on a new and unique dataset on Natural Resources in Peace Agreements (NRPA) for internal armed conflicts from 1946 to 2019. The results show that including natural resources provisions increases post-conflict peace duration by three years on average; land provisions increase it by six years; and land provisions specifically related to land ownership by four years. The results further suggest broadening our theoretical and conceptual understanding of how natural resources impact conflict and peace is promising, especially when considering ownership provisions. Second, I complement the study with a qualitative discussion of the cases of El Salvador, Sudan, and Nepal to substantiate the theoretical claims and the empirical results. Taken together, the results from this article suggest that including natural resources in peace negotiations when natural resources can be a critical stepping stone for building sustainable peace.

Natural resources: for conflict or peace?

The effect of natural resources on armed conflict has been central to the literature on civil wars, and several studies have focused on the role of natural resources in the onset of violent conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Ross 2004b, a; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005; Le Billon and Nicholls 2007), the duration of armed conflicts (Lujala 2010), and rates of conflict recurrence (Rustad and Binningsbø 2012). In addition, with the advancement of climate change, new research agendas are finding new ways that the environment and climate change-related impacts like floods and droughts may be connected to armed conflict (Busby 2018; Koubi 2019; von Uexkull and Buhaug 2021).

Given that natural resources play such an important role as causes of armed conflict, recent literature on environmental peacebuilding has argued that these issues should be included in peace processes as critical factors to help promote peace instead of conflict. The argument suggests that since natural resources are often the root causes of conflict, they should be addressed in peace agreements as key factors promoting sustainable peace. This is because peace agreements that address root causes of conflict focus on ending violence and resolving the source of conflict in society (Werner 1999).

While natural resources may be perceived as root causes of conflict, it is crucial to recognize that other issues may become central over time. For example, the initial focus on land rights and access in the Ivory Coast conflict shifted towards government control and democratic transition as the conflict progressed (Ogwang 2011). Similarly, in the Colombia-FARC conflict, although land reform was central in the conflict's early stages, evolving dynamics led to changing demands around land issues. In contrast, the overarching need for access to land and general land reform remained central in both conflict and peace processes (López-Uribe and Sanchez Torres 2018). This highlights the dynamic nature of conflicts and the importance of flexible approaches in addressing their root causes. Despite the term 'root causes' potentially oversimplifying the dynamic nature of conflicts, it remains widely used in academic and policy discourse. In this paper, I utilize the concept to signify not a static and individual initial cause but central issues within conflicts.

Environmental peacebuilding is built on academic and policy discussions and practice and has long advocated for including natural resources in peace processes as catalysts for peace (Mason, Sguaitamatti, and Gröbli 2016; Conca and Beevers 2018; Magalhães Teixeira 2021a). However, most of the literature is either theoretical or based on single case studies, and previous empirical literature on the effect of natural resources

provisions in peace agreements for sustaining post-conflict peace finds conflicting results.

For example, Hartzell and Hoddie (2007) found that more institutionalized peace agreements, with provisions on power-sharing, were less prone to conflict recurrence. However, the relationship was not statistically significant when explicitly examining economic power-sharing. Nonetheless, other studies show that revenue sharing was effective in implementing resource-related instruments and ensuring short-term stability (Le Billon and Nicholls 2007). Binningsbø and Rustad (2012) added to this research agenda by including land reform and decision-making power provisions. However, their analysis encompassed agreements beyond peace processes (like policy documents in the post-conflict phase), finding no statistically significant relationship between wealth-sharing and post-conflict peace. Yet, they highlighted that land reform provisions extended the duration of post-conflict peace.

While some attempts have examined different mechanisms, previous studies have primarily focused on wealth-sharing. This means that while studies have tried to show a broad effect of natural resources on peace, the focus on wealth-sharing provisions reflects mostly the effect of high-value non-renewable resources like diamonds and oil. The abundance of these resources produces greater resource rents and generates more economic wealth, which is connected to grievances around inequality in wealth-sharing. However, new data presented in this paper shows that renewable resources, such as land and water, are more prevalent in peace agreements, and traditional wealth-sharing mechanisms cannot account for how they might affect the prospects of post-conflict peace. To comprehensively understand the effects of natural resources on peace agreements, broader conceptualizations and considerations of the mechanisms that address natural resources in peace agreements that go beyond wealth-sharing are crucial.

Environmental peacebuilding literature underscores the significance of responsibly managing renewable and non-renewable resources to sustain peace (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016). Recognizing natural resources' multifaceted values, including cultural and political, alongside economic potential, enriches our understanding of their role in conflicts. Wennmann (2012) advocates for a 'rational' approach to wealth-sharing, where the economic profit of resource exploitation is the main mechanism for addressing causes of conflict. However, Mason et al. (2016) contend that natural resources are not only viewed through economic lenses, but that political and cultural values of resources often contribute to conflicts. For instance, land conflicts in Central America, like in El Salvador, have been rooted in ethnic and cultural identities connected to land rather than mere economic factors (de Bremond 2013).

Expanding the analysis of natural resource provisions in peace agreements to include ownership provisions alongside wealth-sharing is essential for a comprehensive understanding. This study aims to contribute to the literature first by broadening theoretical expectations of how natural resources might affect post-conflict peace, second by providing new data that allows for a disaggregated view of the impact of such provisions on post-conflict peace duration, and third by discussing how the effects of such provisions can be an important stepping stone in the process towards sustainable peace.

Why natural resources matter for peace: theoretical expectations

Previous research has shown that conflicts involving natural resources, even when terminated by peace agreements, are more prone to high recurrence rates. Researchers have indicated that this is most likely linked to the failure of peace agreements to address natural resources as root causes of conflict and to keep underlying issues unsolved (Rustad and Binninsbø 2012). Indeed, it is essential to remember that peace

negotiations are highly fragile, and most peace agreements fail within the first five years (CDH 2007). This calls for the need to develop more substantial peace agreements capable of addressing the underlying causes of conflict, not only its violent manifestations (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008). This strategic approach, exemplified by negotiating natural resources in peace agreements when they have been central to the conflict, has the potential to bridge the gap between conflicting groups' initial claims and post-conflict peace, ensuring stability over time and reducing the risk of conflict recurrence if the groups' demands are not met (Zartman 2005).

Natural resources as “backward-looking” and “forward-looking”

Natural resources can serve the dual role of helping society address causes of the conflict in the past and allowing for a transformation of the governance structure of the resources so that they can be better allocated, managed, and protected in the future (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016). Natural resource provisions can act in this dual role because they are the type of issues that serve as both ‘backward-looking’ and ‘forward-looking,’ which has been identified as necessary for successful peace agreements. Natural resources can shape the success of peace agreements in natural resources conflicts by addressing how past wrongs have led to conflicts, like the unequal distribution of revenues, unjust land distribution, or unfair access to natural resources, and create new mechanisms that will help manage natural resources in a way to substantially handle the initial demands and promote sustainable use and protection of said natural resources. As Mason, Sguaitamatti, and Gröbli (2016, 76) put, “the implication [of including natural resources] for a peace agreement is that it can enhance a forward-looking dynamic, sowing the seeds for a divided society to use natural resources as an entry point to peacebuilding.” Therefore, natural resource provisions can help create new institutions and political space for dialogue around natural resource issues, which could prevent further conflict in the future. Following this, the first hypothesis can be formulated as:

H1: *the inclusion of natural resources provisions in peace agreements increases the duration of post-conflict peace.*

Some types of natural resources have different effects on conflict and peace. Walter (1999) has argued that wars over territory or land issues were more complex, so mediators should avoid including their negotiation in the peace agreement. However, Binningsbø and Rustad (2012) found that provisions of land allocation in peace agreements have a positive effect on the duration of peace in the post-conflict period. Similarly, Keels and Mason (2019) showed that including land reform in comprehensive peace agreements has a positive impact on the duration of post-conflict peace. Land has added economic value because it contains other natural resources that might be high-value, such as oil, gas, minerals, and gems. Land is also crucial for economic development because it is linked to the agricultural sector and environmental resources like water, forests, and livelihoods. Besides these economic aspects, land is also connected to territory and can have political and cultural importance. Given the multiple elements of land, it is a common claim in armed conflicts; it also appears in most peace agreements, making it an important natural resource to be analyzed in relation to the transition from armed conflict to peace, which previous research has missed. Based on this discussion, the second second hypothesis focuses on the single effect of land provisions:

H2: *the inclusion of provisions on land in peace agreements increases the duration of post-conflict peace.*

Natural resources as hard, structural issues

Natural resource conflicts are never only about the environmental resources in themselves but also the deeper economic, social, and political capital that they represent. Previous studies have identified natural resources as 'hard' or 'zero-sum' issues, making negotiating a land conflict difficult (Walter 2004). Empirical analyses

reveal that conflicts involving natural resources shape demands, commitment, and the potential for conflicting parties to offer concessions, extending beyond the resources themselves to encompass economic, social, and political capital (Carreri and Dube 2017; Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020; Selby and Hoffman 2014). Viewing natural resources as the material basis of societal functioning links rights, ownership, and access to these resources to exercising power, not solely for subsistence and survival. This power manifests in political participation, representation, and economic status, and economically and politically marginalized communities are denied access to natural resources and their benefits. If we look at natural resources through this lens, we realize that wealth-sharing provisions prevalent in previous research might not be enough to address previous grievances. In this context, ownership provisions is what I expect to guarantee that these other political, social, and cultural aspects of resources are protected. Recognizing this perspective, framing natural resources as root causes is not a simplification but a demonstration of their connection to complex layers and processes underlying armed conflict and the difficulty of addressing these issues in a fragile context such as a peace negotiation.

Each natural resource conflict is unique, and negotiating them within peace agreements enables tailored provisions suited to the specific local context. It is thus crucial to further disaggregate aspects of natural resources, challenging the prevailing assumption in the literature that these conflicts are strictly about economic grievances. Recognizing that conflicts can result from environmental injustice and degradation intertwined with the political or cultural relationship of specific groups with nature is imperative. For instance, the 1996 peace agreements between the government of Mexico and the EZLN emphasized the “indissoluble unity between man, land, and nature” (San Andrés Accords 1996, 15). Delinking and relinking natural resources to diverse societal layers and perspectives is essential, advocating for a comprehensive approach. Shifting focus in peace agreements beyond wealth-sharing and toward diverse provisions offers a more nuanced understanding of how natural resources might impact peace. Based on

this discussion, the third and last hypothesis focuses on the effect of ownership provisions:

H3: the inclusion of ownership provisions in peace agreements increases the duration of post-conflict peace.

Research Design

This paper investigates the impact of natural resource provisions in peace agreements on the duration of post-conflict peace. For this, I have identified all cases of peace agreements connected to internal armed conflicts with a natural resources link. I employ a durational analysis to investigate the impact of natural resources provisions in peace agreements and the duration of post-conflict peace.

Data

This study is based on an original data collection effort, the Natural Resources in Peace Agreements Dataset (NRPA). This dataset provides unique and highly disaggregated data on different provisions regarding natural resources in peace agreements connected to natural resource conflicts. Variables are disaggregated based on the type of resource they pertain – land, oil, water, minerals, gems, or forests – and the kind of provision – ownership or wealth-sharing. The coding of provisions is not mutually exclusive – peace agreements can address one or more types of resources and multiple categories of provisions.

Table 1. Construction of the NRPA dataset

Unit of Analysis	Cases	Source	Comment
Peace agreements connected to natural resource conflicts	265	UCDP Peace Agreements Dataset 19.1. Natural resources issues coded based on the Natural Resources Conflicts Dataset (Rustad and Binningsbo 2012) and UCDP Conflict Issues Dataset (Brosché et al 2023)	Natural resources issues are coded 1/0 if there are any connections to natural resources. Not mutually exclusive; a conflict can be about water and oil at the same time, for example
Peace processes-dyads connected to natural resources conflicts	107	Collapsed – from UCDP Peace Agreements Dataset 19.1	Peace agreements that were part of the same process were collapsed together into one dyad observation. The year of the last peace agreement part of the peace process is kept as the observed year
Peace processes-dyads connected to natural resources conflicts with natural resources provisions	44	Coded based on peace agreement texts	Inclusion of provisions related to natural resources (land, water, oil, gems, minerals, forests) and provisions (wealth-sharing or ownership)
Peace processes-dyads with connected to natural resources conflicts with land provisions	25	Coded based on peace agreement texts	Inclusion of provisions related to land ownership or wealth-sharing

The NRPA dataset follows the UCDP definition of an internal armed conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year”. Conflicts have been coded as having natural resources as a central issue based on the Natural Resources Conflicts dataset (Binningsbo and Rustad 2012), which covers conflicts from 1946-2006 and has

been complemented by data from the UCDP Conflict Issues Dataset (Brosché and Sundberg 2023). Variable “Natural Resources” is coded as 1 if a conflict is related to any natural resources and 0 otherwise. The variables about the other types of natural resources replicate the same coding procedure. These variables are not mutually exclusive; conflicts can be about water and oil simultaneously. For this paper, I select only internal armed conflicts connected to natural resources.

Data on peace agreements comes from the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset 19.1, which covers agreements from 1975-2018. A peace agreement is a “formal agreement between at least two opposing primary warring parties, which addresses the disputed incompatibility, either by settling all or part of it or by clearly outlining a process for how the warring parties plan to regulate the incompatibility” (Pettersson, Högladh, and Öberg 2019). The construction of the dataset at different levels is illustrated in Table 1.

Following the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset 19.1, the NRPA also categorizes peace agreements into partial and comprehensive based on the extent to which they address and resolve incompatibilities rather than the inclusiveness of involved parties. Partial agreements involve one or more dyads initiating a process to settle specific incompatibilities, while comprehensive agreements involve all conflict dyads. Note that within a conflict, there may be multiple government-rebel dyads. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both the RCD and the MLC are signatories of the Lusaka Accord in 1999 and of the Inter-Congolese agreement of 2003, so each of these peace process-dyads is disaggregated into their own individual observations. Table 2 illustrates this case.

Table 2. Example of a peace process in the NRPA Dataset

NRPA ID	Conflict ID	Dyad name	PA Name	PA Year
52	283	Government DRC - RCD	Lusaka Accord	1999
57	283	Government DRC -RCD	Inter-Congolese Political Negotiations – The Final Act	2003
52	283	Government DRC – MLC	Lusaka Accord	1999
57	283	Government DRC – MLC	Inter-Congolese Political Negotiations – The Final Act	2003
58	283	Government DRC – CNDP	Peace Agreement between the Government and CNDP (and the Implementation Plan) ("23 March 2009 Agreement")	2009
59	283	Government DRC – M23	Agenda for the Dialogue between the Government of the DRC and the M23 on the situation in Eastern Congo	2013

Dependent variable

In this paper, the duration of peace is the dependent variable and is measured each year after the signing of the last peace agreement until peace breaks or the observation period ends. Peace is considered to break after a peace process if the signatory dyad engages in organized armed violence, leading to at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year, following the definition by the UCDP (Pettersson, Högbladh, and Öberg 2019).

The measure of peace in this study is connected to the concept of negative peace when peace is measured as the absence of violence (Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2018). In environmental peacebuilding, the focus is more broadly on sustainable peace, which

includes issues and indicators beyond the measure of peace as the absence of violence (Conca and Beevers 2018). Especially when looking at the relationship between the management of natural resources and good governance, it proves necessary to understand peace in a broader sense. However, for the benefit of this study, I employ an operationalization of peace in its negative sense to measure the first step in the transition from armed conflict to peace, which is the lack of organized armed violence.

The analysis of peace duration is linked to the dyads that are signatories to the agreement; this means that if one of the actors in the dyad is in active conflict with another actor outside of the dyad that signed the agreement, peace is not considered to have failed³. Peace fails only if the dyad signatory to the agreement is engaged in another armed conflict. In this way, we can also see the failure of peace as a recurrence of conflict. By looking at peace failures at the dyad level we can also account for the specific so-called root causes of each dyad-conflict, and peace failure is only coded if the new conflict is still about the same root causes that have not been resolved.

Independent variables

The main independent variable of interest to this study is the presence of natural resources provisions in peace agreements. The different types of natural resources span renewable and non-renewable, high-value or not; these include land, water, oil, diamonds, and other gems, minerals, and forests. For natural resources to be coded, they should be signaled as linked to the start of the conflict. For example, land redistribution is coded in the dataset if the groups were fighting because of inequality in land rights before the conflict started. However, restitution of land rights following land grabbing as a result of the conflict is not coded as natural resources provisions in the dataset because they happened during or after the conflict and are not linked to the

³ In the models, I control for whether other conflicts related to the parties in the dyads are happening simultaneously. The results are not significant and are available in the appendix.

root causes of the conflict, for example, in the case of land distribution for return of refugees after the genocide in Rwanda. In contrast, in the case of Colombia, even though the land question became exacerbated throughout the conflict as violence uprooted and dispossessed a lot of rural communities, the issue of land has been central to the conflict between the government and the rebel groups. Therefore, it features as a root cause of conflict from the beginning.

The second independent variable of interest is the type of natural resource provisions under ownership and wealth-sharing based on the texts of the peace agreement documents. Wealth-sharing denotes provisions on sharing economic revenues from exploiting and producing natural resources, like the ones in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A in 2005. The agreement stipulated that the net oil revenues coming from Southern Sudan should be split in half between the local and national governments (CPA 2005, 44-45). Ownership denotes political provisions on the rights of different groups to manage, allocate, and decide on rights, access, and use of natural resources. One example is the agreement between the Government of Bangladesh and the JSS/SB in 1997, where all decisions on land ownership in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region were to be transferred from the national government to the regional council of the Hill District. The autonomous region got the right to manage, allocate, and decide on rights, access, and use of land and its natural resources. The central government was not allowed to transfer, buy, or sell any land, hills, or forests in the region without the consent of the Hill District Council (Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord 1997, 4).

Control variables

Previous research has suggested that the *duration* of civil war before the signing of the peace agreement might have an effect on the likelihood of peace lasting (Walter 2004; Mason et al. 2011; Keels and Mason 2019). I include a control if the conflict was fought

over territory or government, as the type of *incompatibility*, and I control for if the peace process ends with a *full peace agreement* – as natural resources are more likely to be negotiated in full peace agreements, and more institutionalized agreements are more likely to last.

I also control for *conflict intensity*, as more intense conflicts have been associated with a higher risk of recurrence. While there are different ways to operationalize conflict intensity, in this paper, I follow the coding procedure from the UCDP, where it is coded 1 for conflicts with 25 to 999 battle deaths per calendar year and 2 for those conflicts with at least 1,000 battle deaths in a given year (Pettersson, Högladh, and Öberg 2019). To account for *economic development* and *inequality levels*, I use the World Bank's infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (World Bank n/d). This measure has more available data for countries in the Global South than, for example, existing data on GDP. I also include a model in the appendix using V-Dem's *polyarchy* measure as an additional control. This variable is available for fewer countries, so I keep the preferred models in the text without this control to avoid losing any observations.

I have also coded the *link* between natural resources and conflict as a control variable because they may have intrinsic features that relate to different risks of conflict relapse. The three categories are non-exclusive, meaning a conflict can be linked to natural resources in multiple ways. The *distribution link* relates to conflicts over the distribution or redistribution, access, and rights to own and use the resources. One example is the case of Guatemala, where agrarian reform and land redistribution are a central demand from the rebel group URNG. The *financing link* relates to conflicts where natural resources were mainly used as financing tools for rebel groups and governments. Another example is the case of Mozambique, where the smuggling of gems, ivory, zebra, and lion skins financed the rebels' activities from RENAMO. Finally, the *aggravation link* is related to conflicts where there are already conflicting interests and

history, but natural resources can act as triggers or aggravators for violence. For example, the discovery of new oil fields in Chad multiplied local tensions and contributed to the armed conflict. Other common cases are where environmental degradation and the effects of climate change can exacerbate economic, social, and political conflicts and lead to violence, as is the case of the Azawad conflict in Mali.

Durational analysis: Cox Proportional Hazards Model

Durational analysis as a method is helpful for studying time and political change, and the Cox Proportional Hazards Model allows me to model the effect of negotiating natural resources on the duration of peace before a new conflict event erupts while allowing for the control of other time-varying factors. However, with the specific research design of this study, the only time-varying factor is peace itself, as control variables such as infant mortality and polyarchy are coded only in the first year of post-conflict peace. Cox Proportional Hazards Model is considered semiparametric, which is important when making inferences about relative failure rates since duration dependency should be treated as model-specific and not parameterized (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). To test for the possibility of the chosen variables going against the proportional hazard expectations of this specific hazard model, I ran a Schoenfeld residuals test, and the results were not significant, which highlights the fit of the chosen model for this study.

Selection bias

In addition to the main specifications, I explore the possibility of a selection effect, where natural resource provisions are more likely to be included in certain peace agreements and conflicts and thus could mask the effect on post-conflict duration. While selection effects are often modeled using a Heckmann probit regression, that technique is inappropriate for the specifications of the Cox Proportional Hazards Model. Instead, I build on previous works with similar research designs to find

alternative ways of addressing the possibility of selection effects in the main model (Nilsson 2012; Keels and Mason 2019; Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018; Ogutcu-Fu 2021).

To address selection bias, I conduct a separate analysis to examine the prior stage in negotiating natural resources and ensure that natural resource provisions are not more likely to be included in certain types of peace agreements or peace negotiations with specific characteristics. First, I analyze which factors determine the signing of a peace agreement and then compare them to the factors that determine the inclusion of natural resources provisions. I conducted this analysis using data from the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (Kreutz 2010), which reports the type of termination of all internal armed conflicts from 1946 to 2019. I merge this dataset with the NRPA dataset and use the same control variables as in the main models to test whether there are any significant differences in explaining these two outcomes of the probability of signing a peace agreement and of natural resources provisions being included in a peace agreement.

Building on a similar approach by Nilsson (2012), I use a logit model with robust standard errors clustered on conflict. Given the temporal nature of the variables, I also include a count for time and three cubic splines. The results from the two regression models are similar for both types of outcomes: conflict ending in a peace agreement and the inclusion of natural resources provisions⁴. In this case, there is little to suggest

⁴ While the results are similar, there is a significant difference in *conflict intensity*, which is bigger for peace agreements that include natural resources provisions. This might indicate that conflicts that experience higher battle intensity are more difficult to resolve through provisions in peace agreements. In this case, adding natural resources provisions to already fragile negotiations might only serve to complicate the possibility of peace. Previous research has indicated that when natural resources provisions were seen as too contentious, they should be avoided in difficult negotiation settings so as not to spoil the possibility of arriving at a negotiated peace (Walter 2004).

that the conflicts that include natural resource provisions in peace agreements differ from the larger sample of natural resource conflicts. This sharpens the inference that it is, in fact, the effect of natural resource provisions that are responsible for the variation in the duration of post-conflict peace.

Table 3. Modelling the selection effects

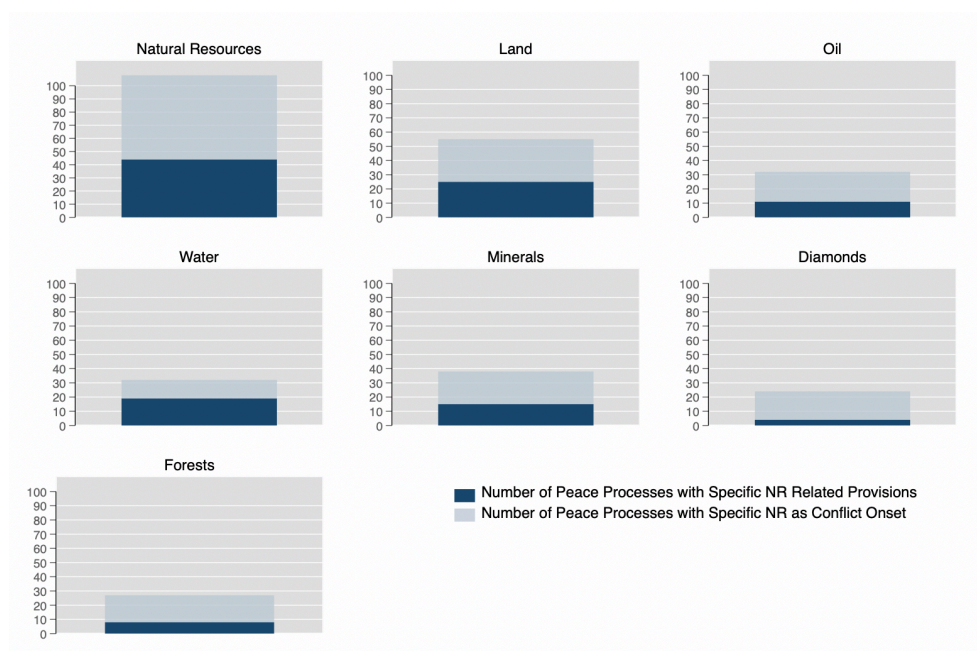
VARIABLES	(1) PA	(2) NR PA
NR Onset	1.370*** (0.251)	-
Intensity Level (25-999)	-1.186*** (0.230)	-1.705*** (0.345)
Intensity Level (over 1000)	-1.127*** (0.291)	-3.448*** (1.046)
Conflict Duration	0.389** (0.179)	-0.131 (0.343)
Year	0.0404** * (0.00726)	0.0517*** (0.0103)
Constant	-83.19*** (14.62)	-104.4*** (20.69)
Observations	2,496	1,303
Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

Natural resources provisions in peace agreements: statistical analysis

The NRPA data provides a previously unavailable picture of natural resource provisions in peace agreements. As shown in Figure 1, 107 peace processes-dyads were

connected to natural resources at the onset of the conflict. From these, 40% have addressed natural resources in some capacity in the peace agreement.

Figure 1. Natural resources present in peace agreements by type



Of all the types of natural resources, land is the most common – both connected to the onset of conflict and discussed in peace processes. Of all peace processes linked to conflicts over land, around 40% addressed land issues in the agreements – making it the most common resource in these documents. Minerals are the second most common conflict resource to be addressed in peace processes, being addressed in 20% of all the processes related to conflicts over mineral resources. Forests and diamonds are often connected to the root causes of conflict but are rarely included in provisions in peace agreements.

The data shows that there is significant variation not only in the types of resources and the types of conflicts but also in the durability of post-conflict peace. Figure 2 shows a visualization of the peace spells of all the dyads that included natural resources in their peace agreements at some level. The first point shows the year of signing the last peace agreement in a peace process (different for every peace process), and the lines show the duration of post-conflict peace. All conflicts end in 2019 because it is the end of the observation timeline. This figure shows a significant duration of post-conflict peace in most cases where natural resources are included in peace agreements.

Figure 2. Post-conflict peace spells by conflict dyads with natural resources provisions in peace agreements

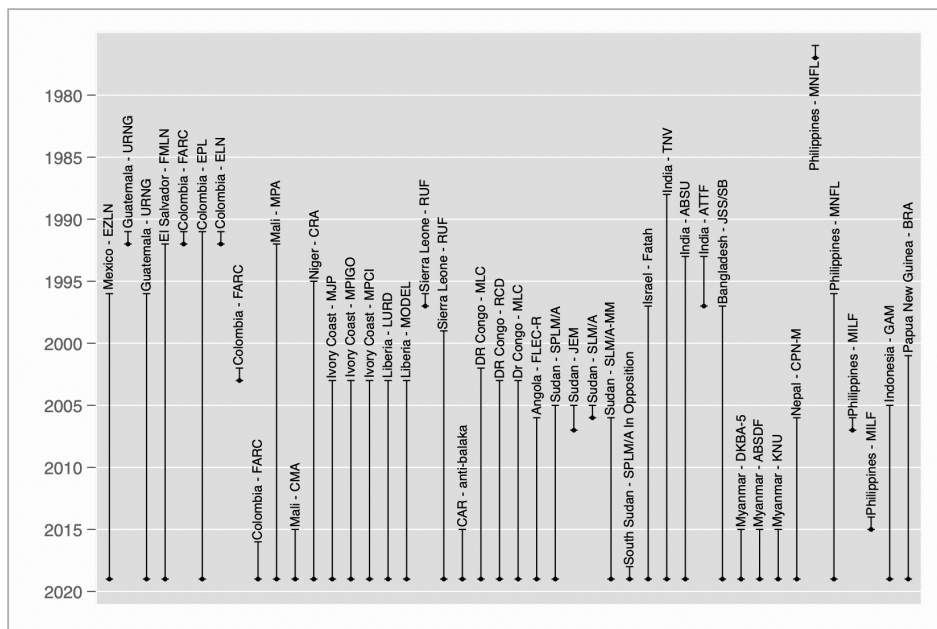
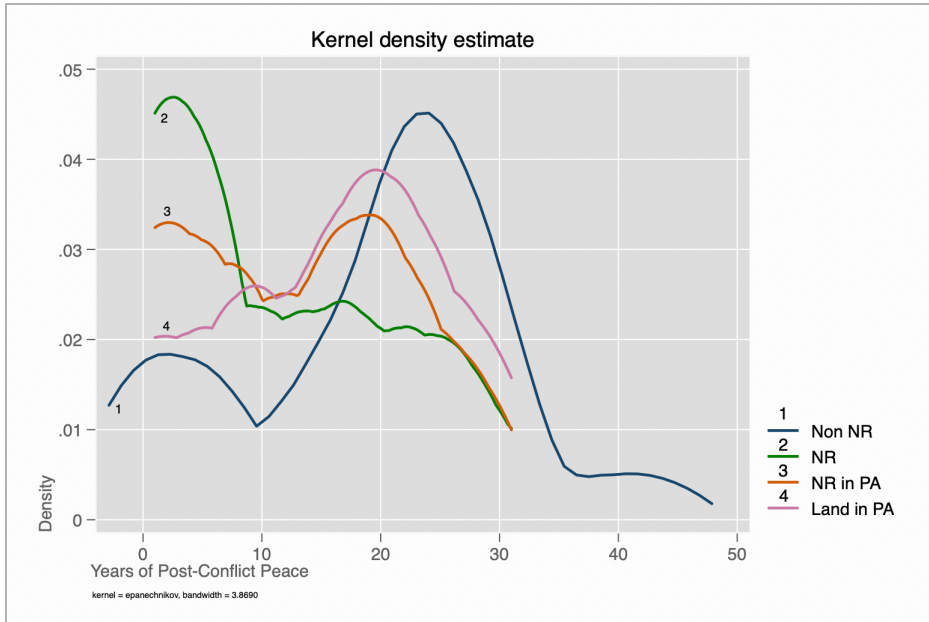


Figure 3. Kernel density estimate of the distribution of years of post-conflict peace

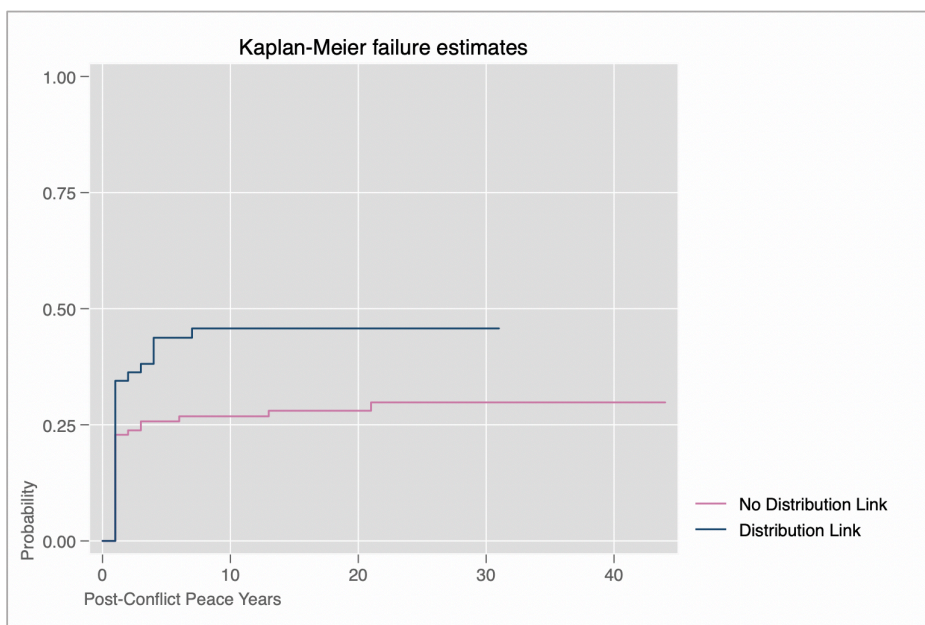


The analysis also shows an important picture of natural resource conflict recurrence rates. Natural resource conflicts that end in a peace agreement are twice (107,5%) as likely to reoccur than other conflicts that end with a peace agreement but are not about natural resources. It is possible to observe this through the duration of post-conflict peace periods in Figure 3: more than 45% of all natural resource conflicts relapse into violence in the first five years after signing a peace agreement, compared with 18% of non-natural resource conflicts. However, only 33% of all natural resource conflicts that address natural resources in the peace agreements relapse into conflict, while 20% of conflicts that address land issues in peace agreements do. On average, a natural resource conflict experiences around ten years of peace after signing an agreement; if the agreement addresses natural resources issues, the average number of post-conflict peace years increases by three years. In the case of land conflicts, the average number

of peace years after signing an agreement is ten years; if the agreement addresses land issues, the average number of post-conflict years increases by six years.

The analysis also shows that conflicts connected to natural resources through the distribution link, in contrast with the financing or aggravation link, are much more likely to reoccur after a peace agreement.

Figure 4. Kaplan Meier failure estimates based on conflict link



This is shown in Figure 4. The Kaplan-Meier curve shows the probability of survival of natural resources conflicts with the different links between the start and end of a given timeline⁵. The graph shows that conflicts relating to natural resources through the distribution link are more likely to relapse into violence. When conflicts revolve

⁵ Probability is calculated as the number of dyads at the beginning minus the number of dyads that “fail” divided by the number of dyads at the beginning.

around the central issue of redistribution of ownership, access, and rights to a specific natural resource, which can be seen as a zero-sum situation, it becomes pivotal to resolve these issues to stop violent conflict. This illustrates how peace is more likely to fail if peace processes do not address the most substantial issues at the root of natural resource conflicts. The distribution link mostly reflects conflicts over land, while distribution issues can also characterize water and oil conflicts. Diamonds, minerals, and forests are mostly connected to conflict through the financing link. The distribution can be seen in Figure A in the appendix.

Effects on the duration of peace

The results from the statistical analysis strengthen the inferences above. The tables show the results from the models using Cox Proportional Hazards investigating the effect of the different provisions in the peace process documents on the risk of conflict recurrence. Usually, hazard ratios are interpreted differently from regression coefficients. However, I have transformed the Cox coefficients into probabilities to make reading the results table more intuitive⁶. The test of the first hypothesis - that the inclusion of natural resource provisions in peace agreements would have a positive effect on the duration of post-conflict peace - is shown in model 1, table 4⁷. According to the estimates, including natural resource provisions in peace agreements is associated with a 47% lower probability of conflict recurrence.

Table 4. The effect of natural resources provisions on post-conflict peace duration

⁶ The percentage change in survival time from a unit change in the independent variable is calculated using the formula: $(1 - \exp(\text{coefficient}))$.

⁷ Given the small number of observations in the dataset (164 conflict-dyads in total) the reduction in degrees of freedom is too large to allow for an inclusion of all types of provisions in the same model. For this reason, I opt to estimate the effect of separate provisions in separate models to make sure the effect of each type of natural resource provision is captured.

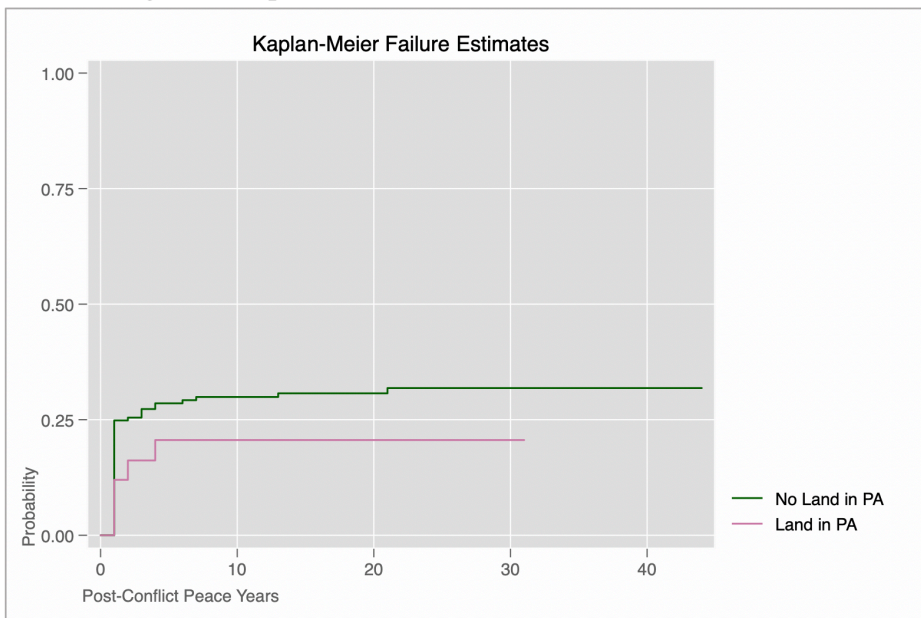
VARIABLES	(1) NR	(2) Land	(3) Water	(4) Oil	(5) Diamonds	(6) Minerals	(7) Forests
NR Provision	-0.635* (0.385)						
Land Provision		-1.090** (0.487)					
Land Onset		0.645 (0.436)					
Water Provision			-1.191* (0.655)				
Water Onset			0.335 (0.501)				
Oil Provision				-1.662 (1.034)			
Oil Onset				0.501 (0.351)			
Diamonds Provision					-37.09 (1.615e+08)		
Diamonds Onset					-0.864 (0.552)		
Minerals Provision						-0.530 (0.622)	
Minerals Onset						-0.0484 (0.403)	
Forests Provision							-0.560 (0.748)
Forests Onset							0.282 (0.486)
Distribution Link	0.899*** (0.325)	0.525 (0.455)	0.889*** (0.320)	0.639** (0.321)	0.668** (0.308)	0.672** (0.310)	0.737** (0.310)
Financing Link	0.113 (0.306)	0.0682 (0.308)	0.0608 (0.309)	0.0649 (0.312)	0.428 (0.339)	0.163 (0.324)	0.0192 (0.353)
Aggravation Link	0.294 (0.365)	0.118 (0.405)	0.319 (0.378)	0.149 (0.379)	0.00466 (0.392)	0.264 (0.368)	0.260 (0.366)
Conflict Duration	-0.00685 (0.0187)	-0.0109 (0.0181)	-0.0110 (0.0180)	-0.0138 (0.0182)	-0.0181 (0.0186)	-0.00895 (0.0188)	-0.0140 (0.0185)
Full Peace	-0.450 (0.323)	-0.396 (0.326)	-0.317 (0.333)	-0.492 (0.315)	-0.547* (0.313)	-0.591* (0.314)	-0.574* (0.312)
Conflict Intensity	0.533*** (0.187)	0.564*** (0.190)	0.609*** (0.194)	0.543*** (0.187)	0.506*** (0.187)	0.528*** (0.188)	0.562*** (0.187)
Infant Mortality	0.106 (0.235)	0.188 (0.238)	0.160 (0.246)	0.0884 (0.236)	0.157 (0.243)	0.0572 (0.231)	0.0470 (0.233)
Incompatibility	-0.142 (0.392)	-0.301 (0.405)	-0.257 (0.396)	-0.133 (0.379)	-0.0289 (0.377)	-0.113 (0.391)	-0.0223 (0.400)
Observations	163	163	163	163	163	163	163

Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Model 2 in Table 4 tests the second hypothesis - that including land provisions in peace agreements would positively affect the duration of post-conflict peace. We see from the estimates that the results support the hypothesis. Land conflicts also present a higher risk of recurring, but the results show that negotiating land issues in peace

agreements, when the conflict is about land in the first place, reduces the risk of conflict relapse by 66%. There is also a positive effect for the inclusion of water provisions; however, those are driven mainly by a couple of notable cases, and negotiations around this topic are very technical, which often does not touch on the political nature of access to this resource. In Figure 6, I have plotted the calculated cumulative hazard of the risk of conflict recurrence for a peace process that included and did not include land provisions. As shown, peace processes that did not include provisions on land issues see a sharp increase in the failure risk (risk of peace failing, i.e., risk of conflict recurring) in the first years. The risk also continues to increase with time. Agreements that have included provisions on land issues, on the other hand, see a sharp increase in the failure risk in the early years after the signing of the peace agreement, but the continued risk remains lower over time.

Figure 6. Kaplan Meier failure estimates for land conflicts



To ensure the results are robust, I have selected several control variables to account for other factors that might affect the relationship under investigation. The first control is whether peace processes end with a full peace agreement. The results are not significant, and a full peace agreement becomes statistically significant in models 5-7, where the natural resources variables are weaker. The other control variables, like incompatibility and infant mortality, were also not statistically significant, but their effects were in the expected direction. For conflict duration, the effect is likewise not statistically significant. One result that stands out among the control variables is the effect of *conflict intensity*. When conflicts have experienced an intensity of over 1000 battle-related deaths in a calendar year, it has a substantially negative impact on the duration of post-conflict peace, and it is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level across all models.

In Table 5, I model the effect of ownership provisions on the duration of post-conflict peace in relation to the third hypothesis. The results show no statistically significant results for ownership of natural resources in general, but we see a significant effect for land ownership provisions. This is not only in line with results from previous research arguing for the specific effect of land reform on peace duration (Keels and Mason 2019), but it also corroborates the theoretical expectations of this article that shifting the focus to look at ownership provision beyond wealth-sharing is important. In accordance with previous studies, the results do not hold when looking at wealth-sharing provisions. In contrast, Model 2 of Table 5 shows that including land ownership provisions in peace agreements where land is a root cause of the conflict reduces the probability of conflict recurrence by 65%. This means that, on average, post-conflict peace in land-related conflicts lasts ten years, and including land ownership provisions in peace agreements increases this post-conflict peace period by almost four years.

Table 5. The Effect of ownership provisions on post-conflict peace duration

VARIABLES	(1) NR	(2) Land	(3) Water	(4) Oil	(5) Diamonds	(6) Minerals	(7) Forests
NR Ownership	-0.690 (0.517)						
Land Ownership		-1.070** (0.496)					
Land Onset		0.665 (0.442)					
Water Ownership			-1.178* (0.660)				
Water Onset			0.326 (0.500)				
Oil Ownership				-1.436 (1.036)			
Oil Onset				0.462 (0.350)			
Diamonds Ownership					-36.90 (2.330e+08)		
Diamonds Onset					-0.917* (0.553)		
Minerals Ownership						-0.426 (0.629)	
Minerals Onset						-0.0469 (0.404)	
Forests Ownership							-0.382 (0.754)
Forests Onset							0.241 (0.482)
Distribution Link	0.814*** (0.313)	0.526 (0.456)	0.913*** (0.323)	0.644** (0.322)	0.682** (0.308)	0.679** (0.309)	0.729** (0.312)
Financing Link	0.0848 (0.308)	0.00993 (0.310)	0.00125 (0.311)	0.0548 (0.311)	0.420 (0.339)	0.145 (0.322)	0.0206 (0.354)
Aggravation Link	0.233 (0.362)	0.136 (0.403)	0.332 (0.376)	0.175 (0.378)	0.0122 (0.392)	0.268 (0.369)	0.265 (0.366)
Conflict Duration	-0.00697 (0.0181)	-0.00910 (0.0183)	-0.00932 (0.0181)	-0.0136 (0.0182)	-0.0176 (0.0186)	-0.00903 (0.0188)	-0.0133 (0.0184)
Full Peace	-0.508 (0.315)	-0.422 (0.324)	-0.378 (0.329)	-0.542* (0.314)	-0.569* (0.312)	-0.604* (0.314)	-0.593* (0.311)
Conflict Intensity	0.546*** (0.189)	0.557*** (0.191)	0.601*** (0.194)	0.549*** (0.187)	0.506*** (0.188)	0.531*** (0.188)	0.559*** (0.188)
Infant Mortality	0.0677 (0.234)	0.217 (0.247)	0.198 (0.255)	0.0816 (0.238)	0.162 (0.243)	0.0605 (0.231)	0.0533 (0.234)
Incompatibility	-0.117 (0.391)	-0.323 (0.409)	-0.296 (0.402)	-0.109 (0.381)	-0.0325 (0.376)	-0.108 (0.391)	-0.0289 (0.401)
Observations	163	163	163	163	163	163	163

Standard errors in parentheses: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The above findings show that including natural resources provisions in peace agreements positively affects the duration of post-conflict peace at large. The results are not significant when looking at wealth-sharing provisions, which are available in the

appendix and consistent with results from previous research. However, when we disaggregate the different types of natural resources and broaden our conceptualization to include ownership provisions, the effect of including natural resources in peace agreements becomes substantial. This indicates why we see longer peace duration in conflicts over land redistribution in Latin America and Asia. In Figure 2, we can see that in conflicts like the ones between the government of Guatemala and the URNG, the government of El Salvador and the FMLN, the government of India and the ATTF, and the government of Nepal and the CPN, the results are an indication that the long peace duration is connected to addressing land ownership questions in the peace agreement.

Prospects for sustainable peace: qualitative analysis

To further explore the effects of natural resources provisions in peace agreements on the duration of post-conflict peace, I complement the statistical analysis with a qualitative analysis of illustrative cases to explore the prospects for sustainable peace. Case studies, as argued by Gerring (2004: 349), “...enjoy a natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature”. Since we currently have little insight into the role of natural resources in peace agreements, I believe that combining this qualitative approach with the statistical study might be useful to further the understanding of this topic. The cases selected are of the negotiations in El Salvador, Sudan, and Nepal. The selection was based on modeling the different levels of recurrence risk and whether the conflicts recurred. The cases presented a high recurrence risk but, however, managed to avoid conflict recurrence; therefore, they have been selected to explore further how the negotiation of natural resources might have contributed to the solidification of post-conflict peace. In the case illustrations, I move beyond the definition of negative peace to see how negotiating natural resources in the peace processes might affect prospects for sustainable peace. In the discussion below, I show how the cases show that including natural resources provisions in the respective peace agreements has helped

avoid conflict relapse in the three cases, and I provide a tentative explanation for the causal mechanism.

El Salvador – FMLN

The conflict between the government of El Salvador and the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was a protracted civil war that lasted from 1980 to 1992. The conflict arose from longstanding socio-economic inequalities, political repression, and land disputes in El Salvador. The 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords (CPA) brought the civil war to an end, establishing a framework for political reconciliation, demilitarization, and the reintegration of former combatants into society (UCDP n/d). Hopes of fixing inequality in land access and distribution led to the negotiations of the peace accords between the government and the rebels. The chapter on economic and social questions clearly stipulates that the land transfer program should target properties that exceed the maximum of 245 hectares, per the constitutional requirements from the previous land reform program in the 1980s (Chapultepec Agreement 1992, 21).

The negotiations over the land issue did not go without problems. In mid-1992, negotiations collapsed over the specific details of the overall amount of land supposed to be transferred, the number of recognized beneficiaries, and the details for requests and payments for land. The disagreement over the extension of the land transfer program and the ‘market-driven’ reform was such an impasse that the FMLN threatened to cease demobilization during the peace process. At the height of the neoliberal agenda, the UN mediator team proposed the criteria for participation based on the new generation of market-assisted agrarian reform (MALR) from the World Bank (McReynolds 2002; de Bremond 2007).

The eventual acceptance of these terms by the FMLN was seen as the most considerable concession during the negotiation process, as the MALR model meant that the forms of tenure and ownership dictated by the Peace Accords would individualize land and social life within the newly liberalized economy, and betray their initial political imperative (de Bremond 2013). As Wood (1995) pointed out, the strategy of the FMLN was to make gains toward the democratization of political institutions as a promise for more fundamental change in the aftermath of the conflict. The FMLN transformed from a guerrilla movement into a political party, participating in democratic elections and eventually winning the presidency in 2009 and 2014 (Ramos, López, and Quinteros 2015). After the peace negotiations, the programs mandated by the accords became the new stage for the struggle between the former conflicting parties.

In the first six years after the signing of the Accords, 10% of the agricultural land had been transferred to ex-combatants of both the FMLN and the armed forces and civilian supporters of the FMLN (de Bremond 2013). The CPA presents the highest implementation rate, showing 76% already three years after the signing of the agreement and reaching 95% after 10 years (PAM n/d). However, deeper structures of poverty, inequality, and social disinvestment still plague El Salvador, even after 30 years since the end of the conflict. The stipulation of MALR that lands had to be offered for sale to the transfer program voluntarily complicated the process of matching sellers to buyers. More than that, most lands that comprise the pool of land to be transferred through the program were of low quality and class, often with forest cover and steep slopes. As much as 70% of these lands were not suited for expanding agricultural production of any type of annual crops, such as corn and beans, which are the basis of peasant agriculture. In this sense, after the peace agreement, the 'best lands' remained outside of reach for poor peasants, limiting their ability to improve their livelihood (de Bremond 2013).

Marked by growing rates of poverty and inequality, as well as increased levels of violence and crime, rural communities constitute the greater part of emigration from El Salvador. Since the end of the civil war, emigration has been so intense that it has completely changed the structure of economic sectors for foreign exchange. In the 1980s, traditional agricultural exportation accounted for 80% of the total share of foreign exchange; in 2004, it had declined to 5%, with 70% covered by international remittances from migrants in the USA (PRISMA 2011). In 2022, remittances accounted for 25% of El Salvador's GDP, placing the country among the top dependents on international remittances for their national economy (World Bank Data n/d). While the peace agreements and the land transfer program ensure that the conflict has ended, it can be argued that sustainable peace has not been consolidated. As Corriveau-Bourque (2013, 323) noted, the peace accords, through the focus on MALR, "cemented structural scarcity as a condition for peace" and undermined the potential of land reform in creating viable livelihoods for smallholder farmers and the peasant population.

Nepal – CPN-M

The conflict between the government of Nepal and CPN-M (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist) began in 1996 with the launch of an armed struggle with the aim of overthrowing the monarchy and installing a communist government (UCDP n/d). The roots of the conflict have been tied to land issues since Nepal has a long history of socio-economic disparities and unequal land distribution. One of the key demands of the Maoists during the insurgency was land reform, aiming to address landlessness and inequitable land distribution. They advocated for land redistribution from wealthy landowners and from the monarchy to landless peasants and marginalized communities (Thapa and Ramsbotham 2017).

While the land question was central to the Maoist insurgency, the issue of land reform was only vaguely discussed in the peace agreement. In the section on Political, Economic, and Social Transformation and Conflict Management, the conflicting parties agree to “adopt a policy of implementing a scientific land reform program by ending feudal ownership” with the aim of “providing land and other economic protection to socially and economic backward classes including landless squatters, bonded laborers and pastoral farmers” (CPA 2006, 3). In this sense, the issue of land was not considered about land itself. Still, it was directly connected to how unequal land access and ownership affected Nepalese society's social, political, and economic structures.

In the post-conflict context, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has scored high in the implementation score, reaching 72,41% implementation rate 9 years after the signing of the peace agreement (PAM n/d). However, the land reform process has faced significant challenges, and progress has been slow and uneven, characterized by minimum implementation. While the main goal of land reform was to redistribute land from large landowners and the monarchy, in the aftermath of the conflict, the CPN-M rebels-turned-political party led the process of restituting lands seized during the conflict (The Carter Center 2012). With the formation of a Maoist-led government in Nepal in 2011, progress appeared possible, as the government recommitted to land reform and land return, formalized in the Seven-Point Agreement 2011. A committee was formed under the Minister of Land Reform and Management to study recommendations and to drive the implementation of a comprehensive land reform policy (The Carter Center 2012).

However, the post-conflict period in Nepal has been marked by democratic turmoil, difficulty in negotiating a new constitution, and the dissolution of parliament in 2012, 2020, 2021, and 2022. This context of insecurity and democratic uncertainty makes

transformative changes in the structure of governance and ownership of land impossible, as it is always side-tracked by conflicts over government. As a result, Nepal continues to be a highly unequal country regarding access to land, and a complex and contentious character still characterizes land issues. While the dissolution of the monarchy in 2008 directly connects to the Maoists' goals of ending the feudal system in Nepal, the failure to transform land tenure systems beyond only the central role of the monarchy makes comprehensive land reform impossible. In this case, while the civil war between the government of Nepal and CPN-M has not returned to violence after the signing of the peace agreement, the underlying issues of land access and ownership are still prevalent in the society and still pose a threat to social, economic, and political development and for the solidification of sustainable peace.

Sudan – SPLM/A

The conflict between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A (Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army) was one of the longest and deadliest conflicts in Africa, spanning three decades and resulting in widespread violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises. The conflict primarily revolved around issues of marginalization, resource allocation, governance, and identity, particularly between the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum and various marginalized ethnic groups, predominantly in southern Sudan (UCDP n/d). The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) was marked by issues of access and ownership of land and inequality in the distribution of revenues from oil exploitation.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was finally signed in 2005 and formed around the Machakos Protocol, recognizing South Sudan's self-determination rights. In the six years of the transitional period, before the referendum for independence could be implemented, the CPA established the authority of the Government of South Sudan over its territory and exclusive powers over adopting its own constitution,

planning for social services like health, education, and welfare – and management over the financial resources of the region. Indeed, the CPA’s protocol on wealth-sharing established that “revenue should reflect a commitment to devolution of power and decentralization of decision-making in regard to development, service delivery and governance” (CPA 2005, 47). The provisions on wealth-sharing provide a clear and detailed formula for the redistribution of oil revenues, which “should balance the needs for national development and reconstruction of Southern Sudan” (CPA 2005, 54). The Government of South Sudan’s authority over the revenues from oil exploitation was understood as a cornerstone to its transition into a “functioning polity” (Carolan 2018). Ultimately, the CPA stipulated that the net oil revenues coming from Southern Sudan should be split in half between the local and national governments.

While the provisions on wealth-sharing and distribution of revenues from oil were detailed and substantial, the same is not true for the land question. In Sudan, land is viewed not only as a means of survival or economic benefit but also has cultural, social, and political connections to the local people inhabiting and living off the land. The land issue in Sudan has become so contentious, and its political implications so acute, that “the peace processes in Sudan have not dared address the question of land in any depth, deferring much of the work to the post-agreement phase” (Egemi 2006, 54). While the CPA created a Land Commission to deal with land tenure issues and grazing rights, its implementation does not seem interesting to either party to the conflict, as they have their own interests in the land – and the oil fields in them. With the independence of South Sudan, the government of Sudan lost most of its oil fields, and it is not willing to lose even more if Abyei decides to secede and join the South (Salman 2013). Since 2011, when Abyei should have been given the right for a referendum on self-determination, its legal status is undetermined, with an unofficial unilateral referendum in 2013 which voted in favor of joining South Sudan not being recognized by Khartoum. As of 2024, South Sudan has de facto control over the area after intense

inter-communal violence triggered by territorial and resource-sharing disputes (ACLEED 2023).

Beyond the Abyei dispute, land issues overall in both Sudan and South Sudan have remained after the CPA and the South's independence. Beyond political will and land ownership, several other problems are plaguing other regions within Sudan – such as Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan – and within South Sudan (Carolan 2018). The land question is not detailed nor substantial, and the procedures for reconciling the recognition of customary and grazing rights in the CPA with the traditional institution of land management. The existing institutions and structures have also been repeatedly accused of weak and undemocratic structures that lead to the continuation of discrimination amongst marginalized groups as well as women (Egemi 2006)

While the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement brought an end to the decades-long conflict between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A, the legacy of the civil war continues to impact both Sudan and South Sudan, with ongoing challenges to peace, stability, and development in the region. The CPA's inability to address key issues of land and inequality reveals a significant problem: it focused solely on resolving issues between the North and South of Sudan, overlooking the complexities of other conflicts within the country that shared similar root causes. By doing this, it reinforced the belief that Sudan's numerous violent conflicts were separate and unrelated, failing to address deeper social, economic, and political structures necessary for sustainable peace.

Concluding discussion

This article set out to investigate whether the inclusion of natural resources provisions in peace agreements affects the duration of post-conflict peace. The results from the

statistical analysis show that when an agreement addresses natural resources in its provisions, the average number of post-conflict peace years increases by 3 years on average. When different types of natural resources are disaggregated and land conflicts are looked at specifically, the average number of post-conflict peace years increases by 6 years if land provisions are included in such an agreement. Looking beyond wealth-sharing provisions only also proved fruitful. Ownership provisions have also been shown to affect the durability of post-conflict peace, which indicates that there is merit in broadening our analysis framework and understanding of how natural resources affect conflict and peace beyond the focus on wealth-sharing.

The statistical analysis was then complemented by a qualitative discussion of three peace processes. Based on the analysis of the three different cases - El Salvador, Nepal, and Sudan - it becomes apparent that while addressing land issues in peace agreements may not have eradicated the root causes of the conflicts, it has nonetheless facilitated a transition from armed conflict into negative peace. This transition is particularly evident as former rebel groups transformed into political parties in the post-conflict phase, engaging in democratic processes where struggles over land issues occur within an institutional framework. The analysis of the cases demonstrates that peace agreements alone may not comprehensively address root causes - as theoretically proposed by environmental peacebuilding literature. The complexity of these conflicts demands radical transformations of political, social, and economic structures, often beyond the scope of peace negotiations. Thus, while addressing land issues in peace agreements is a crucial first step towards sustainable peace, it must be complemented by broader efforts to tackle underlying socioeconomic and political disparities for sustainable peace to be achieved.

However, the analysis of the three cases suggests that creating democratic and transparent institutions to deal with land issues in the post-agreement phase strongly

contributes to keeping the rebel groups from spoiling peace negotiations. While the present analysis can only offer suggestive evidence that this might be the mechanism preventing conflict recurrence, more research is needed on the promise of resolving conflicts peacefully and democratically through strong institutions. Future research is still needed to address more qualitative and nuanced questions that remain unanswered by this present study, such as the importance of the implementation of peace agreements, the quality of the natural resources provisions, the role of different actors in pushing for environmental and natural resources topics in peace negotiations and in the post-conflict phase.

To conclude, the results from these analyses offer important implications for practitioners and policy-makers. By providing avenues for peaceful dispute resolution and political participation, democratic governance can help address grievances and prevent the recurrence of violent conflict. Prioritizing conflict sensitivity, context-specific interventions, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, policy-makers and practitioners can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives. Ultimately, these policy recommendations emphasize the importance of addressing underlying grievances and promoting inclusive governance and socioeconomic development to achieve lasting peace in post-conflict countries.

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Appendix

Figure A. Number of conflict dyads by type of resource at onset and type of link

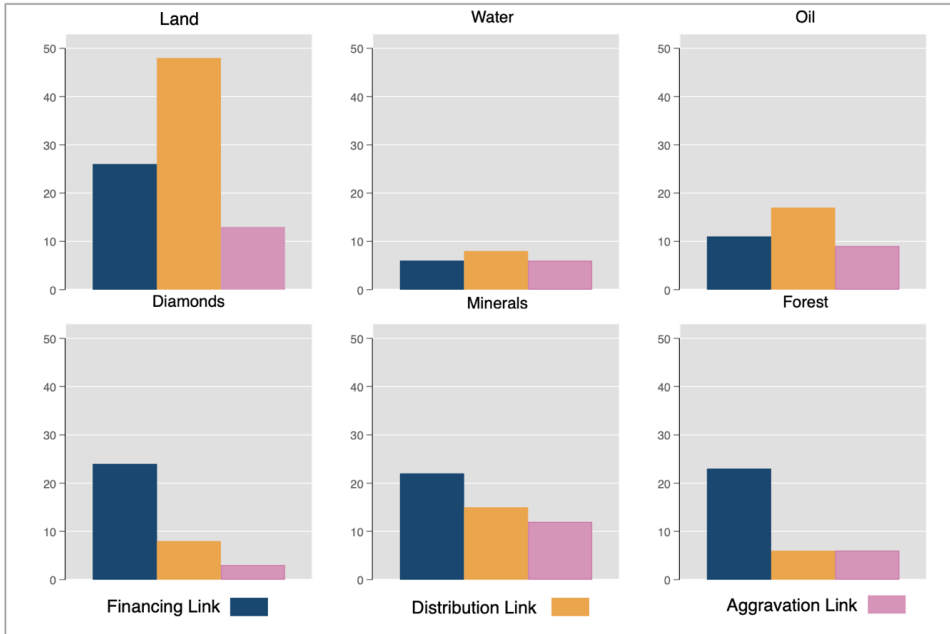


Table A. Effect of NR Provisions on Peace Duration, extra controls

VARIABLES	(1) NR	(2) Land	(3) Water	(4) Oil	(5) Diamonds	(6) Minerals	(7) Forests
NR Provision	-0.621 (0.384)						
Land Provision		- 1.099** (0.503)					
Land Onset		0.796* (0.471)					
Water Provision			-1.298* (0.691)				
Water Onset							
Oil Provision				- 1.736* (1.041)			
Oil Onset				0.502 (0.383)			
Diamonds Provision					-39.09 (4.405e+08)		
Diamonds Onset					-0.683 (0.576)		
Minerals Provision						-0.617 (0.631)	

Minerals Onset						0.0144	
						(0.418)	
Forest Provision							-0.577
							(0.763)
Forest Onset							0.0930
							(0.538)
Distribution Link	0.898*	0.362	0.877**	0.707*	0.651*	0.687**	0.748*
	*						*
	(0.361)	(0.510)	(0.352)	(0.372)	(0.345)	(0.348)	(0.349)
Financing Link	-	-0.125	-0.145	-0.126	0.182	-	-0.107
	0.0300					0.00950	
	(0.308)	(0.312)	(0.313)	(0.310)	(0.350)	(0.344)	(0.364)
Aggravation Link	0.266	-	0.284	0.214	0.0336	0.260	0.220
		0.00461					
	(0.384)	(0.438)	(0.397)	(0.390)	(0.410)	(0.390)	(0.387)
Full Peace	-0.472	-0.434	-0.317	-0.525	-0.591*	-0.604*	-
							0.591*
	(0.332)	(0.337)	(0.348)	(0.322)	(0.320)	(0.322)	(0.323)
Conflict Intensity	0.465*	0.493**	0.541**	0.437*	0.408**	0.446**	0.466*
	*	*	*	*			*
	(0.181)	(0.186)	(0.189)	(0.184)	(0.180)	(0.180)	(0.182)
Infant Mortality	0.183	0.338	0.293	0.165	0.254	0.128	0.139
	(0.262)	(0.276)	(0.286)	(0.252)	(0.272)	(0.252)	(0.253)
V-Dem Polyarchy	0.105	0.531	0.512	-0.295	0.129	-0.0337	-
							0.0449
	(1.168)	(1.159)	(1.201)	(1.135)	(1.111)	(1.145)	(1.124)
Incompatibility	-0.178	-0.340	-0.303	-0.202	-0.0517	-0.162	-0.110
	(0.413)	(0.415)	(0.414)	(0.396)	(0.390)	(0.410)	(0.414)
Other	0.223	0.204	0.313	0.267	0.182	0.256	0.234

Conflict

(0.315) (0.319) (0.332) (0.314) (0.309) (0.317) (0.312)

Observations 157 157 157 157 157 157 157



From peace agreements to sustainable peace?
Assessing the question of land in Guatemala's peace process

Abstract

This paper proposes a novel framework for assessing the inclusion of natural resource issues in peace agreements, with a particular focus on land inequality and its implications for sustainable peace. Land inequality, deeply rooted in historical injustices and exacerbated by globalization and large-scale land acquisitions, remains a critical driver of conflict. Through an in-depth analysis of Guatemala, this study illustrates how addressing land issues in peace agreements can help build sustainable peace. By applying parameters from the peace agreement literature, the proposed framework critically evaluates the clarity, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of land provisions in peace agreements. The findings underscore the necessity of an ethical, political, and environmental imperative in environmental peacebuilding to prevent the perpetuation of unequal structures that produce and reproduce violence and conflict. This approach is vital to moving beyond the unintended consequences of peacebuilding efforts that may inadvertently foster new forms of violence and oppression. Ultimately, the study advocates for a normative commitment to a vision of sustainable peace that is beneficial for both people and the environment, ensuring that peacebuilding processes contribute to just and lasting outcomes.

Keywords: land, environmental peacebuilding, natural resources, Guatemala, conflict, peace

*“The cry for land is, without any doubt, the loudest,
the most dramatic, and the most
desperate sound in Guatemala”*

Guatemalan Bishops 1988

Introduction

At the height of the armed conflict in the late 1980s, the Association of Bishops of Guatemala released a collective letter qualifying the strong relationship between land, poverty, racial inequality, and violence in the country. Land ownership in Guatemala had been historically skewed, with the largest portion of land concentrated in the hands of a small elite at the expense of Indigenous and campesino (peasant) communities (Handy 1988; Cambranes 2004). This historical injustice had fueled political, economic, and social grievances and had served as a root cause of the 1960s-1996 armed conflict and featured prominently in the subsequent peace negotiations (Jonas 2000). Negotiating land issues in peace agreements presents opportunities for addressing important aspects of peacebuilding, such as securing livelihoods, promoting economic recovery, addressing governance issues, and reintegrating former combatants (Unruh and Williams 2013).

Increasingly, scholars and practitioners have considered the issue of land as one of the most important aspects of post-conflict stabilization. Environmental peacebuilding (EPB), as a field of both academic scholarship and policy, has argued for the importance of including natural resource issues in peace processes when they are seen as root causes of conflict (Mason, Sguaitamatti, and Gröbli 2016; UNEP 2009; Guterres 2018; Magalhães Teixeira 2021a). Negotiating natural resources in peace agreements can serve to address conflict-related issues such as redistribution, access, and control of natural resources, as well as to establish new policy frameworks and institutions capable of promoting equitable resource management in order to foster

economic development and prevent the recurrence of conflict (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beever 2018).

However, the field has been strongly critiqued for being too deductive and theory-driven (Ide et al. 2021) and theorized claims are backed by insufficient empirical evidence (Dresse et al. 2018; Ide 2020). While EPB mechanisms are vague enough to allow room for adaptation to specific contexts and at different scales, it has become difficult to assess its explanatory strength, given that mechanisms are poorly specified (Johnson, Rodríguez, and Quijano Hoyos 2021; Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021). Thus, this paper is guided by the question of *how the inclusion of natural resources in peace agreements affects the sustainability of post-conflict peace*. It aims to contribute to the literature on environmental peacebuilding by testing claims and further developing a theoretical understanding of how natural resource provisions are negotiated in peace agreements and how they contribute to the sustainability of post-conflict peace. To do this, I combine parameters from the peace agreement literature into EPB's framework to assess not only whether natural resources are included in peace negotiations but *how*.

In this sense, this study aims to fill theoretical, methodological, and empirical gaps. Theoretically, it deepens the understanding of the processes and pathways that connect natural resources as catalysts of sustainable peace. Methodologically, it provides the framework for empirically assessing the theoretical claims of environmental peacebuilding in a systematic and rigorous manner. Empirically, it applies the framework of assessment to the case of Guatemala, focusing on the issue of land. By analyzing new empirical material collected through fieldwork in Guatemala in 2022, the empirical strategy aims to provide insights into how the framework can be used and how it can help further theorize how natural resources are important for sustaining post-conflict peace.

The analysis shows that not only do EPB's mechanisms need further development, but the entire framework requires a critical transformation. The results from this study echo critical voices in the field that call on EPB to move away from neoliberal paradigms that reduce environmental and social issues to mere economic value and potential revenues (Bliesmann de Guevara, Budny, and Kostić 2023; Magalhães Teixeira 2024). These paradigms reinforce a capitalist, growth-oriented mentality that fails to address the root causes of conflict and inequality, exacerbates climate change, and perpetuates cycles of violence and oppression. In order to achieve sustainable peace, EPB must adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes justice, equity, and environmental sustainability through a normative commitment to addressing historical inequalities and ensuring that peacebuilding efforts lead to long-lasting positive outcomes for marginalized communities.

The land question – cause of conflict and catalyst for peace?

Land inequality and lack of access to land are major causes of internal armed conflicts (Thomson 2016) and have been central to most natural resource conflicts since the 1970s (NRPA Dataset). Historically tied to colonialism, land inequality is linked to various forms of inequality, including wealth, power, gender, health, and the environment (Cramer and Richards 2011). It contributes to global crises such as democratic decline, climate change, pandemics, mass migration, unemployment, and intergenerational injustice (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020).

Land inequality is also closely related to political inequality, which undermines democracy as powerful actors benefiting from land inequality can control or subvert efforts toward fairer redistribution (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). These inequalities often manifest as violence, threats, and repression toward land and environmental defenders who face physical violence, including murder and assault, as well as legal harassment and criminalization aimed at silencing their advocacy (Global Witness 2020;

Navas, Mingorria, and Aguilar-González 2018). In this context, violence is used as a means for social control and for dominating labor, as well as for coercing people away from democratic participation (Kay 2007).

Globalization and large-scale land acquisitions, or 'land grabs' often for agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure projects, are legitimized in the name of economic development (Le Billon and Lujala 2020; Thomson 2011). They frequently disregard local land rights and customary tenure systems, leading to forced evictions and displacement of communities (Dell'Angelo et al. 2017). As global demand for natural resources grows, so does the pressure on land, intensifying conflicts and endangering land defenders (Balestri and Maggioni 2021; Scheidel et al. 2020). The involvement of powerful international actors adds a layer of complexity and impunity, as local governments, eager for foreign investment, often turn a blind eye to the violence perpetrated against those who resist these projects (Wegenast and Schneider 2017).

However, land inequality also negatively impacts economic growth, particularly in less developed countries, by leading to excessive land concentration and perpetuating inequality and dependence (Cipollina, Cuffaro, and D'Agostino 2018). It also harms the environment, linking large land inequality to higher deforestation rates (Ceddia 2019). Large-scale industrial farming exacerbates climate change by threatening the sustainable practices of small-scale farmers and Indigenous peoples through evictions, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and excessive resource pressure (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). Consequently, land defenders face increased risks of assassination, physical attacks, and legal persecution as they challenge powerful economic interests that benefit from land accumulation (Scheidel et al. 2023).

The field of environmental peacebuilding has increasingly focused on integrating land issues into peacebuilding processes, recognizing the centrality of land to the onset of

conflicts and the potential to serve as a catalyst for sustainable peace. Literature in EPB advocates for the need to include land issues in peace negotiations as a way of addressing root causes of conflict through land redistribution, securing tenure rights, and ensuring equitable access to land resources (Unruh and Williams 2013). This approach not only seeks to rectify historical grievances but also aims to prevent future conflicts by fostering inclusive and just land governance (Mason, Sguaitamatti, and Gröbli 2016; Magalhães Teixeira 2021a). Including land allocation and land reform provisions in peace agreements has been shown to have a positive impact on the duration of post-conflict peace (Binningsbø and Rustad 2012; Keels and Mason 2019; Magalhães Teixeira 2022).

Addressing land issues during the peace process can be one of the most important aspects of post-conflict stabilization. Beyond being a root cause of conflict, access to land is also crucial to meeting some of the most basic needs, such as shelter and sustenance. Land is also central to providing livelihoods and food security for conflict-affected populations (Unruh and Williams 2013). In this sense, negotiating land issues in peace processes is not only necessary to address root causes of conflict but is also imperative to generate livelihoods, foster good governance, and promote economic recovery essential for sustainable development.

Since 1946, peace agreements have been the most common mechanism for ending internal armed conflicts (Kreutz 2010). The international community favors peace agreements for their potential to address the root causes of conflicts, include diverse actors, promote reconciliation, and establish frameworks for sustainable peace. However, peace agreements have a high failure rate, with 35% failing within the first five years⁸, which is even higher for natural resources conflicts. Given the fragility of

⁸ Calculated using data from the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset v 22.1 (Pettersson, Högladh, and Öberg 2019)

peace processes, previous studies have argued that land issues are highly complex, and mediators should avoid including them in peace negotiations so as to not create opportunities for spoilers (Walter 1999; Stedman 1997). However, Rustad and Binninsbø (2012) argue that this high failure rate is due to peace agreements often failing to address the root causes of conflict related to natural resources.

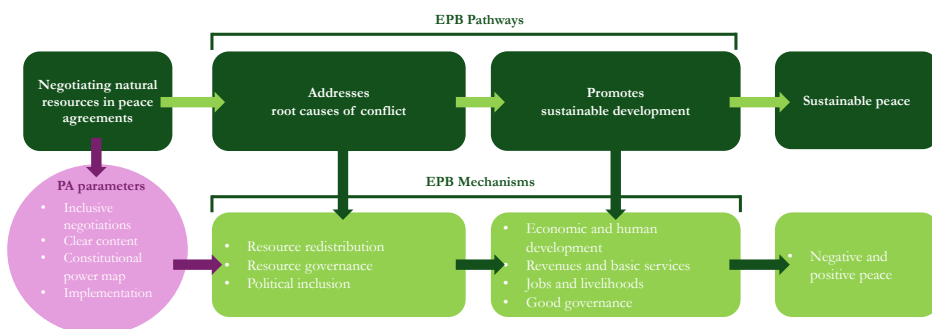
A significant criticism of peace agreements is that they often focus too much on the symptoms of conflict, such as violence and security while neglecting the underlying root causes (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008). Effective peace agreements should aim to resolve the armed conflict and promote future cooperation, not just cease hostilities. Provisions for natural resources should address the root causes of conflict and establish new ways to manage, distribute, and access these resources in the future. This underscores the importance of including natural resource issues in negotiations, as peace agreements are vital for societies emerging from armed conflict and pave the way for sustainable peace.

However, one significant shortcoming in the EBP theory is the lack of meaningful discussion about *how* natural resources issues are addressed in peace agreements, and not only a focus on whether they are addressed or not. It is essential to recognize that merely mentioning natural resources as root causes of conflict and acknowledging the need to address them in order to move forward into peace is insufficient. Without a clear roadmap outlining concrete strategies on how to solve issues related to access, control, and distribution of resources, the peace agreements' effectiveness in fostering sustainable peace remains elusive.

From peace agreements to sustainable peace? An integrated framework

In this study, I propose a new framework that introduces critical parameters for assessing the quality and durability of peace agreements and their ability to address root causes of conflict and promote sustainable development. The parameters of inclusivity in the negotiation process, the clarity of the provisions, the provision of a roadmap, and clear instructions for their implementation are crucial factors for the sustainability of post-conflict peace. These parameters coming from the peace agreement literature provide a detailed guideline for evaluating peace agreements, ensuring that they are not only inclusive of natural resources issues, but also comprehensively address them. The proposed framework is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Proposed framework



The first row in the model reflects EPB's theoretical claims, showcasing the overall framework: the negotiation of natural resources in peace agreements is argued to address root causes of conflict, which then allows for conditions that promote sustainable development, which is essential for building sustainable peace (Conca and Beevers 2018; Dresse et al. 2018). The second row in the model represents the disaggregation, or operationalization, of these broad theoretical claims and breaks them down into specific, actionable mechanisms, which are essential for the implementation

of EPB's pathways (Johnson, Rodríguez, and Quijano Hoyos 2021). The concept of sustainable peace is here conceptualized to account for a spectrum that ranges from negative peace - as the absence of violence - to positive peace - as the inconceivability of the use of violence (Ide et al. 2021). This nuanced view underscores EPB's commitment to not only stopping conflict but also to fostering an environment of justice, equality, and inclusivity.

Here, I also introduce parameters to assess the quality of peace agreements, which I have identified through previous research on the topic. First, successful peace agreements are often crafted through inclusive negotiations, where not only the conflicting parties have a seat at the table, but a larger representative portion of civil society is also included in order to affirm the legitimacy of the process (Nilsson 2012). Second, the content of peace agreements is crucial for their success or failure. Peace agreements need to have clear and structured language that can serve as a roadmap for post-conflict transition. Vague and ambiguous documents can hinder implementation and lead to conflict recurrence due to frustration over unclear guidelines (Maina 2015). Conversely, clearly articulated and structured agreements act as a historical milestone between warring parties, facilitating the transition from violence to peace and managing expectations. However, peace agreements are not absolute; significant renegotiations over terms or specific provisions are likely in the post-agreement phase. It is not only necessary for provisions to be realistic and desirable by the conflicting parties during the negotiation but also achievable during implementation.

Third, the peace agreement should outline the strength and structure of institutions in the post-conflict phase, effectively providing a 'constitutional power map'. Bell (2003) suggests this map should delineate government agencies, societal institutions, and the relationship between the people and the state. Strong peace agreements with clear institutional frameworks address past inequalities and grievances, fostering a more just

and equitable society. They serve as pivotal moments for societal transformation by stipulating new institutions and regulating the relationship between individuals, the state, and their expectations. This ability to shape institutions and regulate societal contracts offers the greatest opportunity for building lasting peace after armed conflict. If existing institutions and societal structures contribute to conflict, transforming them becomes imperative to prevent future conflicts. Therefore, resolving armed conflict is not enough; it is crucial to reshape societal structures from conflict-prone to peace-oriented.

Finally, beyond making sure natural resources are adequately addressed in peace agreements, it is also necessary to ensure their full implementation. The degree of implementation of peace agreements has greater explanatory power than the mere presence of these provisions in the texts (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008), and it has significant long-term effects on post-conflict peace duration. Implementing peace agreements can break the cycle of conflict by normalizing political relationships, solving credible commitment problems, and reducing information uncertainties (Joshi and Quinn 2015). Thus, it is not only important to include natural resource provisions in peace agreements, but also to implement these provisions in order to realize their benefits for peace.

While previous studies have focused on developing the mechanisms connected to EPB's pathways, the framework proposed here has integrated parameters from the peace agreement literature to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how natural resources are not only acknowledged as conflict drivers but are also addressed in ways that promote long-term peace, justice, and sustainability. This approach seeks to identify whether provisions in the peace agreement already address how conflict-prone structures can be transformed into peaceful and equitable systems in order to address historical inequalities and ensure sustainable development and peace. By introducing

these parameters into the overarching EPB framework, I aim to provide the tools for empirically assessing the mechanisms that can address root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace through addressing natural resource provisions in peace agreements. Here, the parameters serve as an early warning sign that indicates whether the warring parties and other participating actors are fully committed to the transformations necessary for building sustainable peace by already setting out the pathways for their implementation.

Research design

Guatemala presents an interesting case study due to the central role of land issues in both the onset and resolution of its armed conflict. Guatemala was also selected based on a predictive model using data from the Natural Resources in Peace Agreements Dataset (NRPA), which indicated a high risk of conflict recurrence post-1996 Peace Accords. Yet, Guatemala has maintained nearly 30 years of peace. This study aims to advance understanding of EPB's pathways and mechanisms, proposing a deeper theoretical approach to addressing natural resources issues in peace agreements. Hence, the study employs a case study, given its natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature (Gerring 2004).

However, this study views land conflicts in Guatemala not just as a case but as an opportunity to explore the interaction of global structures with local dynamics. Land conflicts and inequality are seen as outcomes of complex interactions between domestic and international actors, shaped by their interests, ideologies, and asymmetric power relations (Riofrancos 2021). Thus, Guatemala is approached not as a homogenous case but as a *site* for observing broader processes of general theoretical interest (Soss 2022). The choice to study land conflicts and peacebuilding in Guatemala also incorporates feminist reflexivity, considering practicalities like language skills, travel prospects, familiarity, identity, and personal connections to the site (Nagar 2014).

Data was generated mainly through fieldwork, which consisted of in-depth site visits and participant observation, as well as semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. Fieldwork was conducted in September 2022 in diverse sites across Guatemala, from institutional offices in the capital and in Antigua to Indigenous and campesino territories in the provinces of Sololá and Alta Verapaz. Participants in the semi-structured interviews were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, and fieldwork was done in deliberative collaboration with partners, embedding the research design in their ongoing efforts for land and peace in Guatemala (Brigden and Hallett 2020; Anctil Avoine 2022). During fieldwork, I followed different peasant and Indigenous organizations working with land issues, environmental protection, and construction of peace, such as CONGCOOP (Coordinación de ONG y Cooperativas), CODECA (Comité de Desarrollo Campesino), IMAP (Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura), and CCDA (Comité Campesino del Altiplano). The aim of the interviews was to understand how the issue of land has developed in the aftermath of the peace accords and whether it has contributed to building peace through the view of the people most affected by the conflict and by land inequality.

Based on a feminist research ethic, I understand that while I am interpreting the information and knowledge produced by formal interviews and informal communication, the research participants are also themselves interpreting and analyzing their social world and reality (Ackerly and True 2020). After a careful discussion about the possible risks of participation in the study, we decided to openly name the research participants in order to correctly attribute the origin of their own concepts, theorizations, and analyses (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). The research participants named in this study are all public figures, community leaders, and/or local politicians who work with land issues and peacebuilding in their everyday lives. Research participants who did not feel comfortable with this practice have remained anonymous.

In total, I carried out 18 interviews and participated in 8 different activities with the partner organizations.

Fieldwork data is complemented by analyzing important documents from the Government of Guatemala, the UN agencies connected to the negotiation process, as well as several different reports produced by the government and by other organizations on the question of land, environmental conflicts, and sustainable peace in Guatemala. The empirical material presented in this study reflects the process of land politics and renegotiations in post-accord Guatemala as it unfolds. I use thematic analysis to cluster the different topics that came up during the interviews together with the different mechanisms presented in the framework in relation to the parameters from the peace agreement literature and the pathways from the environmental peacebuilding framework (Terry et al. 2017). As a result, the analysis tests the theoretical framework of environmental peacebuilding and its capacity to explain and reflect the multiple and complex reality of addressing the root causes of conflicts and promoting sustainable peace while also providing new insights for further theory development.

Assessing the Peace Agreement and Negotiations

In this section, the content and structure of the peace agreement will be analyzed following the framework introduced, focusing on parameters from the peace agreement literature - inclusive negotiations, clear content, constitutional power map, and implementation - in relation to their ability to address land inequality issues at the roots of the conflict.

Inclusive negotiations

The formal negotiations of the Agreement on Socio-economic Aspects of the Agrarian Situation (1996) between the Government of Guatemala and the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca) lasted over a year and involved diverse actors, including warring parties, civil society organizations, and representatives of the business owner's class and landowning elite (CACIF). The United Nations mediated the process, partnering closely with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As a result of this mix of divergent forces pulling in various, mostly conflicting directions toward peace, the Socio-Economic Accord ended up being the lengthiest and the most contentious part of the peace agreement to negotiate.

The push for peace negotiations initially came from Guatemalan civil society organized under the National Reconciliation Committee. By 1994, grassroots popular and Indigenous movements viewed the peace process as a platform to address issues that were neglected in the formal political arena and demanded their participation in the peace talks. During the agenda-setting meeting, Indigenous, peasant, and women organizations joined forces with established political parties and small and medium businesses to form the Civil Society Assembly, which became central in proposing negotiation topics. Though their proposals were non-binding, they could not be ignored, prompting the government and army to use psychological warfare to intimidate the popular movement (Jonas 2000).

Civil society significantly contributed to the agreements on human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples. However, the accord on the agrarian situation did not reflect the proposals from Indigenous and peasant communities and was strongly criticized by the popular movements (Rosada 1996). While the peace agreement acknowledged widespread land access and poverty issues, it did not propose a national land reform or constitutional reform to include the 'social function of land'. Instead, it focused on

agrarian modernization and market-assisted land redistribution programs to improve peasants' access to land ownership.

In a conversation with Leocadio Juracán⁹, an Indigenous Maya Kaqchikel and director of CCDA who participated in the peace process consultations, he recounted the peasant movement's contribution called *The Democratization of the Use, Tenure, and Ownership of Land*. This proposal aimed to transform land ownership and accumulation structures for more equitable distribution, reclaiming land acquired in what he called “anomalous and wrongful ways” by the military and landed elites before and during the conflict. However, Leocadio emphasized that the negotiating parties were unwilling to accept such transformative changes due to the government's role in illegal land accumulation and the increased influence of businesses and landowning elites in the peace process.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as observers, also influenced the land issue in the peace agreement. An anonymous CCDA member¹⁰ highlighted the immense international pressure to finalize the negotiations, emphasizing market-assisted land reform, which the World Bank was rolling out at the time in Latin America. He recalled that no one had any illusions that the accord would directly improve people's lives - even though there were clear and straightforward proposals from affected peasant and indigenous communities. The lack of substantial engagement with the people's proposals already revealed a fundamental flaw in the design of the peace negotiations, indicating that the government and its supporters were not willing to commit to the structural transformations necessary for the just distribution of land in Guatemala. Ultimately, the Civil Society Assembly was reluctant to endorse the final accord and only did so two months after it was signed.

⁹ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

¹⁰ Interview 13, 22nd of September 2022.

Clear content

Jonas (2000) reports that the component dealing with the agrarian question was the weakest or softest of the Guatemalan Peace Accords documents. Given the elusive and complex issue of land, and the great influence of the business and land-owning elites in the peace process, negotiating a transformative land reform in the peace agreement was politically unfeasible. Instead, the accord provided for the creation of a land trust fund – Fontierras - from which land would be acquired by the government and made available to landless peasants at low prices. It clearly specified that the focus would be on lands that had been given out or held irregularly (by army generals and government officials) during the armed conflict, uncultivated state lands, land acquired through government resources for the National Land Fund and the National Peace Fund, land acquired through loans from international financial agencies. The accord did specify the possibility of expropriating private unused lands, but only within the parameters of the already existing legal framework. However, without a constitutional reform stipulating the social function of land, the legal basis for land expropriations was extremely limited.

Regarding social and economic development, the accord committed the government to prioritize development, emphasizing mechanisms for broader citizen participation, especially of women. It also set specific targets for increasing social spending on education, health, social security, housing, and 6 percent annual economic growth. It committed the government to enforce existing labor laws, especially regarding rural workers, and to recognize new unions. However, it did not have a clear program for addressing unemployment, only for creating vocational training. Finally, the accord committed the government to raise the ratio of tax-to-GDP by 50 percent since Guatemala had the lowest ratio in Latin America. While there were no clearly specified tax measures and changes in regulations, the accord called for a “fair, equitable, and on

the whole progressive” tax system (Government of Guatemala and URNG 1996, 26). Overall, while the Socio-economic Accords had considerably ambitious targets for improving the socioeconomic situation of the country, the intentions were stronger than the clarity of the mechanisms laid out, and this is in part because a lot of changes required constitutional reform.

Constitutional power map

More than ending the 30 years of armed conflict, the peace agreement was seen as a democratizing experience for Guatemala. The peace process compelled the government and ruling elites to engage with historically marginalized populations, such as Indigenous and campesino movements. Although it did not achieve structural transformation, it established basic reform that could pave the way for future long-term changes. The democratization process opened more political participation, allowing Indigenous and campesino leaders to engage in national politics and broadening the forms of political mobilization. The peace accords committed to local municipal autonomy, leading to the creation of civic committees that won significant mayoralities in the 1995 elections, for example. Indigenous traditions of community democracy and customary law were also incorporated into the development of the democratic project in post-accord Guatemala.

The demilitarization of Guatemalan society and the reform of the judicial system, along with the institutionalization of Indigenous cultural, civil, and human rights, were imperative for solidifying the process of democratization. Many of the research participants shared that one of the most important successes of the peace agreement was that now they were able to openly talk about land issues and political questions without fear of repression. The process of democratization not only ensured the ability of contesting social and political groups to participate in the political life of the country, but it also allowed for the freedom of organization and resistance. This, of course, is

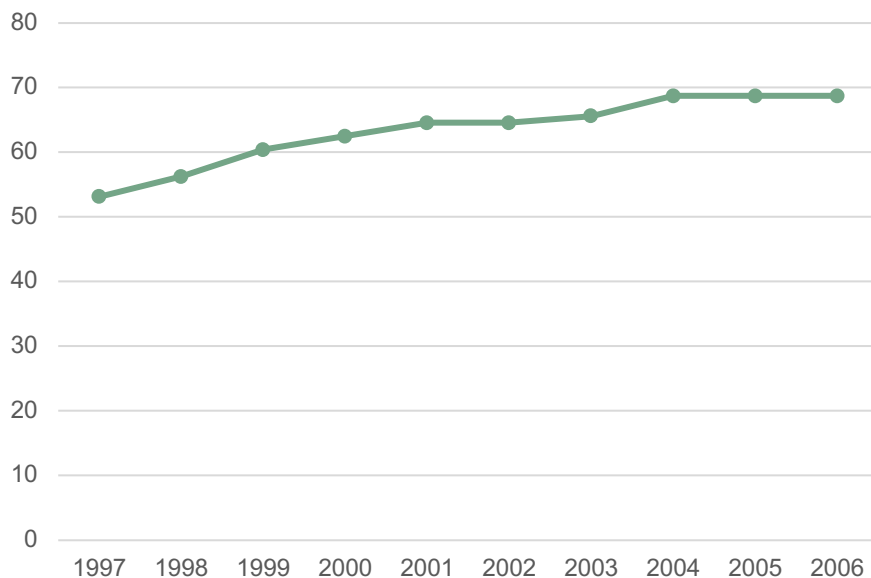
not a victory of an institutionalized process but of the strength of the social movements in claiming that space during and after the peace negotiations.

However, provisions in the peace agreement requiring post-accord constitutional reform were among the most contentious, particularly tax reform, which revealed “systemic obstacles to deep change in Guatemala and the workings of a dysfunctional state”¹¹. Tax reform, as agreed during the peace negotiations, was crucial for implementing the peace agreement by providing internal financing for the process and was supposed to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio from 8% in 1996 to 12% by 2000. At the time, Guatemala had the lowest tax ratio in Latin America (20% average) and lower than most developing countries globally (14% average). In 1997-1998, the government proposed a property tax reform directed at large landowners. However, the government made no effort to explain the law to the population or to counter misinformation campaigns from the political and economic elite (Jonas 2000).

Protests against this property tax reform sparked across the country, with even Indigenous and campesino movements against it. While a large portion of the population had been misguided about how they would be affected by such reform, some organizers argued that this property tax reform was beneficial only to the national government to the detriment of the local authorities and would weaken municipal autonomy, which was gained through the peace agreement. Ultimately, the President then repealed the proposed law reform, which many saw as a sign of political defeat and inability to provide the constitutional reforms necessary for the implementation of the peace agreement.

¹¹ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

Figure 2. Aggregate Implementation Score of Guatemalan Peace Accords



Source: Peace Accords Matrix

Implementation

In the case of Guatemala, the highest rate of implementation of the peace accords was in 2006, as shown in Figure 2 above, when it reached 68,75%. Provisions that saw full implementation were connected to disarmament, demobilization, amnesty, and reintegration of former combatants, the ceasefire, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The overall implementation of the peace agreement rested largely on the constitutional reform needed for increasing taxes, which stipulated that the government of Guatemala should be able to self-finance the implementation of the accords and guarantee their financial feasibility. Since tax reform became impossible, so did the implementation of the provisions that depended on this reform.

Provisions like constitutional reform, media reform, official language and symbols, implementation timelines, and natural resource management showed minimal implementation scores after the peace accords. The government of Guatemala established a coordinating agency and the National Land Fund (Fontierras) to address land access, but these institutional channels have been ineffective in redistributing land to Indigenous and campesino peoples. As members from CONGCOOP¹² have shared, Fontierras' mandate to regulate and promote land access has been slow and insufficient, meeting only a fraction of the current demand. "We get one or two farms per year...out of 2500 in demand. At this pace, we need more than 1000 years to meet current demand". Land redistribution is hindered by the lack of implementation of other provisions, such as tax reform. Without land and property taxes, there are no legal or economic incentives for large landowners to sell idle land. This reveals an inherent flaw in the neoliberal model of market-assisted land reform, which relies on economic incentives that are not provided by their own program (Mendes Pereira 2021; Gauster and Isakson 2007).

Leocadio Juracán¹³ explained that this reflects the government's lack of faith in the "spirit of the accords". He said:

"the problem is that in this regard we want deep changes and that the spirit of the accords be applied. But in truth, we have never governed after the signing of the peace agreements. And the people that have been governing do not believe in the spirit of the accords, only in their own interests".

¹² Informal conversation 1, 10th September 2022.

¹³ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

In this sense, while important provisions that addressed the physical manifestations of conflict were implemented, the more structural causes of conflict were left behind. This jeopardizes the post-conflict context's ability to address the root causes of conflict, provide the foundations for sustainable development, and build sustainable peace.

Assessing EPB's pathways and mechanisms

As seen above, the negotiations and the peace agreement provisions did not provide a transformative approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and even the mechanisms for achieving the limited goals were not well specified, which led to implementation problems. While it established a set of basic reforms, it opened society to the possibility of future changes by providing a democratic space for political participation. The application of the framework shows that there are many shortcomings in the peace negotiation process that are highly likely to affect EPB's mechanisms meant to address root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace. In this section, the outcomes of the peace agreement and its impact will be analyzed following the EPB's mechanisms, with the aim of showing how they are affected by the structure and content of the peace negotiations.

Root causes

Identifying the root causes of armed conflicts is complex due to their structural, historical, and multi-layered nature. In Guatemala, land is central to both armed conflict and ongoing struggles. Land is an active organizational aspect of life for campesino and Indigenous communities, and many economic, social, political, and cultural rights are linked with the question of land. As Lesbia Artola¹⁴, an Indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' member of CCDA in Alta Verapaz, explained: "All rights are intertwined with the land," especially for Indigenous communities that have been stewards of their

¹⁴ Interview 19, 26th of September 2022.

territories for centuries, their existence is tied to their land. The armed conflict in Guatemala has its roots in the “dispossession and the exploitation, the marginalization, the exclusion, the abandonment, and the racism that there is in Guatemala,” affirmed Imelda Teyul¹⁵, an Indigenous Maya Q’eqch’i member of CCDA Alta Verapaz. In this sense, to address the root causes of conflict, it is necessary to deal with the intersections of resource, economic, social, cultural, and political inequality.

Resource redistribution

Despite nearly 30 years since the peace agreement, Guatemala remains one of the most unequal countries regarding land distribution (Bauluz, Govind, and Novokmet 2020). During the peace negotiations, land ownership and distribution were addressed through market-assisted land reform (MALR), influenced by structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and IMF in the 1990s-2000s. MALR aimed to address land inequality via market-based approaches rather than traditional state-led expropriation and redistribution. This method sought to make land reform more politically feasible by using the market to correct distortions in the distribution of land from large landowners to small farmers (Mendes Pereira 2021).

Unlike traditional land reform, MALR is based on the voluntary sale of land by landowners to the government or directly to the beneficiaries at negotiated market prices, avoiding political resistance and legal battles linked to compulsory expropriations, like what happened with the 1952 land reform and the subsequent coup against Árbenz (Handy 1994; Gleijeses 1989). This strategy is designed to work within existing trade laws, whereas expropriations require the constitutional principles of ‘the social function of land’, which allows for the expropriation of unproductive land.

¹⁵ Interview 18, 25th of September 2022.

Although this principle was part of the 1950s land reform, it was blocked during the 1990s peace negotiations.

Without constitutional backing for expropriations and a strong property tax to incentivize landowners to sell unproductive land, the efficacy of MALR is extremely limited. Landowners lack economic incentives to sell land, which leads to inflated prices that beneficiaries cannot afford, even with government financing. Plus, the program's voluntary nature results in the sale of low-quality lands, limiting peasants' success in commercial and subsistence crops and their ability to repay loans. In a country where dependence on the agricultural sector is extremely high, this has further economic impacts as many peasants either move to urban areas or emigrate because of tough conditions. In this sense, this approach is not only not able to address the root causes of conflict in Guatemala, but it also creates other problems that make sustainable development and peace far-reaching. This illustrates the depoliticization of environmental conflicts that EPB must avoid if it aims at addressing the root causes of conflicts and not only their superficial manifestations.

When asked about this topic, Leocadio Juracán¹⁶ from CCDA shared that during his time in the national congress, government members dismissed his proposals for land reform by arguing that it is no longer relevant to the country. The creation of Fontierras and the administration of the MALR are supposed to have addressed this issue. However, he criticizes the highly financialized approach of the MALR and its relation to the historical inequality and conflict in the country:

“it is not enough that they have massacred us, dispossessed us, and on top of that, now we go into debt to buy, to

¹⁶ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

acquire the land... now the campesinos go into debt to rent this land, to manage it, to cultivate it, to improve it and increase its value...and the campesino is rewarded by getting into debt... this will not help advance the underdevelopment of the indigenous and campesino populations. But this is the agrarian situation in Guatemala now”.

In essence, none of the research participants believed that the structural resource inequality in Guatemala had been addressed, not even minimally. They often referred to a “fourth wave of conflict and dispossession” since the peace accords. Giovanni Batz (2022), in his work with the Ixil people, theorizes four types of invasions experienced by the Guatemalan people: the colonial invasion and genocide; the dispossession of land, farm economy, and forced labor; the military government, the genocide, and the armed struggle; and the current land-grabs and dispossession of Indigenous and campesino communities for development projects.

Batz (2022) argues that the peace agreement failed to promote necessary structural changes to address historical marginalization and inequality. Instead, it led to neoliberalization and privatization of social services, expanded laws for mining and monoculture, and the Free Trade Agreement with the US in 2005. The focus on development projects to attract foreign direct investment has resulted in this fourth wave of dispossession and conflict. As he affirms, “the megaprojects are the continuation of a colonial logic of extraction based in the dispossession and destruction of the territory of Indigenous peoples” (Batz 2022, 6). In this sense, the peace agreements not only failed to address the root causes of conflict but also created new avenues for conflict and violence to spread throughout the country.

Image 1. Sign at the entrance of an Indigenous peasant community in Alta Verapaz



The sign reads: “Organized peasants. We want land. No to war”. Next to it is the flag of CCDA.

This is in line with what Lesbia Artola¹⁷ from CCDA in Alta Verapaz stressed, namely that in the last 10-15 years, the rural conflicts have been not only about the land, but also about the natural resources like the minerals, the forests, and the rivers. She said that the work of CCDA has turned to support environmentalists and land defenders “who defend their territory and are precisely the ones being criminalized by the state so that it can take them out of the way and keep dispossessing them of all natural resources.” Speaking on the same topic, Leocadio Juracán¹⁸ added that while there has been no recurrence of armed conflict, the signing of the peace accords only served to disarm the guerrilla so that the people would be defenseless. He said that “the only way

¹⁷ Interview 19, 26th of September 2022.

¹⁸ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

to do this is by tricking us with the signing of the peace accords so that the army can be free to the massacre, and to intimidate, and to neutralize the civil population that struggles to defend their territory and their life.”

Resource governance

In a context of increased tension over not only land but also other natural resources, the issue of resource governance is incredibly contentious. Besides Fontierras, the peace agreements also stipulated the creation of a government agency capable of overseeing agrarian questions. The Department of Agrarian Affairs was created to strengthen land ownership and to participate in conciliatory solutions regarding land possession and ownership rights. Through the institutionalization of this agency, the Indigenous and campesino population has had a legal mechanism to explore in their struggle to recuperate land. Lesbia Artola¹⁹ shared that an important work of CCDA in the last 20-15 years has been to carry out studies and expert reports on the historical registers of Indigenous and common land in Guatemala. This is then used to raise the issue to the Constitutional Court in Guatemala and show the different waves and instances of dispossession that different communities have faced throughout history.

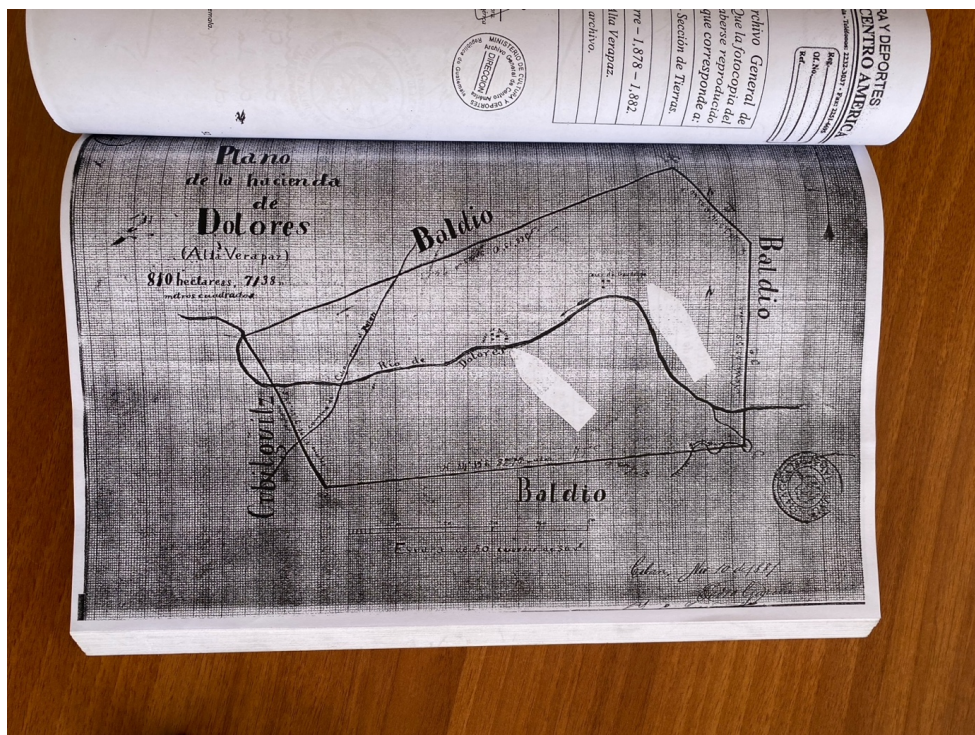
In the conversation with Lesbia, she recalled several resolutions favoring Indigenous land rights, such as in San Elena Samanzana II (CCDA 2021). During a visit to a Q'eqch'i community by the River Dolores in Alta Verapaz²⁰, village women shared their history of protecting their territory. They recounted that their community had fled their ancestral lands to nearby mountains during the armed conflict due to military scorched-earth tactics aimed at defeating the guerrilla and destroying Indigenous villages and their history. The women recounted that the Q'eqch'i community returned to their ancestral lands only after hearing about the signing of the peace process in the

¹⁹ Interview 19, 26th of September 2022.

²⁰ Group interview 16, 25th of September 2022.

radio. However, they discovered that powerful landowners had claimed their lands and reported their resettlement as illegal occupation.

Image 2. Expert report prepared to claim historical Indigenous rights to threatened lands



This map from November 1881 shows the 'Dolores Farm' in Alta Verapaz, which covers 810 hectares. The two white arrows point to the historical locations of two Indigenous Q'eqch'i communities by the River Dolores.

Imelda Teyul²¹ explained that in all the studies and reports put together by CCDA, no historical trace or official document stating private ownership of the disputed lands was found. She noted that whenever they have challenged the supposed landowner to show their ownership documents, they have failed to do so. Unfortunately, the

²¹ Interview 18, 25th of September 2022.

institutionalization of land and natural resources has been historically in favor of the landowning elite and against the constitutional rights of Indigenous peoples. At that time, out of 70 community members, 25 of them had orders of capture issued by government security forces, as they were supposedly illegal occupiers of those lands. All 25 of them were women, as most men from the community had already been jailed, killed, or forcefully displaced. In the talks about that situation²², the women shared their anxiety and fear of being captured by the police or private militias, especially because they had been left in charge of the communities on top of their traditional caregiver roles.

In 2020, amidst rising violence and threats against environmental and land defenders, the government closed the Department of Agrarian Affairs, increasing institutional obstacles for Indigenous people to claim their historical lands. They also shut down the Presidential Commission of Human Rights and launched the *Observatory for the Rights of Private Property*, a government agency working closely with the private sector to defend private property rights. An anonymous member of CCDA²³ linked the observatory's creation to a fiscal mechanism prosecuting illegal usurpation of land. CCDA has since observed "greater criminalization, greater arrests. The law of the observatory is to search for the arguments and the prosecution is to enforce the arguments that are found". Adding to this, Leocadio Juracán²⁴ highlighted that post-conflict Guatemala's resource governance failed to meet the peace agreements' expectations, with significant Indigenous rights lost, reflecting their lack of participation in resource governance and affecting their ability to claim their territories and natural resources.

²² Group interview 16, 25th of September 2022.

²³ Group interview 17, 26th of September 2022.

²⁴ Participant observation, 22nd-24th of September 2022.

Political inclusion

While the peace accords provide for Indigenous participation, their political representation remains limited due to systemic barriers and discrimination. While some, like Leocadio Juracán, have been elected to Congress (2015-2019), their representation has been stronger at the local level. In 2022, preparing for the 2023 elections, I followed²⁵ Leocadio's efforts to mobilize local Indigenous and peasant leaders to run for office. In Alta Verapaz, we frequently changed transportation to avoid being followed or ambushed. During that time, Leocadio was intensely following a live stream from one association of landowners, falsely claiming an order of capture against him. He explained that this was a tactic used to spread fear and deter Indigenous and peasant organizers from political participation amid rising violence and repression in the past years²⁶.

The 2023 national elections took place amidst worsening corruption and repression against journalists, human rights activists, and environmental defenders. The Guatemalan Constitutional Court blocked candidates of the Movement for the Liberation of Peoples (MLP) party from running. Thelma, a Maya Mam environmental and human rights defender, ran for president in 2019 and received 10% of the vote (the winning candidate, Giammattei, got 14%). Jordán Rodas, previously a human rights prosecutor, exiled in 2022 due to persecution for his anti-corruption work. After the court decision, which was criticized for its legality, protests demanded their participation in the election. As told by one anonymous member of CODECA²⁷, Indigenous peoples of Guatemala have always denounced the corruption and cooptation of the state, which violates the rights of Indigenous peoples. They argued that individual cases of persecution and repression are a collective form of punishment for the rights to political participation of Indigenous people.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview 20, 27th of September 2022.

While Thelma and Jordan were not allowed to participate in the elections, Zury Ríos, daughter of Efraín Ríos Montt, the former military dictator later convicted in 2013 for his genocidal crimes during the armed conflict, was among the top contenders for Guatemala's presidency in 2023. Leocadio Juracán²⁸ stressed the “lack of historical memory” of the Guatemalan people and shared about this dissonance:

“we say we want change, but we keep the same corrupt people in power, so corruption will continue. We want change, but we keep the same *mafiosos* that have historically dispossessed us and our people... We criticize the role that the dad (Efraín Ríos Montt) had in the genocide, but we keep the daughter (Zury Ríos) in important places in the government”.

The 2023 election results bring hope for Guatemala. Bernardo Arévalo, son of the former president from the Guatemalan Revolution era (1944-1954), ran a strong anti-corruption campaign and won with a surprising 58% against the former first lady. However, a network of politicians, bureaucrats, and business elite along with the attorney-general, attempted what Arévalo called a ‘slow-motion coup’ to suspend his party’s legal status (Abbott 2024). This sparked national and international outrage, with Indigenous leaders organizing over 100 days of protests demanding respect for the election results and the attorney-general’s resignation. While Arévalo’s presidency is a victory against institutionalized corruption in Guatemala, significant challenges remain for strengthening democracy and ensuring equal political participation.

The analysis shows that the peace process in Guatemala has failed to address the historical root causes of conflict, reflected in the persistent economic, social, and

²⁸ Informal conversation 13, 23rd of September 2022.

political inequalities faced by Indigenous and campesino communities. This failure stems from the lack of substantial political participation of these communities in creating a transformative strategy for land reform. By not addressing these root causes, the prospects for sustainable development are very low, as it risks further exacerbating inequalities if the process remains misaligned with the people's needs. Without concerted efforts to include communities and address their concerns, peacebuilding attempts will likely be superficial and temporary, potentially deepening the disparities that fuel conflict and instability.

Sustainable development

While EPB's theoretical framework may not be entirely clear on the sequencing and causal direction, promoting sustainable development is dependent on addressing root causes of conflict in the first place. Historical economic, political, and social inequalities, particularly manifesting through land inequality, are foundational issues that, if left unaddressed, can severely hinder sustainable development efforts. This section analyzes the post-conflict efforts in Guatemala to promote sustainable development, referring to their connection to the root causes of conflict.

Economic and human development

Nearly 30 years after the peace agreement, Guatemala remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in Latin America, particularly affecting rural and Indigenous populations. The World Bank estimates that 55% of the population lives in deep poverty, with the informal economy accounting for 49% of GDP and employing 71% of the workforce. Guatemala has low human development scores, with a child malnutrition rate of 47%, one of the highest globally. The World Bank (2023) argues that “a small and ineffective state (with historically low tax revenue and low spending), persistent gaps in access to basic services, limited employment and productive

opportunities, and frequent disasters are some of the key factors that have contributed to poverty in Guatemala”.

Leocadio Juracán²⁹ also points out that development plans created in the aftermath of the peace accords were merely palliative:

“There were no serious programs and projects...that showed a decisive projection of the State to really make an investment and change the lives of the population. Actually, the programs that were created through the peace accords were used to politicize and generate greater dependence on the population because it is fertile ground for politicians who have total control of the State to continue manipulating and continuing to use a vulnerable population”.

After the signing of the peace accords, President Árzu’s government focused on attracting foreign direct investment by adopting neoliberal laws and policies and privatizing the energy, mining, and telecommunications sectors. This, coupled with a global rise in demand for electricity and metals, led to megaprojects that benefited international corporations but caused displacement, dispossession, and conflict for local communities (Batz 2022). An example is the communities along the River Dolores, who have been fighting against the expansion of hydroelectric power plants threatening their access to the river. Beyond its legal and economic value, the Indigenous community views the river as a sacred entity that should not be exploited and abused.

²⁹ Informal conversation 12, 22nd of September 2022.

Leocadio³⁰ affirms that this happens because there is a disconnect between the national and international strategy for development and growth and the type of development the Indigenous communities want and need.

“Guatemala doesn’t accept mining, Guatemala doesn’t accept big hydroelectric plants, Guatemala doesn’t need megaprojects, no... we have survived without this, so it is important to make a referendum to define our own model of development. Because currently, we have a model of development that is destructive, that aims to favor a reduced group of people at the cost of dispossession, pollution, destruction, and massacre of the majority of the population”.

Revenues and basic services

The neoliberal policies to attract foreign investment in extractive sectors aimed to generate significant revenue for economic development. However, mega-development projects have not benefited the Guatemalan population, especially the host communities. Zarsky and Stanley (2013) show that extractive industries yield negative ‘net benefits’, with low economic gains and human welfare improvements, while facing strong local resistance and posing high environmental risks. Since 1998, metal extraction has increased 1000% in Guatemala (Dougherty 2011), but the government receives only 42% of revenues, and local communities just 5%, far below global averages (Zarsky and Stanley 2013). Thus, rather than fostering economic and human development, the focus on extractive industries and megaprojects threatens the environment and the health and security of Indigenous communities.

³⁰ Informal conversation 12, 22nd of September 2022.

As members of the Indigenous Q'eqch'i community by the River Dolores shared³¹, “They want to block the river and sacrifice the river for electricity and energy and money, but we don't have any of that. They take all, and we get nothing, only the pollution left afterward”. CCDA members have explained that Guatemala is facing an extremely difficult economic, political, and social period with little government spending on basic services. Lesbia Artola³² emphasized the stark inequality in the country: while some neighborhoods in the capital appear developed, most villages in the “deep Guatemala”, as they call it, lack access to basic services like water, sanitation, hospital, and education.

They claimed the government avoids financing education programs to exploit the lack of knowledge among rural populations, including limited Spanish proficiency, to coerce them into giving consent for land use, taking advantage of their unfamiliarity with laws and rights. For example, interviews with the Indigenous Q'eqch'i community in Alta Verapaz required translation to Spanish by Imelda Teyul and Lesbia Artola. Although the peace accords committed the government to improving Indigenous education, emphasizing bilingual and intercultural education, inclusion of Indigenous languages and cultures, equitable access, and community involvement in educational planning, the quality of education remains low, especially in rural areas. This is due to limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and inconsistent policy implementation. Significant challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to quality education, underscoring the need for sustained investment to meet the accords' commitments.

³¹ Group interview 16, 25th of September 2022.

³² Interview 18, 26th of September 2022.

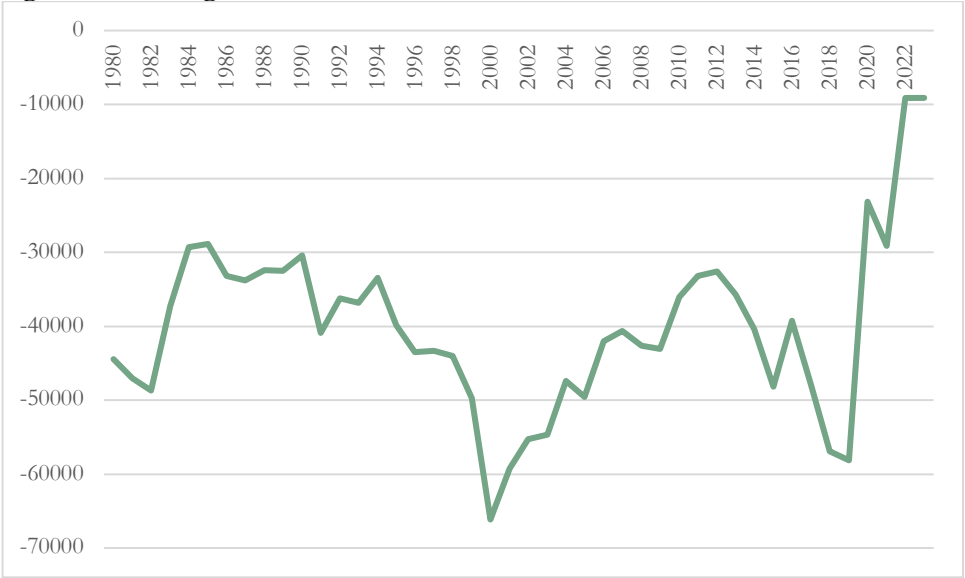
Image 3. The River Dolores



Jobs and livelihoods

The failure of the neoliberal land distribution program and the absence of tax reform severely affected people's access to jobs and their ability to sustain their livelihoods. The lack of access to productive land left peasants unable to support themselves and their families. Consequently, many were forced to move to cities with scarce job opportunities or emigrate, often illegally, to the United States. Figure 3 below shows Guatemala's net migration, highlighting that it surged during the armed conflict and has continued to worsen since the peace accords.

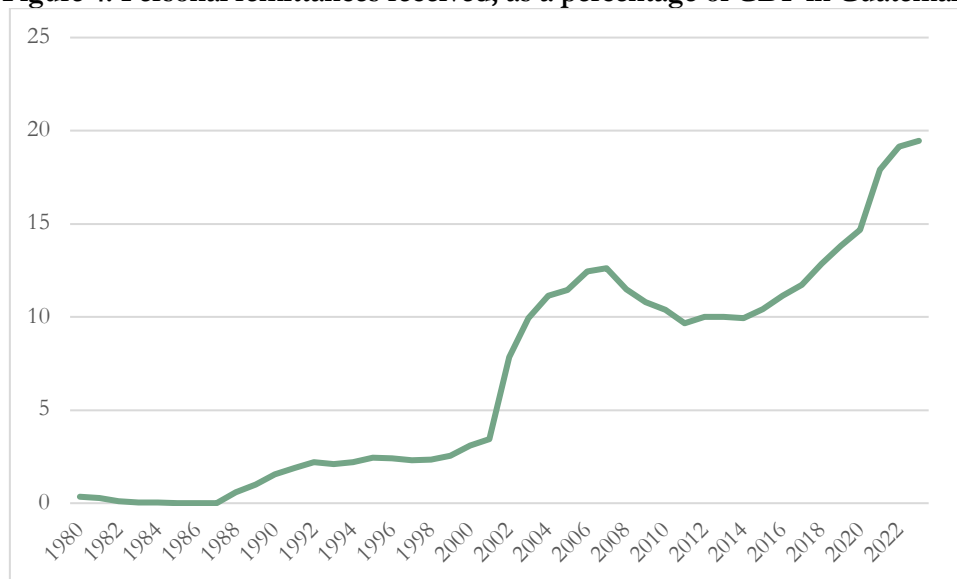
Figure 3. Net migration for Guatemala 1980-2023



Source: World Bank Data

As Guatemala’s economy has been historically reliant on the agricultural sector, this mass migration has led to a significant transformation of the composition of its GDP. Figure 4 below shows how Guatemala’s economy has grown a significant reliance on personal remittances from abroad, which constitute around 20% of its GDP. This significant reliance on the economic prosperity and job availability in other countries underscores the lack of domestic economic sovereignty over a substantial portion of its economy. Many Guatemalans depend on family members who have emigrated and secured employment abroad, highlighting the country’s vulnerability and its reliance on external factors to sustain its economy. This highlights the economic instability and the failure of domestic policies to create sustainable livelihoods and jobs for Guatemala’s rural population.

Figure 4. Personal remittances received, as a percentage of GDP in Guatemala



Source: World Bank Data

Good governance

Efforts to strengthen democratic institutions have been the focus of post-accord Guatemala. A significant milestone was the formation of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2007, in partnership with the United Nations. CICIG collaborated with Guatemalan prosecutors and police to dismantle state-criminal networks involving elite military, police, and death squad members. Their work revealed that leaders of the civil war counterinsurgency had transitioned into the criminal world, becoming key figures in large-scale violence (Trejo and Nieto-Matiz 2022). However, in 2019, the government terminated the agreement with the UN, accusing CICIG of illegal acts, abuse of authority, and constitutional violations. This decision, backed by the business elite, triggered an institutional crisis, even as the Constitutional Court ruled against it. The crisis occurred while CICIG was investigating then-President Jimmy Morales' campaign funding irregularities and exposing widespread illegal campaign finance in the country (Ávalos and Dudley 2018). The

government responded by sending the police to CICIG’s headquarters to escort staff away as their mandate ended (BBC 2019).

Several research participants³³ explained that the state of Guatemala has undergone a process of cooptation by corrupt political and economic elites. In 2019, CICIG showed that illegal bodies and clandestine security apparatus operate as illicit political-economic networks. These organizations have infiltrated various state entities and manipulated democratic institutions to their advantage, corrupting elections, political parties, and political participation mechanisms (CICIG 2019). Since then, Indigenous and campesino organizations have reported that even the minimal institutional spaces for claiming land and human rights have become ineffective. One member of CODECA³⁴ shared that the government has “used the laws and justice in a perverse way to obstruct and frustrate the Indigenous and campesino population from continuing with their procedures. So, practically, there have been some advances, but today, I believe, we have regressed enormously in the pursuit and fulfillment of the rights of Indigenous peoples”.

Civil society organizations report increased authoritarian measures by the government, including the alignment of the three branches of state, dismantling of public institutions, conservatism, militarization of civil life, and increased use of violence and repression (UDEFEQUA 2021). Civil society and grassroots movements have promoted good governance by holding the government accountable and pushing for reforms. However, political instability, weak institutions, and widespread human rights violations continue to undermine citizens’ trust in the government. The advance of megaprojects post-peace accords has highlighted significant governance failures,

³³ Informal conversations 1,2,13,15; interviews 10,11,18,19,20 – September 2022.

³⁴ Interview 10, 27th of September 2022.

particularly regarding the rights of Indigenous and peasant communities to their territories and institutional procedures to defend their rights.

As committed in the peace accords, Guatemala ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which promotes Indigenous rights to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). FPIC mandates that "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources" (UN 2007, 23). This means that Indigenous peoples should have the right to decide free of intimidation, manipulation, force, coercion, and pressure from the government, international companies, and other entities if they wish to give their consent or not. However, the state, supported by private companies, often ignores FPIC principles, criminalizes land and human rights defenders, and uses state forces to repress democratic and peaceful protests against development projects (Batz 2022; Wegenast and Schneider 2017). Ignoring FPIC is not unique to Guatemala; governments and companies worldwide have been shown to disregard this right, particularly in connection with extractive activities on Indigenous lands (Shenk 2022; Hanaček et al. 2022; Kurniawan et al. 2023; Samper and Krause 2024).

Research shows that extractive industries are most connected to killings of environmental and land defenders, with violence and repression intensifying significantly when Indigenous communities are at the front of these environmental conflicts (Le Billon and Lujala 2020; Global Witness 2021; Scheidel et al. 2023; Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024). Guatemala is one of the most dangerous countries for environmental and land defenders, with high levels of attacks against human rights defenders and journalists (UDEFEQUA 2021). Bernardo Caal Xól, an Indigenous Q'eqch'i teacher, was sentenced to prison in 2018 for protesting a hydroelectric plant

on the River Cahabón in Alta Verapaz. Amnesty International (2020) considers him a prisoner of conscience, as no factual evidence supported the charges against him.

In an informal conversation³⁵, he explained that the River Cahabón is sacred to the Q'eqch'i people. Climate change and irregular rain patterns have caused longer dry periods, affecting water access. Despite the region's water abundance, mining and electricity companies privatize water use, harming the community's livelihoods and their ability to protect the river. Due to the water crisis, migration from the region is high, exacerbated by harsh agricultural and economic conditions. Bernardo stated, "Predators only destroy; they do not care about life and do not respect life. And if we stand up for life, the system and companies imprison us".

This analysis demonstrates that it is impossible to promote sustainable development without first addressing historical inequalities that led to causes of conflict. Ignoring these foundational issues in favor of economic growth and the intensification of extractive industries can exacerbate inequalities and create new forms of conflict, violence, and injustice.

Sustainable peace...?

Since the signing of the peace agreements in 1996, Guatemala has continued to grapple with violence and conflict, albeit in different forms. The official end of the civil war did not bring an end to violence and instability; instead, the country faces ongoing challenges from organized crime, drug trafficking, and environmental conflicts. The legacy of the civil war, including widespread impunity and weak state institutions, has hindered effective governance and state capacity. Additionally, stark social and economic inequalities fuel further discontent and unrest, particularly among

³⁵ Informal conversation 2, 10th September 2022.

Indigenous communities and peasant populations, who continue to suffer from land inequality and dispossessions.

Research participants have noted that while the peace accords ended the armed conflict, violence, fear, and persecution persist. Juracán³⁶ stated, “malnutrition worsened, extreme poverty has increased, and the expulsion of citizens from the country due to the lack of economic conditions has risen... so practically the roots and causes of the conflict were not resolved but rather aggravated.” While environmental peacebuilding’s framework adopts a broad understanding of peace, encompassing both negative and positive conceptualizations, the practical focus of both theory and practice has been on securing negative peace. Negative peace, defined as the absence of open armed conflict, is undoubtedly essential as it ensures immediate safety and stability. However, the aspirations of the Guatemalan people, particularly Indigenous and campesino communities, extend far beyond the mere cessation of armed conflict.

In interviews conducted for this study, all participants unequivocally stated that there is no true peace in Guatemala, despite the absence of open warfare. For Indigenous and peasant communities, various forms of violence and repression have become normalized, a reality that is often overlooked when discussing the condition of ‘peace’ in the country. These communities continue to experience direct violence, such as threats and attacks on land defenders; structural violence, reflected in systemic inequalities and lack of access to basic services; and cultural violence, manifesting in persistent discrimination and marginalization. As a CCDA member³⁷ shared: “to speak of a culture of peace where the same legal mechanisms violate the rights of the people is not possible. It is a peace for the powerful”.

³⁶ Informal conversation 12, 22nd of September 2022.

³⁷ Informal conversation 13, 22nd of September 2022.

Indeed, while the peace accords hoped to address the historical inequalities in Guatemala that caused the armed conflict, this study shows that the ‘powerful’ were never truly committed to the deep transformations necessary to build sustainable peace on strong foundations of justice and equality. They sought to end the armed conflict on their own terms by disarming the resistance and implementing a land distribution program that not only preserved the existing scenario of land accumulation but also allowed them to offload their most marginal and low-quality lands at a profit. This approach ensured that the underlying issues of inequality and injustice remained unaddressed, undermining the potential for a genuine and lasting peace. Without adequately addressing the issue of land inequality, it has been impossible for Guatemala to move forward into sustainable development and peace. At least for Indigenous and campesino communities.

This study shows that the government, by aligning itself so closely with the interests and pressures from CACIF, was not impartial; it was effectively signing peace to appease the powerful, not the people. This partiality is why Indigenous and campesino organizations continue to struggle to transform both the economic system, which imposes a type of “oppressive peace”, and the structure of the state as a whole. Leocadio³⁸ shared: “the people, we ask for a change in the structure of the state, so that we can finally have peace”. Their ongoing efforts aim to achieve genuine sustainable peace that addresses the needs and rights of all citizens, particularly those historically marginalized.

This analysis demonstrates that it has been the persistent efforts of Indigenous and campesino organizations, human rights activists, and grassroots movements that have driven progress towards a more inclusive and democratic society. These civil society actors have been crucial in holding the government accountable and pushing for

³⁸ Interview 11, 21st of September 2022.

reforms that promote justice, equality, and sustainable peace. Future research in environmental peacebuilding should engage more with the transformative peacebuilding potential of such organizations.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the peace accords in Guatemala, despite their historical significance, failed to bring about the deep structural changes necessary to address the root causes of conflict. While previous research has argued that environmental peacebuilding's mechanisms were poorly specified, this study shows that it is the orientation of the mechanisms and the pathways to achieve them that are inadequately detailed and undertheorized.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of clear and detailed content from the outset of peace negotiations to prevent implementation delays and shifts in political commitment. By focusing on how natural resources are negotiated in peace agreements, EPB's framework can now identify early signs of a lack of commitment to necessary deep transformations integral to building sustainable peace. In Guatemala, the government showed such signs, particularly in its reluctance to approve critical tax reforms essential for implementing the peace accords. The analysis suggests the government agreed to tax reform provisions primarily to secure international support and financial aid rather than out of a genuine commitment to addressing historical inequalities.

The study also highlights the need to engage more theoretically with the role of civil society and non-state actors in peace negotiations. Despite the active participation of organizations representing Indigenous peoples, women, and campesinos, their recommendations were largely ignored, while powerful actors like CACIF had direct

influence. This unequal negotiation ensured that those uninterested in profound transformation dominated the process, perpetuating existing power structures. International actors, such as the World Bank and the IMF, also played a significant role in shaping the political landscape by pressuring for specific types of solutions while simultaneously enabling the government to delay implementation. This external pressure often focused on neoliberal policies, which have proven insufficient in addressing the complex and structural realities of land inequality and economic disparity in Guatemala. This clearly indicates the need for EPB theory and practice to engage more deeply with the political dimensions of natural resource conflicts (Le Billon and Duffy 2018; Aggestam 2018; Davis et al. 2023). Clear normative commitments are essential to transform political, social, and economic structures towards justice, equality, and peace. This involves not only addressing immediate resource distribution issues but also reshaping the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate inequality and conflict (Magalhães Teixeira and Nicoson 2024).

The analysis in this paper further highlights two significant issues related to how we conceptualize and measure peace. Initially motivated by Guatemala's surprising avoidance of a relapse into civil war despite its status as one of the most unequal countries, a closer investigation reveals that the country is still experiencing violence. Although not characterized by civil war or battle-related deaths, Guatemala continues to suffer from organized violence. As informed by the research participants in this paper, the peace accords in Guatemala served to disarm the guerrilla and to instill hope – albeit false – that land inequality could be addressed through democratic channels in the post-accord phase. However, the implementation of the proposed framework shows that these efforts have been ineffective and slow, compounded by the neoliberal rationale behind them, which not only reproduces structural inequalities but also produces new types of conflict and violence. This underscores the importance of a comprehensive conceptualization of sustainable peace that not only focuses on ending direct violence from civil wars but also aims to address other forms of violence and

conflict. Thus, a conceptualization of sustainable peace that accounts for both negative and positive aspects of peace is more capable of identifying the various types of violence that can persist in a post-conflict context without a transformational approach to peacebuilding.

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Beyond the Boom:

Assessing the Effect of Extractive Industries on Development and Violence in Post-Conflict Countries

Barbara Magalhães Teixeira, Department of Political Science, Lund University

Jakob Molinder, Department of Economic History, Uppsala University and Lund University

Abstract

Is intensification of resource extraction an effective peacebuilding strategy for post-conflict countries? While restructuring the extractive sector can stimulate economic recovery and support reconstruction, it often leads to human and labor rights violations. This study examines the relationship between resource extraction, violence, and development in post-conflict sub-Saharan Africa, using georeferenced data and grid-cell level analysis to account for local dynamics. Spatial HAC models are employed to address spatial heterogeneity and autocorrelation. Our findings indicate that while extractive industries boost short-term economic growth, they have no discernible impact on human development. Instead, they are associated with increased violence, particularly against civilians. Additionally, state capacity mediates these effects: high-capacity states experience more protests and state repression, while low-capacity states see increased direct violence. These results highlight the need for responsible resource management and strong governance to mitigate the negative impacts of extraction and promote sustainable peace.

Keywords: natural resources, conflict, violence, sustainable peace, development

Introduction

The economic history of resource-rich countries of the Global South has essentially been a history of resource extraction, underdevelopment, and violent conflict. The paradoxical connection between resource wealth and underdevelopment is the resource curse, in which resource-rich countries underperform economically despite the vast deposits of valuable natural resources (Auty 1993). A focus on extractive industries as the main driver of economic activity in underdeveloped countries of the Global South has been linked to slower economic growth, political instability, and even violent conflict (Ross 2012, 2015; Magalhães Teixeira 2021b). Indeed, research in peace and conflict studies has long identified that mineral-rich countries of the Global South are often caught in the so-called ‘conflict trap’ in which “war retards development, but conversely, development retards war” (Collier et al. 2003). This double causation between war and underdevelopment creates a vicious cycle in which underdevelopment creates a risk for civil war, which in turn exacerbates underdevelopment, which leads again to an increased risk of violent conflict. An essential argument from this literature that has informed much of contemporary international development and peacebuilding policy is connected to efforts towards improving economic development and growth as a conflict prevention and resolution mechanism (Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2008).

More recent literature in Environmental Peacebuilding (EPB) builds on this theoretical approach and argues that the intensification of extractive industries in post-conflict countries can be an effective instrument in building peace by promoting economic growth and rising levels of development (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beevers 2018; Jensen and Lonergan 2012). However, previous studies have shown that a focus on economic growth in post-conflict countries can not only not be practical for the solidification of peace, but it can also have detrimental effects on conflict. Dahl and Høyland (2012) show that results connecting economic growth with reduced risk

of post-conflict peace collapse are not transparent nor straightforward. At best, they show mixed results, but some models even suggest that economic growth may increase the risk of post-conflict peace collapse.

Indeed, relying on the extractive sector to promote economic growth and peace can be problematic since the industry is characterized by the volatility of the global market and mediated by the commodities' super-cycle by 'boom' and 'bust' swings. This significantly affects Environmental Peacebuilding's strategy of intensifying extractive industries in post-conflict countries and its ability to sustain export and fiscal gains to a level that can promote sustainable human development for the local population. To examine this, in this paper we ask whether *the presence of extractive industries in post-conflict countries positively affects peace and development*.

Our contribution is three-fold. First, we investigate the relationship between the presence of extractive industries in post-conflict countries and the effects on development levels and conflict incidence at a highly disaggregated level. While previous studies have looked at aspects of this relationship, they have done this in isolation. We combine these approaches to understand the triple nexus of extractivism-development-conflict and its local effects.

Second, we focus specifically on post-conflict periods, where the economic situation is deeply affected by conflict and underdevelopment for an extended period and where there is a need for deep reconstruction of infrastructure, institutions, and social policy. While previous studies have analyzed the relationship between resource extraction and conflict, they have done so by pooling data across developing countries without attention to the particularities of post-conflict contexts. The goal is to understand whether the promotion of extractive industries in a post-conflict society is more successful in promoting peace and hindering conflict than in conflictive societies or

whether the exact mechanisms in place during conflict times also spill over during peace times.

Third, we examine under which circumstances different types of violence results from the presence of extractive industries. We find that in context where the state has low capabilities, the presence of extractive industries is associated with civil war and violence against civilians perpetrated by government forces and pro-government militias as well as rebel groups. In contrast, when state capacity is high, presence of extractive industries is associated with increases in state violence, especially in the form of the suppression of protests by police forces.

From conflict resources to peace resources?

In an attempt to address both environmental and security issues simultaneously, studies in the field of environmental peacebuilding argue that it is impossible to create strategies for peacebuilding in resource-rich countries without accounting for how natural resources have played a role in past violent conflicts and political stability (Dresse et al. 2018; Ide et al. 2021; Jensen and Lonergan 2012). According to the UNEP (2009), around 40% of all armed conflicts since 1989 have been linked to natural resources. Environmental peacebuilding literature argues that natural resources are often the root causes of internal armed conflicts (Bruch et al. 2016) and thus should be harnessed to advance post-conflict peace (Conca and Beevers 2018). In this context, responsible management of natural resources is crucial for peacebuilding initiatives in the post-conflict context (Bruch et al. 2016; Krampe 2017; Krampe et al. 2021).

According to previous research, the abundance of natural resources can increase the risk of violent conflict through the ‘resource curse’ phenomenon (Auty 1993). This creates dependency and an overreliance on the extractive sector, which can have

negative social, economic, and political effects, which hinders economic growth and the diversification of the economy (Humphreys et al. 2007; Sachs and Warner 1995), weakens state capacity (James D Fearon and Laitin 2003), undermines democracy (Carreri and Dube 2017; Ross 2015), diminishes public welfare provision (Cockx and Francken 2014, 2016; Tadadjeu et al. 2020) and quality of infrastructure (Tadadjeu et al. 2022), increases social inequality (Loayza and Rigolini 2016) and breeds corruption (Knutsen et al. 2017). When considered collectively, these negative impacts lead to the understanding that natural resource extraction is a contributing factor to the risk of both violent and non-violent conflicts in developing countries (Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024; Berman et al. 2017; Bornschier and Vogt 2024).

However, according to most studies, the risks associated with resource extraction are typically influenced by institutional factors and the quality of governance of local institutions in managing the negative social, political, and economic impacts. The institutionalist approach argues that the quality of political institutions plays a crucial role in determining the effects of the resource curse, and poor institutional quality is the reason behind it (Mehlum et al. 2006). This argument is supported by the literature on environmental peacebuilding, which suggests that sustainable peace can be achieved in resource-rich countries by enhancing good governance and improving the quality of institutions for responsible natural resource management (Brown and Nicolucci-Altman, 2022; Krampe et al., 2021).

It is important to note that in societies recovering from conflict, natural resources can play a crucial role in stabilization and recovery efforts. As conflict often heavily impacts human and social capital, infrastructure, and political institutions, natural resources can be a valuable driver of economic growth. These resources can generate revenue to fund infrastructure reconstruction, provide education and other public goods, alleviate poverty, compensate victims, and create jobs (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016).

Natural resources play a crucial role in post-conflict societies in improving livelihoods, strengthening civil society, and supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants (Rustad et al., 2012). Good governance of these resources can also foster democratization and reinforce peacebuilding efforts. Responsibly and transparently extracting and managing natural resources can not only jump-start the economy but also serve as an incentive to maintain peace and prevent a relapse into war (Rustad and Binninsbø 2012; Rustad et al. 2012; Webersik and Levy 2016).

However, responsible management and good governance in the extractive sector do not come without challenges. To support long-term development, solidify the foundations of peace, and support state-building, extraction of natural resources must be done “without triggering new conflicts, fueling corruption, causing macroeconomic instability, or exceeding the carrying capacity of the environment to accommodate development over the long term” (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016, 6). In a report on post-conflict economic recovery, the UNDP (2008) concludes that “natural resource wealth can be a great asset for post-conflict recovery, but it does pose particular challenges for regulation and distribution.” More than that, in current times of rising global demand for oil and other natural resources, the extractive industry is pushed into post-conflict countries despite the uncertainties and risks involved. Both international and domestic pressure on post-conflict countries to rebuild the economy and gather revenues leads to the flexibilization of commercial investment in mining, oil, forestry, and agriculture. Many of the international concessions are found on lands under customary tenure and under the stewardship of Indigenous, peasant, and traditional communities. The rapid proliferation of natural resource concessions has led to instances of land grabbing, as well as tensions and localized violence in many post-conflict countries, particularly in areas with indigenous, peasant, or traditional communities (Balestri and Maggioni 2021; Dell’Angelo et al. 2017).

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, the attempts of national governments and international actors to revive extractive industries have escalated tensions with local communities because of long-standing land ownership disputes, environmental degradation, and impacts on local livelihoods (Beevers 2019; Johnson 2017). These processes often follow a neoliberal logic of development, in which national governments frequently concede large shares of land to multinational companies to exploit natural resources. In Sierra Leone, for example, around 82 percent of the country's land was ceded to multinational companies to develop the extractive industry in the post-conflict period (Brown et al. 2012). Similarly, in Nigeria, the attempt to make extractive industries “peacemakers” caused immense environmental, social, and economic harm (Idemudia 2014). The overreliance on the work of multinational corporations to promote economic recovery in post-conflict countries is often misguided since these corporations transfer all the wealth from natural resources revenues out of the host country and share it only with a small portion of the national elite –to keep the concessions for exploration (Garrett 2016).

With the globalization of trade in primary commodities and the ever-increasing level of consumption of raw materials, post-conflict countries are often seen as the last frontier for extractive industries, where many of the resource deposits have not yet been explored or given concessions. As of 2016, there were 101 British companies controlling mining operations in sub-Saharan African countries, in charge of over 1.05 trillion dollars’ worth of resources. Of those companies, 25 are incorporated in tax havens (Curtis 2016). This means that the economy may be “developing” and “growing” from resource extraction, but this is decoupled from social benefits and an increase in the quality of life of the local population. By having their land ceded to multinational companies or even suffering from land-grabbing, local communities suffer from land and livelihood loss, which affects their food security. This creates tensions between local communities and multinational companies and increases cases of illegal extraction of natural resources (Johnson 2021). More than that, these areas

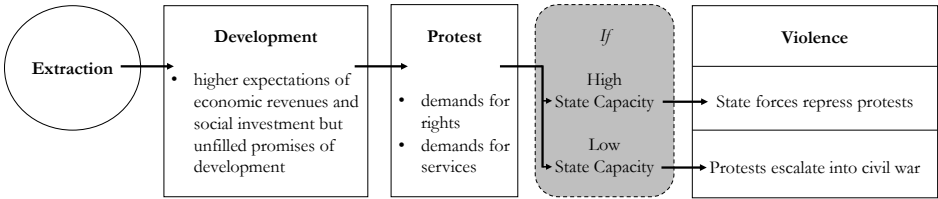
also see increased environmental degradation and violation of human rights (Johnson 2017; Krause 2020; Krause et al. 2022). In this context, recent empirical studies have found that transitioning from conflict resources into peace resources might be more complex than the theoretical expectations and policy recommendations assume.

While previous research has focused on the macro-level dynamics of the extractive sector and economic dependence and the impact of armed conflict, more recent research has looked at the effects of extractive industries at the local level. Recent studies by Denly et al. (2022), Berman et al. (2017), and Wegenast and Schneider (2017) using highly disaggregated geographical data find that the location of extraction sites creates adverse effects for different types of conflicts. Denly et al. (2022) show that sub-national resource wealth is associated with higher levels of conflict in Africa. Berman et al. (2017) show that changes in the commodity super cycle affect not only low-level violence like riots and protests but also positively affect large-scale conflicts like organized battles. Wegenast and Schneider (2017), on the other hand, find that the presence of hydrocarbon fields in a geographical area is more likely to increase the risk of violence against civilians. While traditional literature dealing with the resource curse has linked the presence of high-value natural resources to an increased risk of civil war onset and intensity (Fearon 2005; Humphreys 2005; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005), recent research has shown that extractive industries also have negative impacts on a diversity of violent and non-violent conflicts and processes (Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024; Bornschier and Vogt 2024; Brazys, de Soysa, and Vadlamannati 2023; Christensen 2019; Arce and Miller 2016).

While a rich literature looks at extractive industries' effects on development levels and violent and non-violent conflict, most do so in isolation. In this paper, building on these previous findings and focusing on the context of post-conflict countries, we aim to investigate the effect of natural resource extraction on development, conflict, and

different types of violence. Our goal, thus, is to show if and how the local impacts of extractive industries on development and conflict reproduce and reinforce each other, through the operationalization of the triple nexus of extractivism-development-violence. Research in peace and conflict studies has widely shown the adverse effects of conflict on economic and human development, as it hampers poverty and hunger reduction, increases child mortality, and hinders access to education and potable water (Gates et al. 2012). It has also shown how underdevelopment reinforces a recurring cycle of conflict, which tends to exacerbate underlying grievances, deepen divisions, and undermine trust in institutions (Collier et al. 2003; Fearon 2008; Fearon and Laitin 2003). In this paper, we understand how these phenomena interact at the macro level and aim to investigate how they manifest at the micro level.

Figure 1. Model of the local impact of extractive industries on post-conflict violence



We theorize that the extraction of natural resources does not affect development and conflict separately but that its adverse effects on local development mediate the incidence of local conflict. Building on previous research, we argue that when the presence of extraction sites does not deliver on the promises of development for the local population, this creates grievances that motivate the local population to mobilize against the activities of the extractive industry. Figure 1 provides a visualization of our theoretical model.

The main argument for how natural resources can serve as catalysts of peace for post-conflict countries is through how their exploration can jump-start national economies, and the revenues can finance the reconstruction of infrastructure and welfare spending (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; UNEP 2020). However, focusing on the financial benefits of natural resources to jump-start post-conflict countries' economies often circles back to the initial causes of conflict, as revenues are not shared with the population and inequality persists. Conflicts over natural resources are never really only over the resources themselves but the economic prosperity and political power that they represent, as they indicate the level of redistribution and inequality in a society. Idemudia (2014) has shown that the movement to treat businesses as peacemakers can be harmful to local communities once the extractive industries are tied to multinational corporations that transfer all of the wealth from natural resources revenues out of the country and share it only with a small portion of the national elite – to keep the concessions for exploration (see also Garrett 2016). More than that, the extractive sector is notoriously linked to practices of illicit financial flows, when large sums of revenues from natural resource extraction are transferred into off-shore accounts and tax havens before they can be taxed by national governments in developing countries and used for social spending (Murphy 2012). The Global Financial Integrity (GFI 2015) has reported that significant and persistent unrecorded financial flows hamper developing countries' capacities for economic development and social spending, which impacts people's lives and living standards.

More than that, we see that in the rush to recover the economy, national governments of post-conflict countries often concede large shares of land to multinational companies to promote natural resource exploration (Hilson 2002). This negatively increases land dispossession and human displacement, hindering local communities' access to land and their ability to secure livelihoods (Scheidel et al. 2020; Scheidel et al. 2023; Balestri and Maggioni 2021; Aguilar-Støen 2016). The loss of protected territories also accelerates biodiversity loss and species extinction through pollution, soil and

water degradation, and the destruction of environments and landscapes (Scheidel et al. 2023). More than that, the extractive sector is also marked by the highest level of violence and killings of environmental defenders who resist the expansion of the extractive frontier or protest the way the government negotiates concessions (Global Witness 2021; Le Billon and Lujala 2020; Shenk 2022; Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024; Idemudia, Tuokuu, and Essah 2022).

The negative externalities of resource extraction serve as the basis for grievances of the local population when they identify the corruption of local and national authorities and how state security forces are used to protect the assets of corporations. This, combined with the realization that there is a lack of both skills and political will within the government to implement and monitor the compliance with regulations of concession agreements, motivates the local population to protest extractive activities. It is in this context that we expect violence around extraction sites. However, in this case, violence here is not connected to armed conflicts or the illegal activity of rebel groups. Still, it is instead attributed to government forces that make use of violence against civilians to repress protests and riots. In this sense, we theorize that the way extraction of natural resources is connected to violence in post-conflict countries is through the unfulfilled promises of local development, coupled with exacerbation of environmental degradation and the inability of the government to put the people's interests over the interests of extractive corporations.

Theoretical expectations

In order to probe the theoretical model, the first step is to look at the effect of extractive activities at the local level of development. Our first hypothesis aims to investigate the effect of extraction sites on the local economy to test whether there is any positive effect on the local population.

H1: the presence of resource extraction activity is associated with a higher level of economic activity

However, as reviewed in previous literature, the intertwining of international capital flows and illicit financial activities in extractive industries hampers the transparent and equitable utilization of resources. The diversion of revenues into offshore accounts diminishes the potential for social spending, hindering the development that post-conflict nations seek to achieve. This not only perpetuates economic inequalities but also undermines the foundations of political stability, thereby hindering the delicate process of post-conflict reconstruction. While the intensification of extractive industries may offer a short-term economic boom, it might not sustain economic and human development, given its negative externalities and inability to distribute revenues. This is why we hypothesize the effect of natural resource extraction beyond just economic growth and development to account for the social aspects of development.

H2: the presence of resource extraction activity is not associated with improvements in human development

When it comes to the effect of resource extraction on violence, most discussions in environmental peacebuilding are concerned with preventing the recurrence of large-scale armed conflicts, like civil wars. However, this narrow focus on armed conflicts as the sole manifestation of violence connected to natural resources masks the fact that extractive activities are more likely to provoke other forms and scales of violence. We thus hypothesize that resource extraction is expected to be associated with different types of violence beyond armed conflicts and civil wars, focusing on the role of protests and state repression in accounting for violence in the post-conflict context. We expect protest to be the primary strategy of mobilization and resistance, given the nature of

grievances against extraction. Focusing on mining conflicts in Africa, Arce and Miller (2016) have divided the demands of protests into rights and services.

Mobilizations driven by demands for rights seek to protect the rights of the local population over access to water, land, and landscapes, as well as the cultural rights of traditional communities defending these territories. Protesters often frame their claims based on environmental risks and damages of extractive projects, on their exclusion from decision-making processes that affect their land and livelihoods, or around labor conditions and rights. For example, the Koidu-Sefadu protest in 2007 in Sierra Leone was mobilized around claims that the diamond mine had harmed the living conditions of the local population and their environment. In 2013, the Bong community protested against Liberia's low salaries and poor working conditions. In 2014, people protested outside the National Legislature against selling additional oil blocks (Raleigh et al. 2010). Mobilizations driven by service demands focus on dividing tax revenues, royalties, or other economic benefits associated with the extractive activities. The focus of these protests is to demand financial improvement, jobs, or funds to support the local development of the host communities. In 2013, people in the Tete region in northern Mozambique blocked roads and access to Vale's coal mines, demanding the payment of compensation for resettlement. In Liberia in 2014, protesters blocked entries to ArcelorMittal's iron ore plant and offices in response to the companies' failure to fulfill the terms of its concession agreement, which should compensate local people's loss of crops, plots, and houses (Raleigh et al. 2010).

H3: the presence of resource extraction activity is associated with higher levels of protest

Why do we expect people to mobilize through a protest instead of mobilizing back into armed conflict? We theorize that there are two things conditioning this: first, it is

because of the level of state capacity of post-conflict countries. As previous research has repeatedly noted, the effects of the resource curse are often mediated by the level of good governance and the strength of state capacity. Rebuilding state institutions is frequently the priority of post-conflict countries, and when states increase their capacity, it raises the cost for rebellion and full-out civil war. Based on this, we expect the level of state capacity and democratic institutions to mediate the effect on protest and violence

H4: the association between natural resource extraction and type of violence varies between high- and low-state capacity settings

Second, we move beyond this rationalist explanation of cost-benefit analysis, and theorize that the nature of the grievances surrounding the activity of extractive industries is substantially different from the types of grievances that have ignited civil war. The argument that extractive industries promote development and thus peace serves the purpose of conditioning the local population to believe in the benefits of natural resource extraction as a key to move away from conflict and underdevelopment and into a peaceful future. In this sense, the local population understands that the grievances generated around the activities of the extractive sector can be dealt with through democratic channels.

However, in the extractive sector, there are more negotiation constraints when it comes to peacefully resolving protracted conflicts between businesses and workers. This happens because extractive industries cannot use their usual bargaining chip of threatening to relocate to a different region or country with more lax tax and labor laws since they are tied to the geographical location of the resource deposits. This gives the workers more bargaining power to negotiate their working conditions, even though the corporation can always replace them with new and often migrant workers.

In this scenario, Evans and Sil (2019) argue that mining workers are more and more aware of both the comparative conditions of their counterparts in other countries, but also of the increasingly deteriorating working conditions that they face daily in contrast to the amount of revenue that they produce from their labor. This is connected to larger patterns of abuse of human rights by extractive industries across the globe. The study by Wegenast and Schneider (2017) shows how state repression is used to suppress riots and protests by workers of the extractive industries and even the local communities affected by the extractive activities. In this sense, even though conflicts around extraction sites are usually about grievances between the local community and the extractive industry, the violence comes primarily from the state. One explanation for this is that national governments of countries more dependent on the extractive industries will be concerned with the falling exports of mineral commodities during periods of strikes and protests. This can have a negative effect not only on revenue streams but, more broadly, on the prospects of economic growth. Thus, state repression might be used because businesses and the ruling elite have a sense of urgency to end the dispute and return to order. Even though violence here is connected to the activity of international corporations, we expect the perpetrators of local violence to be the police and state forces.

Research design

In line with previous literature leveraging variation at a fine-grained geospatial level, we make use of geocoded data at the level of 0.5x0.5 decimal degree grid cells, following the PRIO-GRID (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012). Specifically, we make use of four main sources of data. The first is the geolocated dataset on the presence of resource extraction sites collected by Denly et al. (2022). This dataset provides time-varying information on the spatial location of individual natural resource extraction sites and production facilities from 1994 to 2015. It includes data on 197 different

natural resources, like diamonds, oil, gold, and other minerals like tin, copper, cobalt, uranium, iron ore, and more. It also accounts for country-specific prices and output for every location, as well as the ownership pattern – whether it is managed by a public or a private organization³⁹. While the time period covered varies by country, it contains information for all African countries, which is the focus of this paper.

The second data source is from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), which collects real-time data on the locations, dates, actors, fatalities, and types of reported political violence and protests worldwide (Raleigh et al. 2010). The data collection for the world outside of Africa only starts in 2018, while information for Africa is available since 1997. For this reason, we choose to focus the analysis of the impact of resource extraction on political violence in post-conflict societies in Africa. Additionally, we have independently coded the type of actors perpetrating violence based on actor names provided by ACLED and using the categorizations from the UCDP Encyclopedia and the Pro-Government Militias Database (Carey and Mitchell 2021) to distinguish between government forces like the army or the police, rebel groups, private security firms, and militaries, as well as pro-government militias.

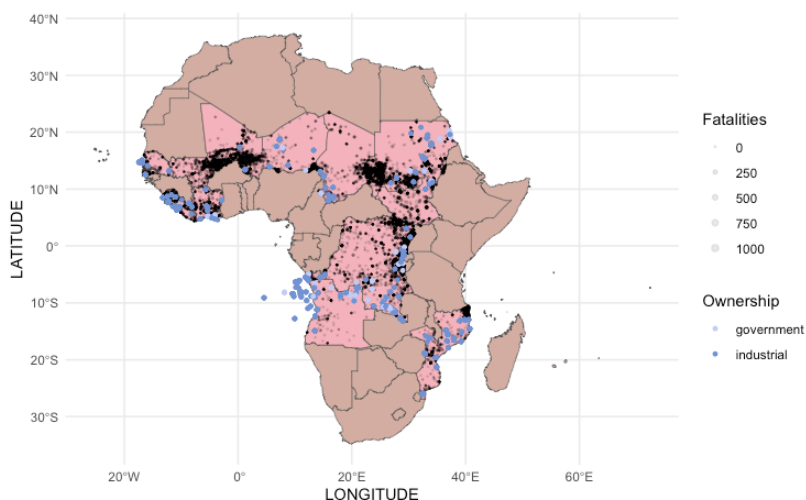
The third type of data is on nightlights, which serves as a proxy for economic output in individual grid cells. The data comes from DMSP-OLS Nighttime Lights Times Series (Version 4) available through the PRIO-GRID data (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012). The data is available for each year from 1992 to 2013.

³⁹ While previous studies have shown the importance of volatility of prices in the incidence of conflict, we have decided to focus our main specification for the presence of extractive sites because of missing data for production values in the Denly et al. (2022) dataset. However, in Figures E, F, and G in the appendix we show the results of models using value of output instead of presence of extraction sites. The results are comparable.

The fourth and final are the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). The DHS has been collecting and using data to monitor and evaluate population health and nutrition measures (Croft, Marshall, and Allen 2018). In contrast to economic output, which can be proxied by nightlights, it is tough to find data at a fine geospatial level on different welfare outcomes for the population in areas in post-conflict societies affected by resource extraction. The DHS has been conducted in many Global South countries since the 1990s. For some countries, several waves of survey data are available. Most DHS surveys also provide information on the location of the survey respondents, with a small amount of noise added in order to retain privacy. One of the things that these surveys ask mothers about is the time of birth of every child, as well as the number of months the child was alive. From this information, we can create a dataset where for each child, the value is 1 if they died within 12 months and 0 otherwise. We then have information on the year that the child was born, in combination with information on a host of demographic and economic variables for the mother when the survey was taken.

We use the coordinates provided by DHS to link each mother to a grid cell. The fact that we are linking the location to the grid level should eliminate most of the imprecision that results from the noise added to the exact coordinates of the respondents. Our approach constitutes a significant improvement since previous analyses of resource extraction and health outcomes have relied on cross-country data. That being said, child mortality naturally only captures one aspect of human development, which is a very multi-layered concept.

Figure 2. Presence of resource extraction sites and incidence of violence in post-conflict countries in Africa



Data structure

For our data selection, we select countries with civil wars connected to natural resources at some capacity (NRPA n/d). For conflict data, we use the georeferenced database for disaggregated types of political violence by ACLED. By using this data reference, our analysis of conflict is limited to countries in Africa. However, we can still account for all African countries with a history of armed conflicts related to natural resources. In all cases, the analysis is limited to the post-conflict period, which differs for each country. This means that we have different starting years for the individual cases. In cases where there were multiple peace agreements, we begin our analysis the year after the last peace agreement date. Observations are also limited to data availability, for example, in the case of health data coming from the DHS dataset. Tables A and B in the appendix show the data availability for each country.

Model

Our empirical design follows previous work on the relationship between natural resource extraction and conflict like Denly et al. (2022) and Berman et al. (2017). We estimate models of the following type:

$$y_{k,t} = \alpha + \beta X_{k,t-1} + FE_k + FE_t + \epsilon_{k,t}$$

Where y_{kt} is the outcome of interest in cell k at time t . FE_k are grid-level fixed effects, and FE_t are fixed effects for the year. These are included to control for time-invariant co-determinants of violence and resource extraction at the local level. The coefficient β measures the impact of the independent variable of interest: $X_{k,t-1}$, which is either the number of resource extraction sites or the value of output lagged one year⁴⁰, for this we follow previous studies specifications to keep our study comparable.

One important mediating factor in the relationship between natural resources and conflict and development is state capacity. There is currently no data available on state capacity at the grid-level that can be used to examine its conditioning effect on the impact of resource extraction on violence. We have, however, examined the conditioning impact of state capacity by using variation at the national level through a multilevel model. This allows us to interact our measure of the presence of resource extraction sites with a measure of national state capacity at the year of signing the peace agreement based on data from the Quality of Government Institute (Dahlberg et al. 2023).

⁴⁰ The results are robust to the use of longer lags. In appendix Figure H, we show results using 5-year lag, suggesting that the effect on violence is even more significant in the longer run.

Our baseline model is the spatial HAC model that we implement using the Stata—ado routine by Hsiang (2010). We specify a spatial correlation cutoff of 500 km for the Conley (1999) standard errors that account for spatial dependence. In addition to the baseline spatial HAC model, for reference we also include results for the simple unconditional relationship between y_{kt} and $X_{k,t-1}$ as well as a model that includes fixed effects for cell and year. To facilitate comparison across models, we standardize all variables to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The interpretation of the coefficients is then the impact on standard deviations of $y_{k,t}$ of a one standard deviation change in $X_{k,t}$.

The analysis leveraging the DHS data cannot be estimated using the spatial HAC model since the unit of observation is individual births, rather than grid cells by year. Since one mother can be observed with several births at different points in time, we are, however, able to control for mother characteristics at the time of the survey or alternatively use mother-fixed effects. The model then looks like this⁴¹:

$$y_{m,k,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{k,t-1} + \beta_2 X_m + FE_{k,t} + FE_m + \epsilon_{k,t}$$

Where $y_{m,k,t}$ is a dummy variable for whether a child born at time t , to mother m in grid cell k survived to the age of 1-year old. The coefficient β_1 measures the impact of the independent variable of interest: $X_{k,t-1}$, while β_2 measures the impact of mother characteristics. We control for literacy, an index of wealth, age of the mother, and number of children. Alternatively, FE_m are mother-fixed effects. $FE_{k,t}$ are fixed effects for grid cell and year.

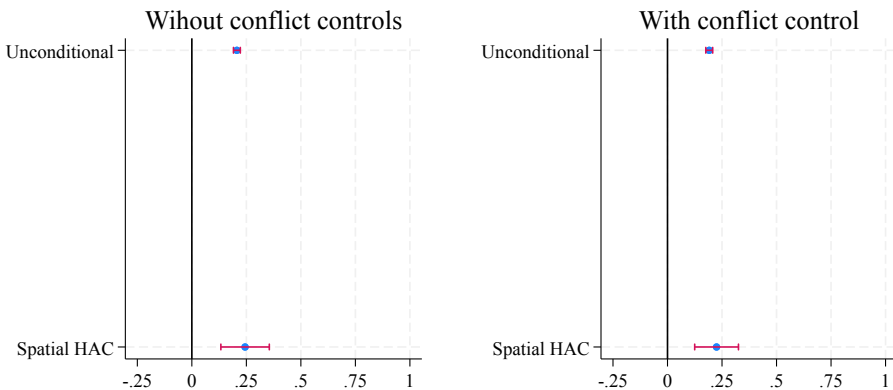
⁴¹ We have replicated the previous model at grid level for infant mortality to make sure that different results between these two models do not hinge on the different model specifications. There were no significant differences in the results.

Results and analysis

Effect on development

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the number of resource extraction sites in a cell and output in the subsequent year as proxied by nightlights. The unconditional relationship without controlling for possible confounders suggests that a 1 standard deviation in the number of sites is associated with slightly more than a 0.25 standard deviation increase in output in all post-conflict countries in the analysis. The Spatial HAC model with fixed-effects confirms this result. While the standard errors are larger, the point estimates are very similar in size. The subfigure on the right additionally controls for conflict in the cell in order to account for the possibility that part of the effect of natural resource extraction on nightlights is confounded by its impact on conflicts. We find, however, that controlling for conflicts does not change the relationship to any meaningful extent.

Figure 3. Effect of all resource extraction sites on nightlights

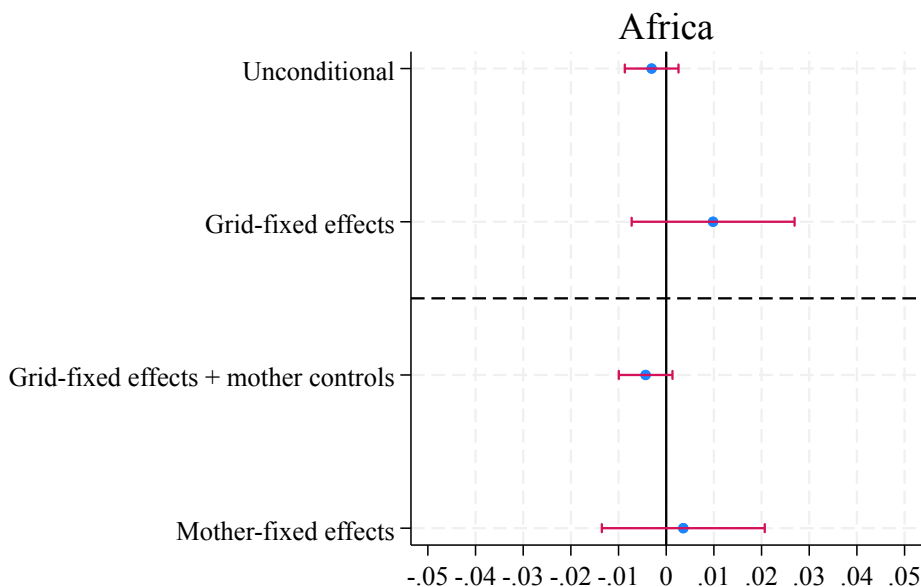


Figures A and B in the Appendix show the impact of differentiating between government-owned and privately owned extraction sites. While the effect is statistically significant in both cases, the impact is greater for privately owned sites.

This result presented so far confirms and extends the finding by Mamo, Bhattacharyya, and Moradi (2019) on resource extraction and output growth and shows that it also applies to post-conflict periods. In these post-conflict societies, areas that see an expansion of natural resource extraction thus experienced an increase in economic activity. To what extent is this economic expansion reflected in improvements in the livelihood of local populations?

Figure 4 shows the results of our analysis examining the impact of an expansion of resource extraction on child mortality. In contrast to the results for economic output, there is only a small, and typically statistically insignificant impact of resource extraction on the probability of a child surviving to the age of one (note the much smaller scale on the x-axis). While the naïve unconditional relationship without control variables suggests a small but statistically significant negative effect on child mortality, the fuller models introducing grid-fixed effects as well as mother controls or mother-fixed effects suggest a statistically insignificant and, if anything, positive impact on child mortality. Given that the effect is estimated to be close to zero, the size of the error bands is rather small and the precision of the estimated zero effect is quite high. Thus, we can rule out with some certainty any important effect of local resource extraction on child mortality. This is in line with the results of Mamo, Bhattacharyya, and Moradi (2019), who additionally find that expansion of mining does not result in greater public goods provisions in Africa.

Figure 4. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on infant mortality



The picture is confirmed by separate analyses available in the appendix that divide between extraction sites with government ownership and those with private ownership. A *positive* impact on child mortality can be discerned from the model with grid-fixed effects and mother controls for extraction sites with private ownership, but again the impact is very small.

The results thus illustrate a substantial positive association between the expansion of resource extraction and economic activity in post-conflict societies. However, the translation of this economic growth into tangible improvements in human development, as measured by infant mortality, proves to be elusive. This result challenges the assumption that intensified resource extraction inherently contributes to enhanced human development outcomes. Keeping in mind this bifurcated picture of extractivism's effect on local livelihoods, we now move on to analyze its consequences for conflict.

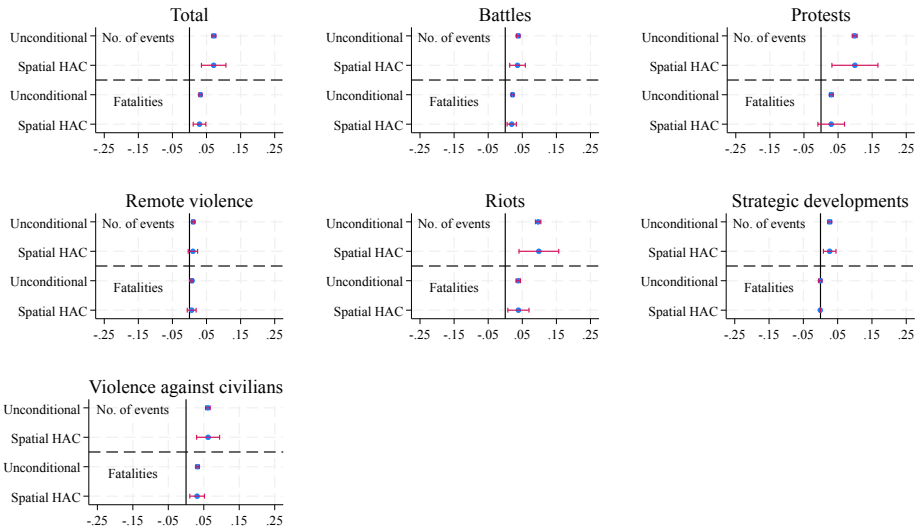
Effect on conflict

Figure 5 shows the estimated impact of the number of resource extraction sites in a cell and conflict in Africa as measured by ACLED. The results are given first for all types of conflicts combined, followed by results for each type of conflict separately. Two sets of results are displayed, one for the impact on the number of conflict events and one for the number of fatalities. Two different models are estimated, one showing the unconditional relationship between resource extraction and conflict and one using the fully specified Spatial HAC model, including cell- and year-fixed effects.

Focusing first on the results for all types of conflict events, we find that a standard deviation increase in the number of resource extraction sites increases conflicts by about 0.05 of a standard deviation and the number of fatalities by a slightly smaller amount. Looking at the results for specific conflict types, the biggest impact is present for protests and riots. In these cases, the estimated effect is around 0.1 of a standard deviation. Slightly smaller but still statistically significant impacts are found for violence against civilians and, to some extent, also for battles and strategic developments. Conversely, there is no impact on remote violence.

The findings unveil a noteworthy increase in conflict events and fatalities associated with a rise in the number of resource extraction sites. Importantly, the impact is most pronounced in protests and riots, indicating that the local population's grievances are manifested in visible forms of dissent. This aligns with the hypothesis that despite economic growth, the lack of substantial benefits for the population may lead to heightened dissatisfaction, grievances, and conflict.

Figure 5. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on different types of conflict



Different actor responses

In Figure 6, we disaggregate the results for the total number of conflict events by the type of actor that instigates the violence. It is clear from this analysis that the biggest effect is found in events where police forces are the actors. A smaller but still statistically significant effect is also found for government forces, government militias, military, and rebel groups. At the same time, there is no discernible impact on violence instigated by jihadist groups and private security.

Figures 7, 8, and 9 show the results by actor for specific types of violence. What becomes clear is that a major driver of violence in conjunction with resource extraction stems from government instigated violence against civilians, through the military and the police forces. Government police forces are also major sources of violence in connection to protests and riots.

At the aggregate level, it is notable the role of state-controlled entities in responding to local discontent. This underscores the government's use of force to suppress dissent and maintain order in the face of perceived threats from discontent fueled by extractive activities. Not only do government forces promote state repression against protests and riots against state policies and strategies, but they also serve to protect the interests and the continuation of work of extractive industries, especially of multinational corporations, in line with previous results by Wegenast and Schneider (2017).

Figure 6. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on all conflicts by actor)

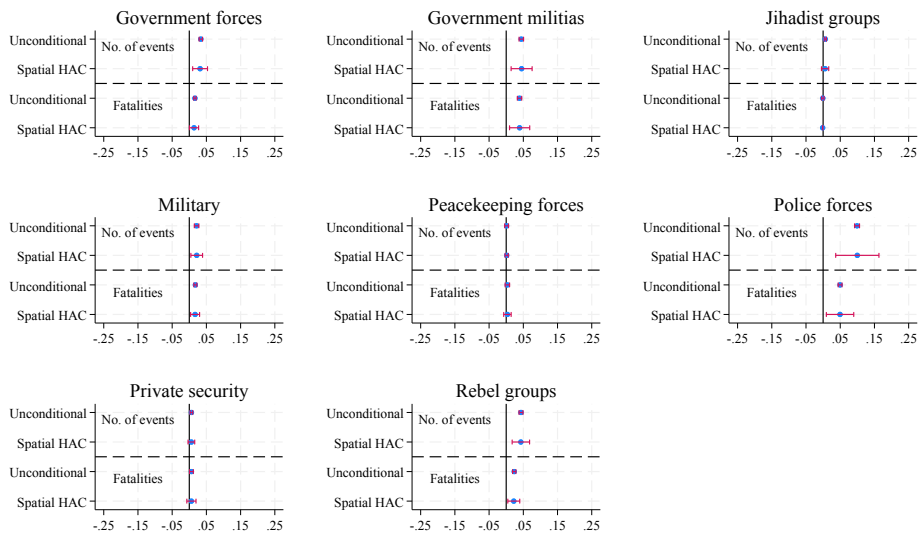


Figure 7. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on violence against civilians by actor

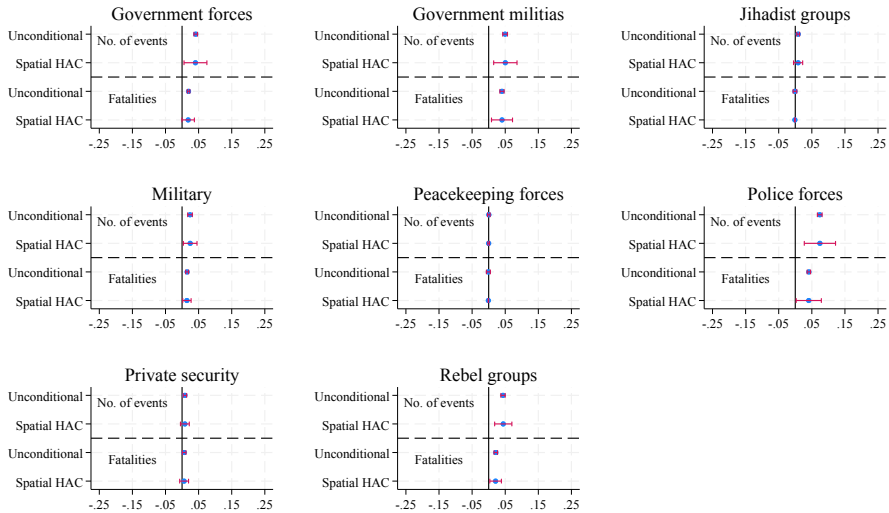


Figure 8. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on protests by actor

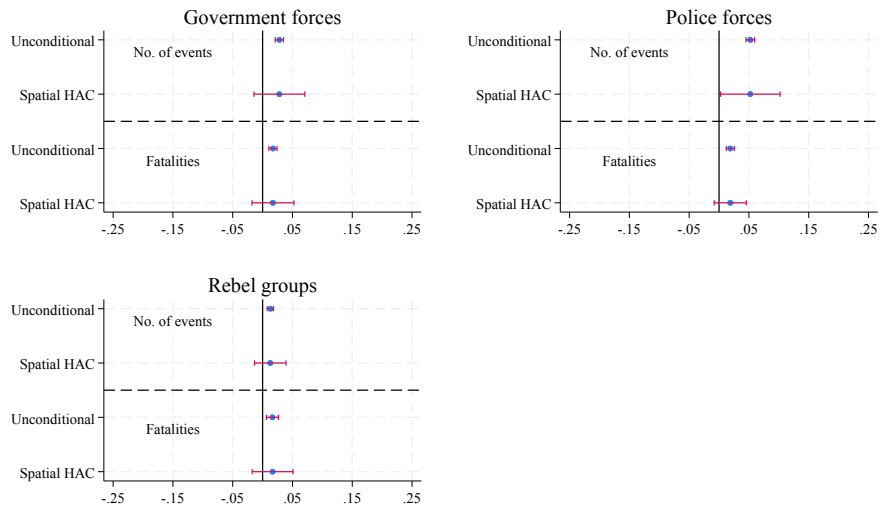
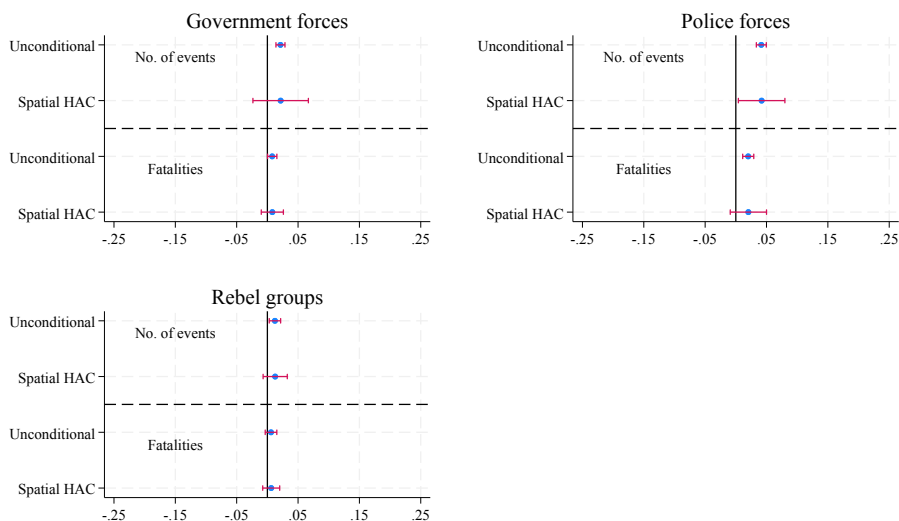


Figure 9. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on riots by actor



In line with the hypotheses laid out earlier, the lack of material benefit for the population despite increased economic activity following intensified resource extraction results in deepened grievances. The government responds by putting down the local population through the use of force.

The findings of our analysis contribute significantly to the existing literature on the intricate relationship between resource extraction, development, and conflict in post-conflict countries. The observed positive association between the expansion of resource extraction and economic activity aligns with some earlier literature emphasizing the potential for extractive industries to spur economic growth (Bruch et al., 2016; Rustad et al., 2012). However, our results diverge from the optimistic narrative by revealing that this economic expansion does not necessarily translate into tangible improvements in human development indicators, challenging the assumption that resource extraction inherently leads to positive developmental outcomes.

These nuanced findings resonate with the resource curse literature (Auty, 1993), highlighting the paradoxical relationship between resource abundance and underdevelopment. While some studies within this tradition focus on the negative economic consequences of resource dependence (Sachs and Warner, 1995; Ross, 2001), our research extends this discussion by shedding light on the specific dynamics in post-conflict settings. The lack of discernible positive impact on human development indicators, particularly infant mortality, speaks to the broader debate on the challenges posed by resource dependence, even in contexts where post-conflict recovery is a priority (UNDP, 2008).

Furthermore, our examination of the link between resource extraction and conflict aligns with existing literature identifying the potential for increased conflicts around extraction sites (Berman et al., 2017; Wegenast and Schneider, 2017; Denly et al 2022). The emphasis on protests and riots as the primary forms of conflict events resonates with studies highlighting the role of social unrest in resource-rich regions. The centrality of government police forces as the primary instigators of violence corresponds to literature emphasizing the role of state repression in response to perceived threats to economic interests.

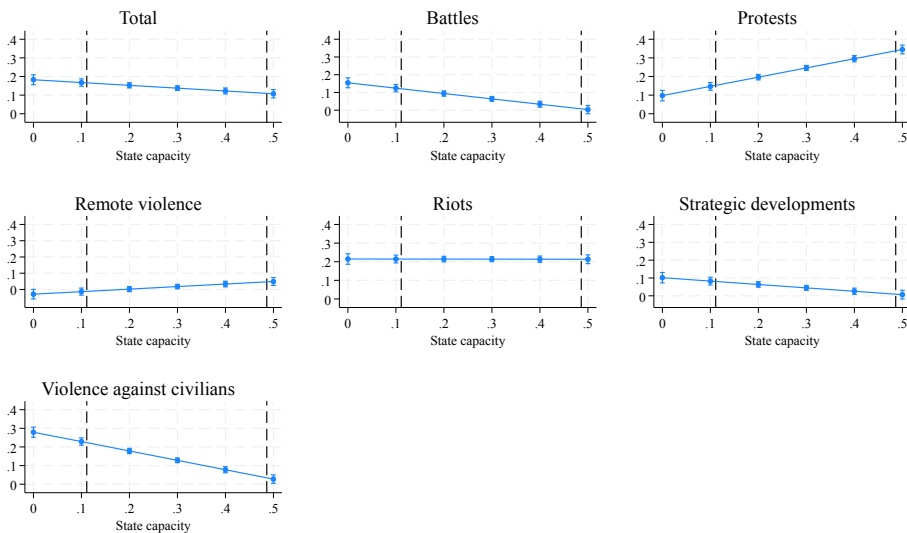
Our study, therefore, contributes to the literature by revealing the complexities of the extractive industry's impact on both economic development and conflict in post-conflict countries. The findings underscore the need to move beyond simplistic assumptions about the positive outcomes of resource extraction and emphasize the importance of context-specific considerations in post-conflict settings. This nuanced understanding is crucial for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars working towards sustainable development and peacebuilding in resource-rich post-conflict countries.

The effect of resource extraction conditional by levels state capacity

We hypothesized that the impact of natural resource extraction on different types of violence would differ between countries with low and high state capacity. In contexts where the state is weak, we expect grievances related to unfulfilled promises of development to lead to more battles and violence against civilians. In contexts where state capacity is high, we instead expect grievances to result in more protest actions that are met with government repression in the form of police violence against civilians.

Figure 10 shows the impact of resource extraction sites conditional on the level of state capacity. As expected, the mediating impact of states' capacities varies widely between types of violence. While resource extraction leads to fewer battles and strategic development when state capacity is high, the opposite is true for protests. The impact of the opening of resource extraction sites on protests is almost twice as large when state capacity is at the level of Ethiopia as compared to the level of state capacity in the DRC.

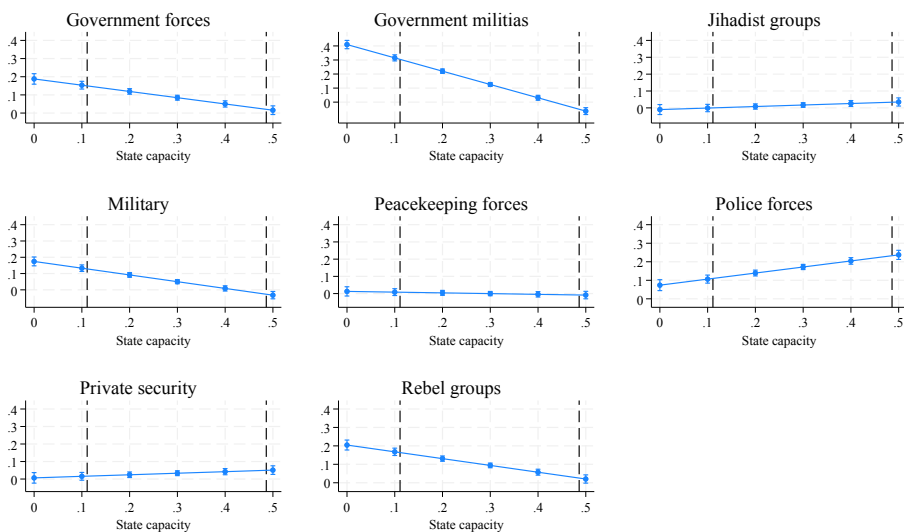
Figure 10. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on all conflicts by actor, interaction with state capacity



Note: The dashed vertical lines denote state capacity in the case when with the lowest level, DRC (0.11), and the highest, Ethiopia (0.49). State capacity is measured at the year when the peace agreement was signed.

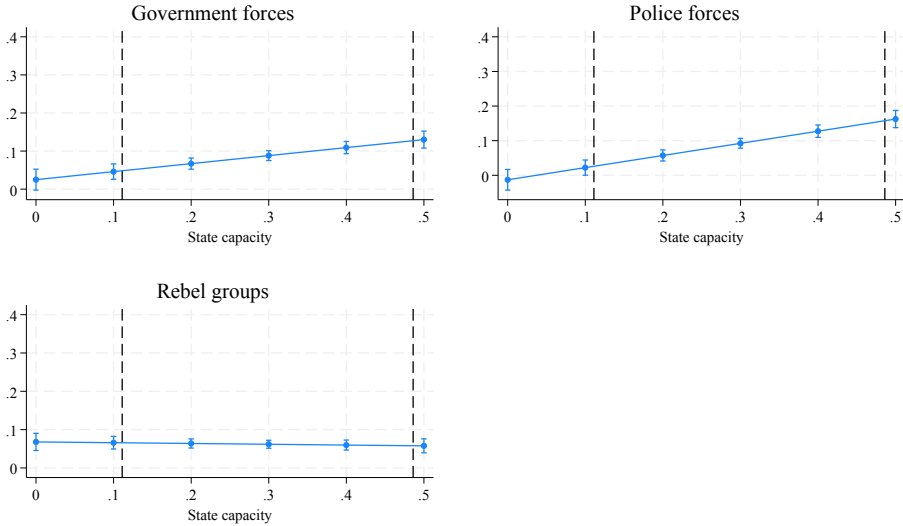
Figure 11 details the impact of natural resource extraction sites on violence against civilians by different types of actors, again, conditioned on the level of state capacity. We find that the impact on violence from government forces, government militias, as well as private militias decrease as state capacity gets higher. The opposite is true for police violence, where the impact increases as the strength of the state gets greater.

Figure 11. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on violence against civilians, by type of actor



Finally, figure 12 shows the impact on resource extraction on violence in conjunction with protests by different actors. It is clear that violence perpetrated by the police and by government forces become a more common response to the opening of extraction sites when the state is stronger.

Figure 12. Effect of all types of resource extraction sites on protest violence, by actor



These results are in line with our hypothesis and suggest that at high-capacity levels, rebels are less likely to directly challenge the power of the state, and citizens are more likely to rely on democratic channels to solve conflicts. There is more space for democratic protests, but when these challenge the economic revenues of both companies and the state, the state is more likely to repress protests against extractive industries by using the police force. These results are in line with previous studies by Evans and Sil (2019) and Wenegast and Scheider (2019).

Conclusion

The findings of this study challenge the prevailing assumption that intensification of extractive industries in post-conflict countries can serve as an effective peacebuilding strategy. While our analysis shows that the presence of extractive industries correlates with short-term increases in economic output, this growth does not translate into any

improvements in human development, as indicated by effects on infant mortality. This disconnect highlights a critical flaw in the strategy of leveraging natural resource extraction for post-conflict recovery and development.

Our research also underscores the multifaceted relationship between resource extraction and various forms of violence. The expansion of extractive industries is associated with increased levels of violence. This violence is driven by grievances stemming from unfulfilled promises of development, environmental degradation, and the socio-economic disruptions caused by resource extraction activities. These findings are consistent across different types of violence and actors, with government forces frequently being the main perpetrators of violence against civilians.

Moreover, the study highlights the significant role of state capacity in mediating the impact of extractive industries on violence. In high-capacity states, protests are more likely to occur, and state forces are more prone to repress these protests, indicating a preference for maintaining order over addressing the root causes of grievances. In contrast, low-capacity states experience more direct forms of violence, such as battles and strategic developments, reflecting the state's inability to manage conflicts arising from resource extraction.

These results contribute to the broader literature on the resource curse and environmental peacebuilding by providing empirical evidence that the economic benefits of resource extraction do not inherently lead to peace and development. Instead, the findings suggest that responsible management and governance of natural resources are crucial. Effective governance must prioritize an equitable distribution of resource revenues, environmental protection, and the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes to mitigate the negative externalities of resource extraction.

To achieve sustainable peace and development in post-conflict countries, policymakers and practitioners must move beyond the simplistic view of resource extraction as a path for economic recovery. Comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted impacts of extractive industries are essential. These strategies should focus on economic diversification, strengthening state institutions, and ensuring that the benefits of resource extraction are shared with the broader population. Only through such holistic approaches can post-conflict countries hope to break the cycle of violence and underdevelopment and achieve lasting peace and prosperity.

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Appendix

Table A. Data availability for post-natural resource conflict countries in Africa

Country	Rebel group	PA Year	Extraction	ACLED	DHS	UCDP
Angola	UNITA	2006	2002-2014	1997-	2015	1989-2022
Chad	MDJT/UFDD	2002/2007	2004-2015	1997-	2014	1989-2022
Côte d'Ivoire	FRCI	2004	2002-2012	1997-	1994, 1998, 2012	1990-2020
DRC	RCD/MLC	2003	2003-2014	1997-	2007, 2013	1998-2022
Liberia	LURD	2003	2004-2014	1997-	1996, 2007, 2013, 2019	1989-2020
Mozambique	RENAMO	1992	2001-2014	1997-	2011	1989-2022
Niger	CRA	1995	2002-2014	1997-	2012	1990-2022
Senegal	MDFC	2004	2002-2014	1997-	2005, 2010	1990-2021
Sierra Leone	RUF	1999	2002-2014	1997-	2008, 2013, 2019	1991-2021

South Sudan	SSDM/A	2014	2011-2015	2011-	x	2011-2022
South Sudan	SPLM/A in opposition	2018	2011-2015	2011-	x	2011-2022
Sudan	SPLM/A	2005	2002-2015	1997-	x	1989-2022
Sudan	Darfur SLM/A-MM	2006	2002-2015	1997-	x	1989-2022

Table B. Data availability for other post-natural resource conflict countries

Country	Rebel group	PA Year	Extraction	ACLED	DHS	UCDP
Bangladesh	JSS/SB	1997	2006-2015	2010-	1999, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2017	1989-2022
Cambodia	FUNCIPEC	1991	2006-2015	2010-	2000, 2005, 2010, 2014, 2021	1989-2012
Colombia	FARC	2016	1994-2014	2018-	2010	1989-2022
Congo	Ninjas, Cocoyes, Nstiloulous	1999	2004-2014	1997-	x	1992-2017
El Salvador	FMLN	1992	2001-2015	2018-	x	1989-2022
Ethiopia	ONLF	2018	2002-2015	1997-	2000, 2005, 2011, 2016	1989-2022
Guatemala	URNG	1996	1994-2014	2018-	2014	1989-2022

India	Bodoland ABSU	1993	1994-2015	2016-	x	1989- 2022
India	TNV	1988	1994-2015	2016-	x	1989- 2022
India	ATTF	1993	1994-2015	2016-	x	1989- 2022
Indonesia	GAM	2005	1994-2016	2015-	x	1989- 2022
Mali	CMA	2015	2002-2014	1997-	1995, 2001, 2006, 2012, 2018	1990- 2022
Mexico	EZLN	1996	1994-2015	2018-	x	1989- 2022
Myanmar	DKAB-5, ABSDF, KNU, RCSS	2015	2005-2014	2010-	2015	1989- 2022
Nepal	CPN-M	2006	2006-2015	2010-	2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2022	1990- 2022
Philippines	MILF	2006	1994-2015	2016-	2003, 2008, 2017, 2022	1989- 2022

Philippines	MILF	2014	1994-2015	2016-	2003, 2008, 2017, 2022	1989- 2022
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Figure A. Effect of resource extraction sites with government ownership on nightlights

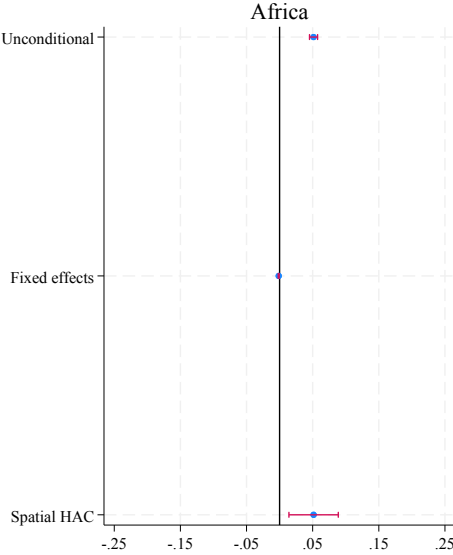


Figure B. Effect of resource extraction sites with private ownership on nightlights

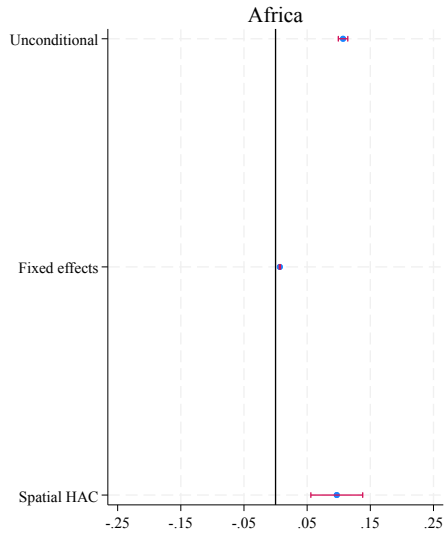


Figure C. Effect of resource extraction sites with government ownership on infant mortality

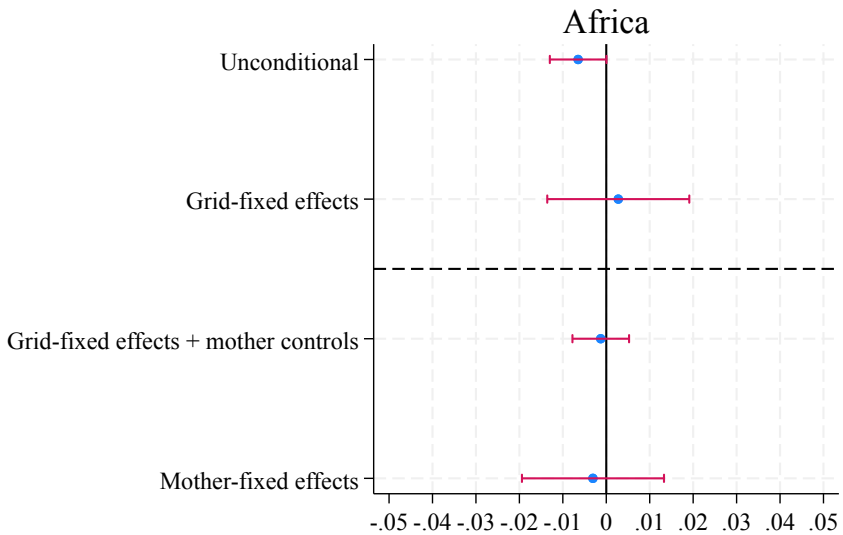


Figure D. Effect of resource extraction sites with industrial ownership on infant mortality

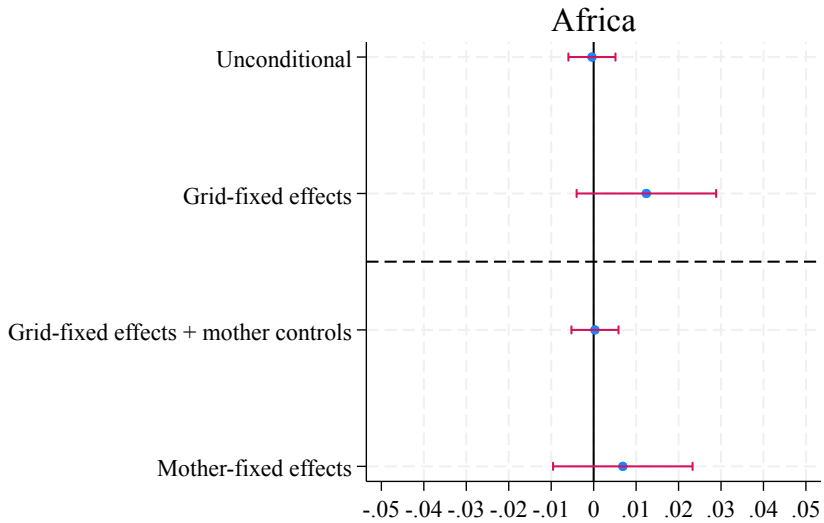


Figure E. Effect of all types of resource extraction output on conflicts

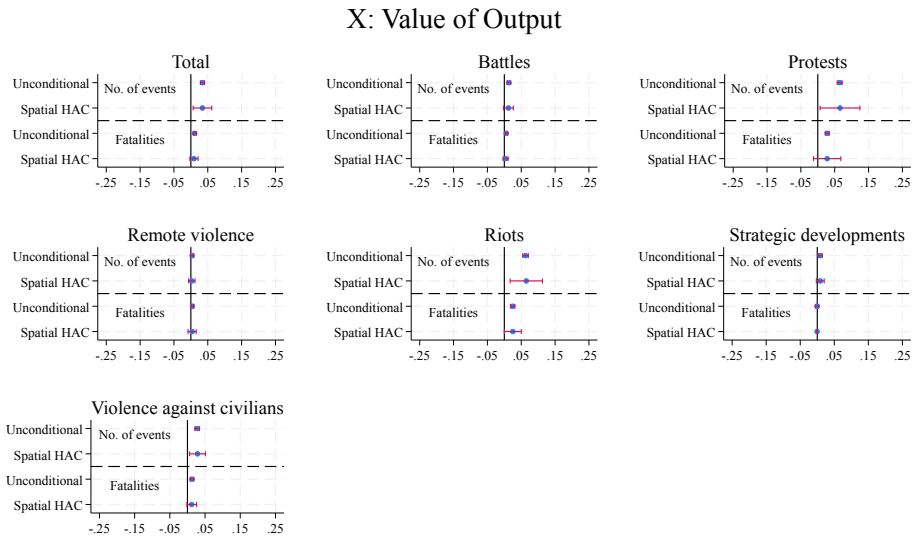


Figure F. Effect of private resource extraction output on conflicts

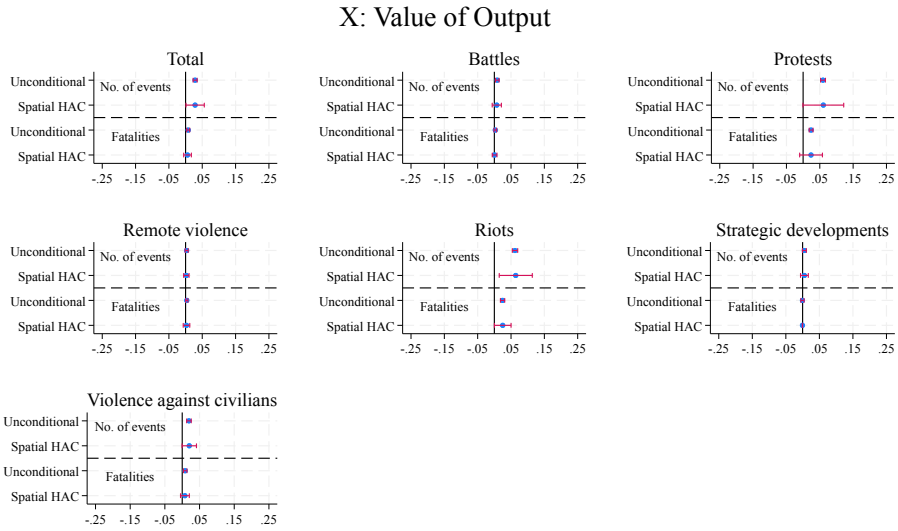


Figure G. Effect of government owned resource extraction output on conflicts

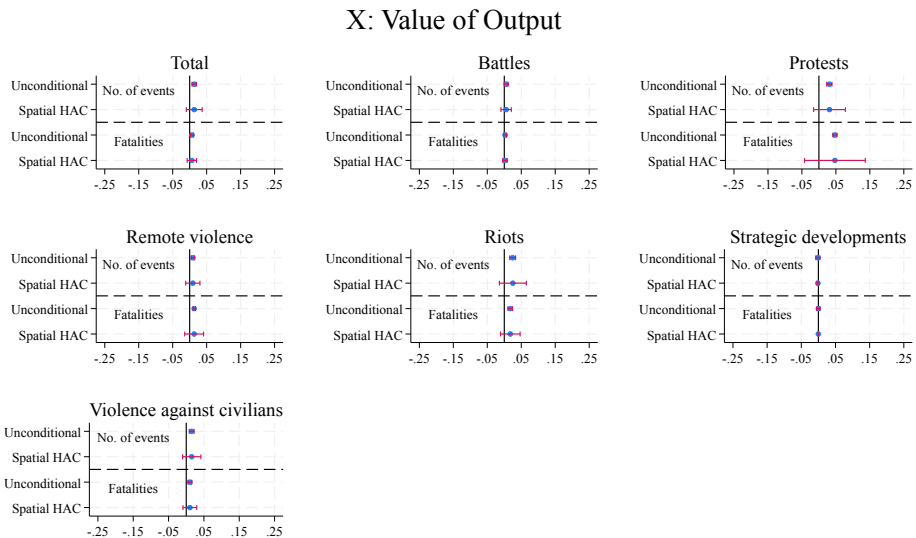
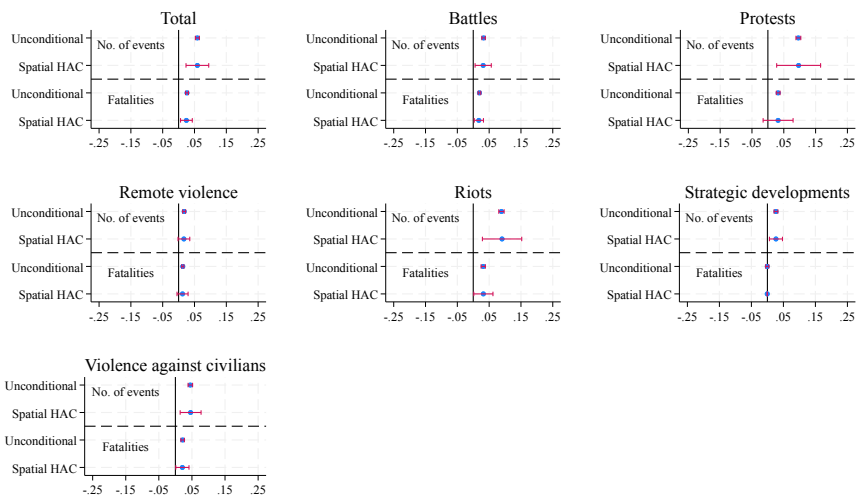



Figure H. Effect of all resource extraction sites on conflicts by type. 5-year lag.





Room to Grow and the Right to Say No: Theorizing the Liberatory Power of Peace in the Global South

Barbara Magalhães Teixeira 

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This article builds on feminist and decolonial perspectives and engages with political geography literature to rethink the way that peace and violence are understood in the Global South. Building peace that is coherent with planetary and ecological limits and that does not further direct structural violence necessitates breaking with the extractivist model of development that benefits growth and accumulation over the well-being of humans and more than human lives. By theorising the way that degrowth strategies can be understood as furthering climate resilient peace in the Global South, this article proposes two ways that we can understand peace as a liberatory praxis based on the 'room to grow' and 'the right to say no'. Through these two strategies, I aim at centring a liberatory praxis for peace on the need to negate both material and symbolic systems and structures of oppression that produce climate and environmental changes, as well as reproduce direct, structural and cultural violence. A peace praxis focused on the liberation of the Global South identifies that different types of violence linked to climate and environmental changes and underdevelopment are not only connected but that they share their roots in deeper structural systems of extractivism, exploitation and colonisation.

Introduction

How do we make space for peace in the Global South, in a context of rising economic and political inequalities as well as environmental and climate change impacts? Both research and policy have come to understand issues of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and insecurity and instability to be intertwined (Agenda 2030 n/d.). While these issues concern the global community as a whole, countries of the Global South face them most acutely. Approaches such as that of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promote a holistic understanding of environmental protection, economic growth and peacebuilding, and the achievement of these goals is seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing. However, this complementarity has since been

CONTACT Barbara Magalhães Teixeira  barbara.magalhaes_teixeira@svet.lu.se  Department of Political Science, Lund University, Lund SE-22100, Sweden

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challenged (Krause 2020; Nicoson 2021). For instance, Goal 8 of the SDGs calls for continued global economic growth of 3% per year as a necessary method for achieving the other human development goals; this is, however, incompatible with the overarching goal of living ‘in harmony with nature’ (Hickel 2019; Hickel and Kallis 2020). Continually rising levels of resource extraction and consumption needed to achieve infinite economic growth drive environmental breakdown and climate change (Lynas, Houlton, and Perry 2021).

Moreover, the connection between economic growth and peace has also been disputed. Though there is a longheld assumption that growth promotes and sustains peace, scholars increasingly point to the harmful consequences that a dependence on growth can have for societies coming out of armed conflict (Dahl and Høyland 2012). The focus on economic growth has also been noted to produce broader patterns of harm to both people and nature, understood as ‘corporate violence’ (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson 2020). In addition, the benefits of economic growth have been shown to only improve quality of life to a certain threshold, where thereafter it jeopardises social cohesion and well-being (Petridis et al. 2015). Thus, the assumption that economic growth can power both sustainable development and peace has not been shown to be significant, it rather has the opposite effect. Indeed, many studies have shown the links between economic growth, capitalist expansion and extractive industries with armed conflict and different types of violence across the negative-positive continuum (Duffield 2007; Lahiri-Dutt 2006; Maher 2014, Thomson 2011, Dube and Vargas 2013; Selby and Hoffman 2014; Magalhães Teixeira 2021).

In this paper, I develop theoretical propositions of ‘room to grow’ and ‘the right to say no’ as practices for building liberatory peace¹ in the Global South that address both material and symbolic modes of violence and oppression. First, I discuss the idea of ‘room to grow’ based on how strategies for degrowth – that is a purposeful recentring of the economy away from the goal of infinite growth (Kallis 2018) – in the Global North can have positive impacts for the social, economic and environmental emancipation of the Global South. Second, through the idea of ‘the right to say no’, I theorise how systemic alternatives – like *buen vivir*, *ecological swaraj*, *ubuntu*, *ujamaa* – already practiced by different communities and societies in the Global South can be understood as processes of building peace by negating both material and symbolic structures of violence and domination, thus making space for peace.

Furthermore, this paper provides conceptual contributions to peace and conflict studies literature concerned with how to combine ideas of building peace that not only negate social and economic structures that perpetuate inequality and violence – such as that of development and economic growth – but that also account for how environmental and climate change effects might be included in a process towards peace. Understanding peace in a positive

sense, as more than the absence of violence, actively promotes the transformation of violent structures of domination and exploitation. The idea of climate resilient peace has so far been theorised from a Global North perspective (Nicoson 2021); in this paper, the focus is to theorise this idea beyond the Global North and towards a perspective of the Global South: looking at both the material and the symbolic constraints of the colonial-capitalist-extractive system as challenges to building peace that is not only positive for people but for the planet as well.

In doing so, I combine ideas from feminist and decolonial theories towards a goal of rethinking how peace is and could be understood, and what kinds of economic, political, and environmental transformations are necessary to address peace and sustainability simultaneously. To do this, it is necessary to engage in close conversation with literature in the fields of political geography and post-development to argue how the strategy of achieving development through economic growth and intensification of extractive industries is not only detrimental to the environment but also to the prospects of peace. I do this through engaging with knowledge and epistemologies of the South (Guzmán Arroyo 2019; Carneiro 2005; Muñoz-García, Lira, and Loncón 2022), in order to understand the process of development and its relationship to peace and violence, and argue for the need to understand these questions in a broader historical, ideological and structural sense, taking account of the colonial history and geopolitical implications.

The Global South as a Geopolitical Site of Domination and Resistance

In order to explore the possibilities for peace as created and experienced in the so-called Global South, I first consider the creation of the Global South and how this might shape how possibilities of peace are made (im)possible. I build on the categorisation by Jaramillo and Vera Lugo (2013) to argue that the Global South should not be reduced to a geographic and economic marker or to a heuristic for the 'Other' in relation to rich and (over)developed countries of the Global North. Instead, we should understand the Global South dialectically, as produced through the material structures of capitalist systems that shape and are shaped by the symbolic modes of domination and exploitation (Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2002; Quijano 2000). It is, thus, necessary to understand how processes of capitalist market expansion through the exploitation of both people and environment have not only shaped the material and symbolic conditions of domination but also the organisation of resistance. Here, it is important to highlight that this encounter creates friction between the structural constraints of domination and the organisation of social movements that aim at destabilising hegemonic power relations in the capitalist world-system. In this sense, the Global South emerges not only as a geographic

and economic space constrained by structural and material realities but also as a geopolitical site of domination and resistance.

This dialectical relationship can be best understood through a discussion of the project of global development as a material process of accumulation but also of symbolic and cultural domination. Development emerged as a global strategy of economic advancement, closely tied to processes of nation-building in ‘underdeveloped’ countries in the Global South. After the end of World War II, Western and Eurocentric models of capitalist, liberal and democratic nation-states were promoted to bring freedom, political stability, and peace (Escobar 1995; Esteva, Babones, and Babicky 2013). While advocated as a liberatory process for the Global South, in its essence, this was and continues to be a civilisational project based on an imitative process that homogenises different cultures and ways of life found in the Global South to instead mirror the values and norms of the North (Bhambra 2014). Western countries and financial agencies weaponise development aid, conditioning it on the implementation of democracy, good governance and human rights systems, in what Pul (2016) calls the process of ‘making me you’.

In this sense, this idea of *modernity* and *progress* is deeply rooted in Eurocentric views of the world, which is taken as universal and an inevitable path towards development. Utilitarian Western views of how societies should be organised, including through domination over the environment, become the golden standard for peace and progress. Models of development advanced through a process of universalisation, project the idea of reliance on resource extraction and economic growth to be key for modernisation and progress, and ultimately, peace (Hettne 2001). However, while this Western/Eurocentric view of the world is seen as secular, rational and *supracultural*, it is actually a very specific worldview based on ‘a local culture (however now globalized) of the West’ (Wynter 1996, 300). In this sense, the idea of development can be understood as a form of power that enables western domination in and through the world system and works as a standard through which the Global North measures the Global South (Bhambra 2014).

Thus, the critical use of the term ‘Global South’ as a geopolitical site² that I employ in this paper understands both the material and symbolic movements towards the recognition of the shared history of colonisation - and more recently of development and extractive transformations in the periphery of the global system (Miraftab and Kudva 2014). The geopolitical understanding of the Global South is marked by the recognition that the projects of development through resource extraction and economic growth have not delivered their bountiful promises of progress but have instead crystalized a shared condition at the margins of the capitalist system (López 2007). In this view, the Global South is understood as having systematically been ‘object of practices and discourses of domination, colonization, and *subalternization*,

but that is also seen as a configurator of active subjects of historical processes of postcolonial resistance' (Jaramillo and Vera Lugo 2013, 16).

Finally, to better comprehend the Global South as a geopolitical concept with all the tensions and contradictions that it encompasses, it is also necessary to understand it as a geopolitically situated space of knowledge production (Fúnez-Flores 2022). Building on Grosfoguel (2007), I differentiate between epistemic location and social location. Epistemic location refers to systems of understanding; in particular, I point to systematically excluded ways of seeing and understanding the world (Guzmán Arroyo 2019; Carneiro 2005), often focused on radical epistemologies that have articulated non-western, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist systems of knowledge. Social location, on the other hand, refers to the actor, person or group that is enunciating and articulating systems of knowledge. These functions of locating are nuanced, for as Grosfoguel (2007, 213) notes, being 'socially located in the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location'.

Thus, speaking from the social and geographical location of the Global South, this paper seeks to expand theorising beyond Eurocentric and Western interpretations of modernity, history, knowledge and power; and of being and understanding our relationship to the world. I do this because of a strong epistemological commitment that is shaped and formed by my own experiences and position as a scholar from the Global South while being careful to consider my positionality in order to not reproduce and/or detach myself from the structures that I discuss in this paper. Based on a decolonial feminist commitment, and from this normative point of departure, I dive into a reconceptualisation of how violence and peace have been connected with the project of development in both academic and policy circles, contributing to ongoing critique with a view towards the processes by which natural resource extraction reproduces processes of violence and the implications of this for building peace.

Rethinking Violence and Peace in the Global South

To question violence and peace in and from the Global South, I break with the apolitical and ahistorical theorisations of the causes of war and violence, and further challenge the lack of creativity and imaginative power in envisioning peace beyond the structures of the Eurocentric and neoliberal global capitalist order. Under current hegemonic understanding of peace and conflict, building peace in the Global South necessitates sustainable development based on economic growth, resource extraction and an array of social and political neoliberal policies. This is built on a colonial and Western understanding that peace and development go hand-in-hand, and that they are mutually reinforcing (Duffield 2007; Hettne 1983). However, rather than realising the

dream of ‘peace and prosperity’, processes of development and globalisation have been characterised rather as a ‘nightmare’ for marginalised groups (Escobar 1995, 4). The politics of forced development through infinite economic growth and resource extraction have resulted in rising inequalities and poverty, environmental degradation, and climate change, as well as increasing levels of conflict and insecurity in the Global South (Magalhães Teixeira 2021). In this section, I explore the potentials and limitations of peace and violence in and for the Global South by exploring what the field of peace and conflict studies can learn from political geography and ecology.

While the question of violence should not be seen as necessarily and deterministically tied to the Global South, geographers still point to an ‘Orientalist’ (Said 2003) tendency within peace and conflict literature and practice; wherein the Global South is seen mostly as violence prone and unruly. Springer (2009, 2011) illustrates that this construction of the cartographies of fear and violence as an exclusive problem of the Global South works to promote capitalist expansion linked to liberal democracy and human rights as the ‘harbinger of rationality and the only guarantor of peace’ (2011, 91). This geographic imaginary that views violence and insecurity as being bounded by place produces and reproduces the idea that violence is *irrational* and an *anomaly* and tied specifically to underdeveloped and ‘uncivilized’ cultures and societies of the Global South, while the military interventions of the Global North are upheld as rational and embedded in discourses of progress and freedom (Laliberté 2016). Lahiri-Dutt (2006, 15) argues that the way current theories of armed conflict rationalise the causes of war in the Global South is tied to the idea that underdeveloped countries lack control over both their populations and their natural resources. Indeed, this idea of development as a process of *ordering* is connected to the vision that a world outside the Western/Eurocentric rule would be doomed to total and complete chaos (Smith 2020).

Here, I identify two issues that need to be reconceptualised for a critical understanding of violence and conflict in the Global South, and provide ways for this reconceptualisation that brings the fields of peace and conflict studies and political geography and ecology closer together. The first issue is connected to the very narrow way that violence and conflict are conceptualised in the field of peace and conflict studies. Armed conflict is often understood through its operationalisation as ‘25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year’ (UCDP n/d), and seen as an event, or as an outcome of the incompatibility between warring parties. This definition has been criticised for being symptomatic, in the way that ‘it does not theorize why incompatibilities occur or how conflict processes unfold’ (Le Billon and Duffy 2018, 242). This narrow conceptualisation focuses solely on observable or manifest types of violence, while it renders other types of violence such as structural or

cultural violence invisible (Confortini 2006). Through a narrow view, armed conflicts over natural resources, like the ones over diamonds in Angola or Sierra Leone, are understood as being caused by the greed of rebels in profiting from selling high-value natural resources and financing the rebellion, or by the abundance of resources that might be linked to the *resource curse* (Mildner, Lauster, and Wodni 2011). However, it fails to account for how abundance of diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone only exists because of global scarcity, and because of the high economic value input onto diamonds by the global economic system (Selby and Hoffman 2014).

This is connected to the second issue identified, in which armed conflicts are understood to exist almost in a vacuum, with the causes of conflict most commonly identified within the domestic arena. This methodological nationalism tendency detaches conflicts from their historical and structural positions in the global system and fails to account for how processes of capitalist expansion, colonial legacies and militarised histories of nation-building influence armed conflicts today (Jaime-Salas et al. 2020; Rojas 2001). In order to rethink violence and conflict in the Global South, it is necessary to understand these phenomena not as events, or as outcomes, but as shaped by various historically and socially specific political, ideological, economic, and identity factors. Moreover, it becomes central to theorise how local and seemingly context-specific phenomena are indeed a reflection of larger structural processes of global scale.

Based on this, and inspired by the work of political geographers, I propose rethinking conflict as an unfolding process, rather than as an outcome or a physical manifestation of violence. I focus on the idea of 'sites of violence', which understands that even the most seemingly place-bound manifestations of violence should be understood within the wider context of historical processes and structural constraints (Springer 2011). This signals a shift from a narrow conceptualisation of conflict towards understanding it as a 'recurring historically-driven and multi-scalar socio-environmental process' (Le Billon and Duffy 2018, 242). This means that in order to understand a material manifestation of violent conflict, it is not enough to investigate the spaces and local contexts where they unfold, but it is necessary to understand how they are a reflection of larger structural and macro processes (Riofrancos 2021). For example, when theorising about causes of natural resources conflicts, like in the case of Sudan or Colombia, it is important to understand that manifestations of violence are not only caused by the abundance of oil and other mineral resources and the greed of rebels. Instead, it is important to critically analyse how a utilitarian and market-based view of natural resources inputs high economic value to oil and minerals; and how this, in turn, might affect armed conflict (Selby and Hoffman 2014).

The Feminist Continuum of Violence and Peace

Rethinking the causes of violence and how conflicts unfold through the idea of geopolitical sites has positive ramifications not only for understanding conflict but for theorising peace as well. Through a narrow understanding of conflict, the possibilities for building peace are very constrained. Take, for example, the case of natural resources conflicts: since the abundance of high-value natural resources is seen as the cause of conflict, peace is understood to be possible only through the economic exploitation of those resources in an effective and responsible way, in the moulds of the extractivist model of development. In this scenario, state-owned or multinational corporations should take over the ownership of mineral resources in order to provide responsible and transparent management in the name of good governance (Lahiri-Dutt 2006).

The idea of peace and peacebuilding become tied to the processes of development and the assumed benefits of continued resource extraction to promote economic growth. Indeed, the revitalisation of extractive industries in post-conflict countries has been argued to be a powerful tool in jump-starting the economy and promoting sustainable development (Bruch, Muffett, and Nichols 2016; Conca and Beevers 2018). The argument rests on the idea of institution-building and a focus on good governance, where the responsible and transparent management of natural resources can shift their negative connection to armed conflict into a positive connection towards peace instead (Dresse et al. 2018; Florian, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021). I argue that this understanding reproduces the 'Orientalist' view on peace and peacebuilding, in which peace interventions are seen as necessary to advance Eurocentric/Western values and institutions. This combined approach of *peace and development* not only perpetuates unequal social and power relations (Laliberté 2016) but it also reinforces violence that is inherent to the structure of the capitalist system and processes of extractivism (Escobar 1995; Gudynas 2015; Kothari and Harcourt 2004).

Here, I identify the second problem with how peace in the Global South is currently understood and provide a necessary reconceptualisation. Peace and conflict literature increasingly understand peace through its negative conceptualisation as the absence of organised physical and direct violence based on Galtung (1969). The field has grown to focus systematically on explaining the causes of war and violent conflict, and on measuring and quantifying peace (de Guevara, Berit, and Kostić 2023; Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, and Strand 2014; Krause 2019; Sharifi, Simangan, and Kaneko 2021). For example, violence is often measured by the number of battlefield deaths: fewer than 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year translates to the prevalence of peace (UCDP n/d). However, seeing the relationship between violence and peace as dichotomous may miss nuances and the complex links between them. Geographers have pointed to the problem of conceptualising peace only in contrast to war

(Koopman 2011; Ross 2011), and how peace is actually a spatial phenomenon, which means that it can exist in islands inside conflict systems, but also that it means different things across time, space and scale (Megoran, Williams, and McConnell 2014).

This view is advanced by recent developments in feminist and decolonial peace studies, which take a more holistic approach to the relationship between violence and peace. From a feminist perspective, the dichotomous way in which peace and violence are understood masks many other types of violence that happen outside the battlefield, as well as more invisible³ types of violence like structural or cultural forms of violence (Cockburn 2004; True 2020; Wibben et al. 2019). Feminists propose to understand peace and violence as existing in a continuum, in which both peace and violence can exist simultaneously, and that different types of violence happen even during *peace time* (Cockburn 2004; True 2020). For example, understanding violence and conflict connected to the environment through a narrow understanding would only account for overt violence connected to armed conflict and civil wars over natural resources (Le Billon 2014). However, there are many other forms of conflict and violence that happen around sites of extraction of natural resources (Temper, Del Bene, and Martinez-Alier 2015), as well as along supply chains (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson 2020). This means that a feminist view would be able to account for the way that state repression is used to suppress protests around mining sites (Wegenast and Schneider 2017), how the modernisation of agriculture contributes to land dispossession of small farmers (Maher 2014), as well as the systematic assassinations of environmental and land defenders (Scheidel et al. 2020). Other more traditionally invisible types of violence would also be highlighted, like the slow violence of climate change (Nixon 2013), as well as other types of structural violence in the form of political, social, and economic marginalisation of local populations in extractive zones (Socioambiental 2021).

A feminist understanding of the continuum of violence and peace not only highlights the different types of violence that can happen during so-called peace time but it understands that they are intimately connected. True (2020, 86) argues that it is important to understand violence as a reflection of 'predictable and explicable pattern of violence by a group of perpetrators, and which has a basis in social structures'. Through this approach, we can understand that direct violence and conditions of underdevelopment in the Global South are perpetrated by the material structures of the capitalist logic of production that divides countries into centre and periphery, of producers and consumers of natural resources. This is based on social structures that sustain this relationship, like the historical processes of colonialism and neoliberal globalisation, which, in turn, are based on the Eurocentric, Orientalist, and patriarchal norms and values that legitimise the continued focus on economic growth through resource extraction as the pathway towards *progress*. In this

sense, violence and conflict are not isolated events that randomly happen in underdeveloped nations of the Global South – in a geographical sense – but it is rather the manifestation of larger structural processes of violent domination and exploitation – in a geopolitical sense.

In this context, peacebuilding and development programmes that continuously focus on the promotion of Western neoliberal values and norms through the expansion of capitalist markets and the intensification of extractive industries can be seen as perpetuating violent structures through the reproduction of uneven development and rising inequalities. This harms not only humans and more than humans but the environment as well, as the dependence on increasing levels of resource exploitation and consumption drives current climate change and environmental crises. When thinking about building peace with this understanding in mind, it is important to look at peace not only as an end goal or in its negative conceptualisation but also at how peace encompasses wider structural conditions and implications of relations between development and the environment. In this sense, in order to fully disentangle the idea of peace as a binary counterpart of war and armed conflict, it is necessary to take a decolonial and liberatory approach to building peace, especially when looking at the Global South in the context of environmental and climate changes.

The Liberatory Power of Peace: Decolonial Thought and Praxis

Echoing recent calls for rescuing the emancipatory⁴ power of peace and peace research (Jaime-Salas et al. 2020; Krause 2019; Rodríguez Fernandez et al. 2021), I argue that understanding the possibilities of peace in the Global South necessitates working with both the material and the symbolic aspects of underdevelopment and conflict and how they affect peace. I therefore turn to connections between the environment and violence, considering in particular how environmental harms such as climate change are produced by the same violent structures that pose a challenge for peace. From a liberatory perspective, thus, it is imperative to reconceptualise the idea of peace to ensure that it does not further reproduce structures of violence to both people and the environment.

Building on this normative commitment, I respond to recent work by Nicoson (2021) proposing a theoretical framework for climate resilient peace. This is based on a positive and intersectional approach to peace, in which the idea of peace is concerned with power structures and hierarchies. From this perspective, vulnerability and resilience of certain groups to both direct and structural violence are politically produced and situated based on gendered, racialised, and class divisions. From this, the idea of building peace is seen as an iterative process with the aim of changing unequal distribution of both power and resources which are markers of structural violence. Nicoson

(2021) understands that peace cannot be built on top of violent structures – of economic growth and resource extraction – that produce and reproduce violence towards people and the environment. Thus, in order to build peace, she suggests linking the idea of climate resilient peace to propositions coming from degrowth.

A positive peace and degrowth approach together promote the negation of violent structures and a more egalitarian sharing of resources, wealth, and power in order to foster greater well-being. Degrowth can be a powerful ally in building peace because it understands that the roots of conflict and violence are oppressive and unequal systems of accumulation, and it aims at addressing this problem at the same systemic level (Nicoson 2021). In this sense, combining ideas of degrowth and positive peace allows for a more holistic view of both sources of conflict and ways to address it. The framework of climate resilient peace and degrowth has so far been developed to address structural inequalities and climate vulnerabilities in the Global North. This is because degrowth entails downscaling the levels of production and consumption of highly industrialised societies based on their unequal responsibility for climate change and ecological breakdown (Hickel 2020; Kallis 2018).

Based on this, I argue that it is important to not only theorise what a climate resilient peace framework would look like with a focus on the Global South but how degrowth ideas coupled with systemic alternatives can be understood as liberatory praxis for peace. In this way, I understand the goal of using degrowth in connection to climate resilient peace not as to achieve degrowth as an end in itself, but as a tool towards the necessary transformations that are fundamental for decolonisation – and peace. In this sense, I concur with Tyberg (2020) that degrowth is a path towards dismantling the systems of accumulation of both resources, wealth, and power in the North, while the liberation of the Global South is the horizon to be achieved. More centrally, I focus on how these processes can be understood to contribute to a praxis of peace that is transformative and liberatory.

The way peace has been used in connection with development, and powered through economic growth and resource extraction, serves to reproduce the civilisational matrix of the West through violent structures of domination (Jaime-Salas et al. 2020). From this point of view, the strategies of increased resource extraction and management of natural resources as working towards building peace are not only focused solely on the symptoms of conflict (i.e. direct physical violence) but it also reproduces structural and cultural violence as it continues to prescribe shallow measures that not only do not address the distribution of resources and power but that further consolidate unequal and unjust structures of control of minerals and the economic focus on growth. Instead, a liberatory approach to peace would focus on negating both symbolic and material structures that produce and reproduce violence and domination, focused

on the dialectic relationship between theory and praxis (Freire 2005). From this perspective, it becomes impossible to build peace as a liberatory praxis if it is built on violent structures of extractivism, exploitation, and colonisation.

As Lorde (1983) has famously argued, the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Understanding the pathway towards peace only through the intensification of extractivism and economic growth as tools for development and progress only serves to maintain the master's house intact. What I mean is that, until the idea of peace can be understood and practiced as something bigger than just the reproduction of violent strategies for development through economic growth and extractivism, peace will be oppressive rather than liberatory. For peace to be liberatory, it must not only put the *wretched of the earth* first but it should be connected to envisioning that another world is possible 'where our imagination is let loose outside the bounds of the colonial order' (Fanon 1965). In this sense, it should be connected to an imaginative process of creating alternative systems – both material and symbolic – to organise our societies, our relations to each other and to the environment. These alternatives should be attentive to dismantling structures and systems of exploitation and domination of both people and nature and focusing on building relationships of reciprocity and care instead.

I argue that the propositions of 'room to grow' and 'the right to say no' can be understood as a praxis for peace in two ways: first, through the idea of 'room to grow', I argue that furthering degrowth proposals in the Global North, as mechanisms of climate resilient peace, would allow for the material process of decolonisation and reparation of historical inequalities at the global level. Moving away from economic growth as the main objective of these societies would not only impact degrowth and peace in the North but have important repercussions in the Global South as well. And second, through the idea of 'the right to say no', I theorise about how we can understand movements against extractivism and the colonisation of nature as working towards building peace. I explore how alternative projects to the hegemonic symbolic and material systems of domination of both people and the environment coming from the Global South could serve as inspiration for other ways to organise our societies and our relationships to each other. This also serves as the basis on how to build peace from a decolonial perspective. Finally, building on decolonial thought and praxis, I understand the resistance of anti-hegemonic movements as potential processes to building peace in the Global South based not only on a theoretical understanding of decolonial peace, but as being necessarily grounded in concrete struggles that actively negate systems and structures of violence and oppression and that foster the construction of peaceful societies instead.

Room to Grow

The proposition of the ‘room to grow’ addresses the material dimensions of the structures and systems of oppression and violence imposed on the Global South by the global capitalist-extractivist system. Through the transition towards degrowth in Global North countries, I join other scholars in arguing that this would open up ‘room to grow’ for countries of the Global South, where there is still a need to increase energy and resource use in order to meet human needs. Indeed, a common misconception about degrowth is that this field of theory and political action advocates that all sectors of the economy need to degrow equally, and that all countries need to follow a universal path towards decreasing energy and resource use. However, the pathways through and towards degrowth are very different for countries in the Global North and in the Global South given their current and historical responsibilities for ecological breakdown and the climate crisis.

Through the idea of ‘room to grow’, I build on the understanding that natural resources are a shared and finite resource, and that all people in the world are entitled to an equal share to meet their basic needs. However, through a history of accumulation and appropriation of both resources and labour from the Global South by the Global North (Hickel, Sullivan, and Zoomkawala 2021) the larger portion of responsibility to degrow lies in countries and societies of the Global North. Indeed, recent research by Hickel (2020) shows that Global North countries are responsible for 92% of excess carbon emissions, while Global South countries are responsible for 8%. While emerging economies of China and India are amongst the top emitters today, when accounting for historical emissions, Global South countries at large are shown to be in climate credit, meaning that they have had little to no responsibility for the current climate crisis. This is because Global North countries have used and abused their fair share of natural resources, resulting in a process that Hickel (2020) calls ‘atmospheric colonization’ because of the excessive amount of CO₂ emissions that the atmosphere cannot absorb and that creates imbalances in our climate.

This is why the proposition of ‘room to grow’ focuses on a fast and radical transformation of the economies of the Global North, which have been emitting excessively historically, and where rates of economic growth have become detached from any increase in well-being (Petridis et al. 2015). A degrowth transition in the Global North would not only result in important victories for mitigating climate change but it would also dismantle the material structures of domination of both the environment and people in the Global South, given the history of appropriation and exploitation of both resources and labour (Hickel, Sullivan, and Zoomkawala 2021; Raj and Moore 2018). By dismantling these structures, it would open up ‘room to grow’ for those economies in the Global South that still need to grow important parts of their economy in

order to meet people's needs for food, sanitation and healthcare, for instance. But how can we do that?

Important studies in ecological economics have been trying to understand how we can provide a good standard of living for all people at a global scale without transgressing the planetary boundaries that are limited and finite. O'Neill et al. (2018) in their project on 'a good life for all within planetary boundaries' show that a significant decrease in resource use in countries of the Global North could be implemented without affecting social outcomes in their own societies. This is because at high levels of resource and energy use, growth is not connected to an increase in need satisfaction; it is actually detached from this social component and neither necessary nor beneficial for increasing well-being (Fanning, O'Neill, and Büchs 2020; Steinberger, Lamb, and Sakai 2020). Of course, increase in energy and resource use at low levels of consumption would significantly increase well-being of poorer populations in the Global South, especially tied to health indicators, like the adoption of cleaner technologies for everyday life such as electric cooking stoves instead of open fire (Baltruszewicz et al. 2021). However, high levels of energy consumption in high-income countries are not tied to such activities that increase well-being anymore, but rather is driven by luxury consumption, overproduction and overconsumption, profit making, and debt and rent extraction (Oswald et al. 2021; Stratford 2020; Vogel et al. 2021).

This is because, under current levels of consumption, there is a lot of material resources and energy that go to waste either because of inefficient systems of production, or because of problems such as planned obsolescence of technological equipment, decreased quality of products with the aim of increase replaceability, and expansion of cheap production and consumption in order to keep up with financial pressures and profit making (Vogel et al. 2021). While strong arguments are made about the need to further develop technologies that will allow us to better use resources in the future, research shows that meeting people's needs at a global scale and at sustainable levels of energy use is feasible with the use of current technologies (Lamb and Rao 2015; Millward-Hopkins et al. 2020; Rao, Min, and Mastrucci 2019; Steinberger and Timmons Roberts 2010). Together, these studies show that the focus, thus, should be not on increasing energy and resource efficiency to produce more and better in the future, but it is about creating economic and political provisioning systems that address excess use and consumption of energy and resources and focus on redistribution instead.

Oswald et al. (2021) have shown that global income inequality is tightly connected with resource and energy use, and that shifting our societies and economies towards more equitable systems based on redistribution can not only lessen the stress on the environment and help halt climate changes but can also significantly affect people's well-being at a global scale. This is where a geopolitical understanding of the Global South that is not tied to the

boundaries of nation-states is important, given that it is possible to calculate that the richest 10% of the global population are responsible for almost half of total lifestyle consumption emissions (Chancel and Piketty 2015). This shows that when a few people at a global scale use a lot of energy while many people across the globe do not, the responsibility of climate change and environmental breakdown concentrates among a few perpetrators. This becomes a problem since most of the energy used by ‘mega-consumers’ is not essential but is instead based on luxury energy and luxury emissions, which could be avoided without harming anyone⁵ (Oswald et al. 2021).

By calculating the global distribution of income at different levels of inequality, Oswald et al. (2021) show that given the current size of the global economy, we could lift billions of people out of severe energy poverty without pushing anyone into it. If we were to decrease the resource and energy use of the 1% richest in the world, we could benefit the 40% poorest by increasing their energy accessibility by 1100%. This means that if OECD countries were to pursue degrowth policies in order to decrease their use of resources and energy, but countries of the Global South were to continue growing in order to meet the most basic needs, the end result of this equation would still be an indirect redistribution of global economic wealth, because it means the Global North would stop appropriating resources and energy from the Global South and allow it the room to grow in a way that fulfils the needs of its populations.

However, Oswald et al. (2021, 3) have shown that stronger redistributive policies can take us longer in tackling inequality that can directly affect our environmental impact, since ‘a reduction in inequality, if associated with growth in low-income countries and low growth in high-income regions, yields lower global carbon emissions’. While O’Neill et al. (2018, 92) show that basic physical needs like nutrition, sanitation, access to energy and elimination of extreme poverty below the US\$ 1.90 line ‘could be met for 7 billion people at a level of resource use that does not significantly transgress planetary boundaries’, Oswald et al. (2021) show that in order to bring global energy inequality down to below Scandinavian levels (which are concentrated at around 0.25 on the GINI scale) and lift everyone into the proximity of ‘decent living energy’ standards, we would need to reorganise our economy and implement strong systems of redistribution that could ensure US\$15 purchasing power parity per capita – at a global scale. Otherwise, if we aim only at tackling extreme poverty, the world would remain at basically the same level of energy inequality and the environmental impacts would only worsen.

As of now, no country meets basic social needs for its population within sustainable levels of resource use. However, Global South countries such as Algeria, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, and Cuba are amongst the most efficient in providing a good standard of living to their populations while transgressing fewer planetary boundaries (O’Neill et al. 2018; SDI 2019). One example to learn from is that of Vietnam, which appears as a promising case on the

possibility to achieve good social indicators within planetary boundaries: it transgresses only one biophysical boundary – CO₂ emissions – and it achieves sufficient levels on 6 out of 11 social indicators – employment, healthy life expectancy, nutrition, income, access to energy and social support (Good Life For All Project 2018). Vietnam's social protection system spans a broad range of policies of social insurance and assistance in the form of monthly cash and food transfers, secured pension and maternity leave, as well as universal health care (ILO 2021). It is important to highlight that these Global South countries are able to operate within planetary boundaries not because of a strong commitment to sustainability, but because of the structural constraints of underdevelopment that are built onto the global economic system and have made the available resources and financing for exploitation and transformation of the environment scarce. However, looking at these examples, I want to direct our attention and discussion towards how we can learn about the power of redistributive policies and of increasing resource use efficiency to meeting basic human needs without transgressing planetary boundaries and in a context of restricted amounts of resource and energy availability.

Vogel et al. (2021) show that when aiming at tackling energy poverty, provisioning factors such as public service quality, income equality, democracy, and access to electricity are central in providing a good standard of living for all at a global scale and could be key for a scenario of lower levels of resource and energy use. Indeed, examples of Costa Rica and Uruguay show that operating a strong democracy does not necessarily require high levels of energy consumption (Lamb 2016; Lehoucq 2010). While satisfying physical needs such as nutrition, sanitation, access to energy, and elimination of poverty at global levels, and especially in the Global South, is possible within ecological limits, increasing more qualitative social goals such as life satisfaction, democratic quality and equality at global levels requires increased resource use (O'Neill et al. 2018). Research by Rao, Min, and Mastrucci (2019) show that the energy level for rollout of necessary infrastructure for meeting basic needs in Brazil, India, and South Africa is lower than previously expected. Millward-Hopkins et al. (2020) have also shown that similar scenarios are possible globally and universally, with 2050 global energy use being reduced to 1960s levels – within planetary boundaries. Together, these studies show that while we need to refine technology and industrial processes to guarantee more efficient use of resources and energy, the main goal for providing resources and energy for all at a global scale necessitates degrowing rich countries' levels of energy and resource use into sustainable levels.

In this sense, the 'room to grow' proposition is based on the identification that Global South countries have shown that their social policies of economic redistribution and welfare systems can provide a certain level of need satisfaction even with material and structural constraints of underdevelopment and extractivism. Scaling up these social policies globally necessitates both a radical

transformation of systems of distribution of resources and wealth, as well as a complete reorganisation of the modes of production and consumption. First, a more equitable distribution of resources among countries would address issues of unequal economic and social development across the Global South and allow for the ‘room to grow’. If already wealthy societies of the Global North are not overconsuming their fair-share of resources and transgressing planetary boundaries, then it opens ‘room’ for the Global South to ‘grow’ in order to raise living standards and satisfy people’s needs. This process could allow for the reparation of historical inequalities in the extraction and use of resources which have been tied to the marginalisation of the Global South within the capitalist world-system. Second, degrowth in the Global North means opening up ‘room’ for countries of the Global South to use their own resources, energy and labour force to ‘grow’ the parts of the economy that make sense for living well within planetary boundaries. This could be done by prioritising sectors of the economy that are more energy and resource efficient like moving away from fossil fuels and focusing on renewable energy instead, but it also includes ending planned obsolescence of electronics and the mass-production of cheap and disposable clothing, for example, or shifting food production away from feeding livestock and focusing on feeding people instead.

However, when discussing degrowth pathways in the Global North and the Global South, it is important that the timing of such transformations attains to historical inequalities that could be reinforced in this process. A common concern for Global South scholars and activists when discussing degrowth is that this could be another colonial imposition that could trap Global South societies in the eternal quest for ‘catching up’ with the North – now in the sense of an ecological transition. Magalhães Teixeira and Koşanay (2024) have pointed out that, given the history and structure of dependence in the global economy, the implementation of strong social policies and systems of welfare provision should happen first in the Global South ahead of any degrowth transformations in the North. This is because the economies and societies in the Global South are highly dependent on extractive structures and need to transition both workers and welfare systems away from such a destructive system. This is where strategies of reparations are important in combination with other degrowth policies of decrease in resource and energy use.

Indeed, many degrowth proposals of redistribution and reduction of wealth accumulation could be emancipatory for millions of people in the Global North, such as reduced working hours and resource caps (Stratford 2020). However, such policies, if not done in coordination, risk intensifying the pressure on workers of the Global South to meet demands of Global North workers and their increased consumption. Global South workers should be included in discussions of reduced work hours or universal basic income, since their labour has been appropriated and accumulated for the benefit of the

North. In this sense, it is impossible to talk about such degrowth policies only at a national or regional scale, given their global implications.

In combination, implementing other strategies such as climate change reparations (Perry 2020; Schmelzer and Nowshin 2023) or the implementation of a ‘climate debt’ (Warlenius, Pierce, and Ramasar 2015) could help finance raising living standards in Global South countries while still attending to planetary boundaries. Indeed, as Global North countries are responsible for exorbitant amounts of appropriation and drain of energy, resources and labour from the Global South since colonial times, reparation strategies should not only be in terms of climate change but also about historical unequal exchange (Hickel et al. 2022, Hickel, Sullivan and Zoomkawala 2021). In this sense, when talking about reparations, it is not about only creating systems of redistribution of wealth generated in the North by processes of accumulation, but it is about acknowledging that this wealth is product of appropriation and drain from the Global South in the first place. In this sense, redistribution of global wealth should not be understood as charity or as international aid, but it is a process of sending the wealth *back* to the Global South. However, this level of reparations and distribution of wealth is impossible within the current capitalist system, given its extractivist nature and the rent-seeking characteristic that drives it. Without addressing opportunities for rent extraction at the heart of the capitalist model, there is a risk that degrowth policies in some places can have adverse effects elsewhere – mainly in the Global South. This can affect not only inequality, debt, and financial instability but a creation of scarcity of resource and energy in the Global North could lead to the over-exploitation in the South and even serve as catalysts for violent conflict (Stratford 2020).

This is why in order to advocate for systems of redistribution and reparations, we have to ‘completely remake the world system’ (Táiwò 2022, 1). In this sense, the propositions for the ‘room to grow’ require a complete reorganisation of the modes of production and consumption away from a linear process of growth and towards a circular process of sustainability. If the incentive to accumulate both resources and wealth through infinite economic growth is made obsolete by strong systems of redistribution, our economic activities could be reorganised away from overproduction and waste and towards sufficiency instead. Creating systems and structures of reciprocity and care between not only peoples and countries but also between people and the environment promotes more equal, peaceful, and sufficient societies for everyone.

The Right to Say No

While redistribution of resources and wealth can help render the need for economic growth and extractivism obsolete, this material process needs to be accompanied by a symbolic process of decolonisation of social

imaginaries as well. Moreover, while the idea of the ‘room to grow’ focused on the process of how degrowth in the North could create space for the material emancipation of the Global South, true decolonisation and liberation cannot be gifted – they have to be conquered. I build on the proposition of the ‘right to say no’ based on a normative commitment to negate the idea of *development*, *modernity*, and *progress* centred on colonial and Eurocentric values and norms that have legitimised systems of domination and exploitation in the Global South. The universal ideal of development homogenised billions of different peoples and groups into one specific category: underdeveloped (Esteva, Babones, and Babicky 2013). Societies that lived well in equilibrium with nature and that were organised around small-scale farming, circular economies, and common access to land and resources were branded as poor, miserable, and backward and forced to assimilate to the civilisational project of development of the West (Escobar 1995).

In this proposition, ‘the right to say no’ talks to the right of the oppressed to decolonising our societies and our minds away from pursuing the aspirational project of development in Western/Eurocentric moulds. This process is focused on unsubscribing to colonial ideals of progress and well-being, but also of what a ‘good life’ means. As Puente (2011, 358) – former mayor of Cochabamba, Bolivia – puts it, the idea is ‘not to try and emulate the development of countries that have colonized us, but to liberate ourselves from them and their ideals, and in this process to find ourselves’. And finding ourselves means looking at indigenous, peasant and traditional communities in the Global South that have resisted the ideology of development for centuries (Krenak 2020).

Unlike the hegemony of development, the alternatives are multiple and diverse. They are constructed collectively and focused on social and community organisations of mutual learning and action and can have varied shapes and contents like food sovereignty, ecofeminism, the commons, rights of nature, circular economy, and many more. The idea of *buen vivir*, which can be roughly translated as ‘good living’ or ‘living well’, is one such approach that has taken global repercussions. There is not one definition for the concept of *buen vivir*, which has been in constant construction for the last 30 years in countries of Latin America. It builds on the concepts of *suma qamaña* from the Aymara people and from *sumac kawsay* from the Quechua people, both in the Andes region, or *teko porã* from the Guarani people in Brazil and Paraguay. For Solón (2019), *buen vivir* does not entail a set of cultural, social, environmental, and economic recipes, but it is a complex and dynamic mix of conceptualisations of time and space and a cosmovision on the relation between humans and nature. In its most practical adaptation, *buen vivir* has been conceptualised as ‘an alternative to capitalistic development that must be based on a new relationship with nature and the search for an economic model

that does not plunder natures' resources' (Restrepo Botero and Peña Galeano 2017, 272).

In this sense, the philosophy of *buen vivir* that is being built by resistance movements in Latin America should be understood as a systemic alternative, in which it aims not at incorporating itself into the current structures of the capitalist system but it offers an alternative way to organise our societies and our economies away from the violent machinations of the global capitalist system. The power of systemic alternatives like *buen vivir* lies exactly in its potential to completely rearrange the goals and priorities of our societies in promoting well-being, protecting the environment, and sustaining peace, instead of adapting to exploitative structures of capitalism and extractivism. Another strength of *buen vivir*, and other epistemologies from the South like *ubuntu* (Solón 2019), *ujamaa* (Bittencourt 2017), *vivir sabroso* (Quiceno Toro 2016) and *ecological swaraj* (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014), is their ability to not impose policies and strategies from the top-down, as has been for too long in countries and communities of the Global South, but to enhance the local and the community, based on ancestral knowledges and practices.

However, it is important to discuss how the philosophical ideas coming from *buen vivir* and other systemic alternatives should not be co-opted by capitalist nation-states and implemented as official national strategies. Systemic alternatives built from ancestral indigenous knowledge cannot be understood to be universal and hegemonic and compatible with Western institutions and practices. This is because, as Alatas (2010, 192) argues, these situated knowledges are often informed by 'indigenous historical experiences, philosophies and cultural practices' which are relevant to 'their surroundings, creative, non-imitative and original, non-essentialist, counter-Eurocentric, and autonomous from the state and other national or transnational grouping'. In their essence, systemic alternatives exist in complete separation from the current capitalist system, and are impossible to be turned into political policies compatible with violent, oppressive, extractive, and colonial structures and objectives. And this is how I argue they have power to negate all types of violence and contribute to building climate-resilient peace in the Global South.

The recent attempts (and failure) of the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia in trying to institutionalise *buen vivir* in their national policies serve as important illustrations. The governments of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales failed to break with the exploitative structures of the extractivist model of development and ended up reproducing the same violent structures towards the people and the environment (Restrepo Botero and Peña Galeano 2017). While the progressive governments identified the material colonisation of their mineral resources by multinational companies as a central impediment to development, they failed to identify that the problem lies not in the actor of extractivism, but in the model of extractivism itself. In both countries, while the rhetoric and the political

discourse of the progressive governments were aligned with Indigenous peoples' rights and visions based on *buen vivir* as well as with environmental movements, the decision by both governments to allow the continuation of extractive industries in protected areas ran counter to that. In Ecuador, while the first Correa government took a strong position of avoiding oil exploitation in the Yasuní Park in the Amazon Forest, this decision did not resist both international pressure and demand for oil, as well as domestic demand for potential revenues to pay for social services and international debt. In 2007, the Correa government signed the permit for oil exploitation in the Yasuní Natural Reserve, which was met with resistance by Indigenous, environmental, and social movements within Ecuador that demanded that popular consultation mechanisms and procedures be followed (Gudynas 2023).

In Bolivia, Evo Morales' rise to presidency was seen as a victory for the country's indigenous population, which hoped for radical change in terms of civil rights and protection of the environment and of their territories. Morales' policies of nationalising both gas and oil sectors led to massive investments in social welfare programmes (Restrepo Botero and Peña Galeano 2017), and took Bolivia from the classification as 'lower-income' country to a 'lower-middle income' one (Gómez Sarmiento 2019). However, the intensification of extractive activities in Indigenous territories to keep-up with social spending after the end of the 2000s commodities boom strained the relationship and the popular support for Morales' government, which coupled with both international pressure and demand for minerals, as well as domestic pressure by the far-right and elite media supported by the US, led to the coup d'état in Bolivia in 2019 against Evo Morales' government (Sánchez 2021 Al Bouchi and Caraway 2023).

The two cases of failure of institutionalisation of *buen vivir* philosophies into nation-state structures that do not aim at completely dismantling the violent and oppressive structures of the capitalist-extractivist system show the dangers of taking indigenous knowledge and systems outside of their deeply territorialised, historical and cultural contexts. More than that, it illustrates how the global capitalist system, as well as Western liberal institutions are not built to allow for 'the right to say no' of communities and groups that do not wish to subscribe to the Western ideals of economic growth, development, and modernity and to the destruction of the environment and their ways of life. While consultation mechanisms are commonly built into procedures for expansion of extractive industries, they are often not implemented or followed through. The decision of local communities is often not considered legally binding, as evidenced in both Colombia and in Sweden (FERN 2022; Shenk 2022). This means that the lack of consultation or of environmental protection is not a domestic problem of underdeveloped and corrupted government of

Global South countries, but it is instead built into the structures of the capitalist extractive system.

One opportunity for hope is the victory of ‘no’ in the 2023 national referendum for oil exploitation in the Yasuní National Park in Ecuador. Against the predictions of the national government, but rooted in the tireless work of Indigenous communities, social movements, and environmental organisations, the people of Ecuador voted against oil exploitation in the protected Amazon region of Yasuní – exercising their right to say no. Since the referendum was initially a binding mechanism, the oil company will have to dismantle all operations in the area in the coming months (Martínez-Moscoso and Burdette 2023). The referendum was a victory for the people of Ecuador and the communities protecting their territories and environment. This is also the result of a popular initiative demanded by indigenous communities for more than 10 years before it was finally approved by the Ecuadorian court in 2023 (Martínez-Moscoso and Burdette 2023). While in this case Indigenous peoples and social movements were exercising their ‘right to say no’ to such harmful exploitation to their environment and territories, their struggle to exercise this right is often met with incredible violence and oppression by both government and police forces, as well as by militias and private groups contracted by multinational corporations (Le Billon and Menton 2021; Venegas and van Teijlingen 2021).

Indeed, a seminal report by Global Witness (2020) showed that being a land and environmental defender in the Global South is one of the most risky activities given the high rate of killings mostly carried out when community members attempt to stay in between the defence of their territories and the profit of governments and corporations. Research has shown that the mineral sector is the most violent one, with the highest number of killings of environment and land defenders (Global Witness 2020, Global Witness 2021), that indigenous peoples are most at risk (Le Billon, and Lujala 2020), and that are often at the frontline of violence and land-grabbing (Scheidel et al. 2023). Research has also shown that when transnational corporations own the right to mineral extraction there is more incidence of violent repression and police brutality (Wegenast and Schneider 2017) and that low level of income, high level of foreign direct investment, and high mineral dependence are positively linked with high rates of killings of environmental and land defenders (Le Billon and Lujala 2020). While most research is focused on the Global South, the same patterns are also present in Global North countries – but at much lower levels of violence and repression (Hanacek et al. 2022).

These results together show the structural constraints for indigenous groups, social movements and environmental organizations in both the Global South and North to exercise their ‘right to say no’ to violence both towards their territories and environments and their ways of life. They illustrate that it is impossible to ‘say no’ individually – isolated within the borders

of nation-states and the Western-liberal institutions – without breaking away with the structures of oppression and violence that operate at the national and global level in order for systemic change to be possible. In this sense, it is necessary to rethink how to organise ourselves not only locally and rooted in territories of resistance but to have an internationalist vision of building bridges and network alliances at the global level. In this context, it becomes necessary to overcome the idea of the nation-state as the central actor in processes of decolonisation, but reconceptualising its role in assisting and protecting local movements resisting extravisit model of development through fomenting networks of production and exchange of traditional knowledge and innovation from a local perspective (Solón 2019).

Instead, I propose centring the liberatory practices of peace and decolonisations on the resistance of indigenous, peasant, and traditional groups at the margins of *modernity* and *progress*. Rural populations face complex patterns of both direct and structural violence because of their social, economic, and political status and are marked by violent structures of agrarian and environmental change (Hoddy 2021; Hristov 2004). These marginalised populations are often at the forefront of both climate and environmental changes, as well as physical, structural, and cultural violence. The power for liberation in this context lies in strengthening and highlighting the work of local and popular processes that aim to subvert not only the violence of climate change but also the violent structures of extractivism that produce and reproduce it.

The potential for decolonisation here lies in understanding that fighting climate and environmental changes and violent structures of oppression cannot happen separately. Indigenous, peasants, and traditional groups have been actively promoting alternative projects to the colonial, capitalist, and extractivist hegemony through the conversion of struggles for environment, the pursuit of well-being, and the construction of peace. Here, it is important to highlight that these struggles focus not on the material manifestations of violence, but they aim to ‘subvert the economic, political, cultural, and social structures that are excluding, racist, patriarchal and neoliberal’ (Parrado Pardo 2020). Centering the process of decolonisation around these struggles produces not only synergies between these fronts of resistance but also promotes the creation of alliances of global solidarity through the identification of the collective horizon of liberation (Fernandes 2020).

One example of this internationalist struggle is the work of ‘La Via Campesina’, a grassroots global farmer organization which coordinates peasant associations and indigenous communities around the world. They organise their activities around sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty, to stop violence against women, for agrarian reform, and recognition of peasant and indigenous communities (La Via Campesina n.d.). Another example is the ‘Yes to Life No to Mining’, a global solidarity movement of indigenous peoples and local communities in their struggle against mining projects and the

expansion of extractive frontiers. The network is organised around the idea that local communities that are in connection with their local environments are central actors in promoting alternatives to extractivism through solidarity and collective action (YLN *n/d*). The work of these global solidarity alliances is organised around the central aim of advocating for peasant's rights and food sovereignty, or against intensification of extractive projects, but they understand how questions of defence of water, land, and ancestral territories, global environmental justice, and social justice are intertwined. Both movements combine actions that promote the protection of the environment, the development of alternatives, and the construction of peace simultaneously, because this metabolic ecological view understands that these struggles and the symptoms that accompany them are not only similar but they share their violent root causes in extraction, exploitation, and colonisation. In this sense, their work should not be understood only as fighting against structures of oppression and violence but also as a positive work of actively building a more just and peaceful world on a global scale.

Building peace, thus, necessitates dismantling the multitude of violent structures that sustain the colonial capitalist system of extractivism and is already being practiced by indigenous, traditional, and peasant communities in the Global South that should be recognised as active actors towards building peace.

Conclusion

Building peace in a context of rising inequalities and environmental and climate changes has been pointed as one of the biggest challenges for countries in the Global South. The international community has invested in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as a holistic way to combine economic growth, environmental protection, and peacebuilding under one umbrella. In this paper, I have argued that instead of complementary, these issues are inherently contradictory. A focus on economic growth as the central strategy to promote economic and human development is not only harmful to the environment – as it is responsible for driving climate change – but it is also detrimental for peace – because it is built on violent structures of exploitation of both people and environment. Building on the framework of climate resilient peace, where peace should be understood in its positive configuration where it does not pose harm to either people or environment, it becomes necessary to rethink the strategies and pathways that could lead to such a configuration of peace with a focus on the Global South. In order to put the Global South in the focus of such a discussion, it is necessary to question base assumptions of traditional theories on violence and conflict that reproduce an 'Orientalist' and colonial view of violence as being bounded by place and that produces and reproduces the idea that violence is irrational and an

anomaly and tied specifically to underdeveloped and ‘uncivilised’ cultures and societies of the Global South, while the military interventions of the Global North are upheld as rational and embedded in discourses of progress and freedom. Understanding the different levels of material and symbolic domination that have produced the difference between Global North and South is central to proposing ways forwards towards peace.

In order to contribute as an initial venture into considering how we can understand the possibilities of peace as being centred on the Global South, I build on feminist and decolonial perspectives that understand violence not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a complex system of oppression, that is currently manifested through the global system of capitalist expansion through mineral extraction. In this context, I propose that building peace that is coherent with planetary and ecological limits and that does not further direct and structural violence necessitates breaking with the extractivist model of development that benefits growth and accumulation over people’s well-being. By discussing two strategies of ‘room to grow’ and ‘the right to say no’ I aim at centring a liberatory praxis for peace on the need to negate both material and symbolic system and structures of oppression that produce climate and environmental changes, as well as reproduce direct, structural and cultural violence. A peace praxis focused on the liberation of the Global South identifies that different types of violence connected to climate and environmental changes and underdevelopment are not only connected but that they share their roots in deeper structural systems of extractivism, exploitation, and colonisation.

This article provides a first venture into considering the systemic structures of violence in the Global South, and how to completely transform them. However, such a systemic approach to building peace and negating violence raises questions about limitations regarding feasibility and implementation. Under this understanding of peace, it becomes necessary to question the current economic, political, and social structures that reproduce violence and to completely transform them at the systemic level. While this might entail an enormous and global effort, the examples highlighted in this text point towards how local level or small-scale initiatives that are grounded in territories of resistance can be connected to the global processes and macro structures in order to aggregate towards systemic change. This means that instead of promoting a universal approach to building peace, this framework, however, focuses on the power of elevating the work of indigenous, traditional, and peasant communities in resisting capitalist expansion and systems of oppression and in this way actively building peace by promoting different ways of relating to each other and to the environment. Further research should look more closely into the activities of these local level initiatives to understand the feasibility of creating international solidarity alliances capable of bringing about the

systemic change necessary for protecting the environment, liberating the Global South from material and symbolic domination, and in this process, building peace.

Notes

1. In this text, I use the idea of ‘building peace’ as different from ‘peacebuilding’, in which the latter has become an institutionalised way of promoting Western and liberal ideas and institutions in a post-conflict context as keys to achieving peace, usually in its negative sense (Galtung 1969) and conducted by international actors. ‘Building peace’, on the other hand, refers to marginalised, subaltern, and everyday activities and processes that can be enacted by any actor, but with a specific focus on bottom-up approaches and community-driven actions.
2. This dynamic approach also makes apparent vertical differences and hierarchies within both the Global North and the Global South. For example, political and economic elites of the Global South benefit from the processes of development and economic growth based on the extraction of natural resources, particularly through the export of commodities (Acosta 2013; Gudynas 2015; Riofrancos 2020). In this text, I focus on experiences and epistemologies of the subaltern peoples of the Global South that are at the intersection of all types of violence connected to the environment, development, and conflict.
3. While most of the literature uses the idea of *invisible* to describe types of violence that are not necessarily observable to the human eye, people suffering from these types of violence would of course feel their heavy burden very clearly. In this case, it is important to ask: to whom this type of violence is invisible?
4. While central works in understanding peace, such as the ones by Galtung (1969, 1971) talk about peace as an emancipatory process, I choose to focus my contribution to peace as a liberatory process. This is based on grammatical definitions in which emancipation is the act of setting something or someone free, while liberation is the process of liberating oneself. I believe it to be important to center the agency of the Global South towards liberation and peace, instead of peace understood as something that is granted to the Global South. I thank Jairo Fúnez-Flores for pointing out this distinction.
5. While my analysis in this paper concerns communities and populations in the Global South, all the policies and degrowth transformations discussed here would also benefit the poorest sectors of the population in Global North countries, which have not reached such luxury levels of energy and resource consumptions.

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ORCID

Barbara Magalhães Teixeira  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7798-9051>

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The Nature of Peace

In this dissertation, I explore the links between nature, conflict, and peace building on literature from peace and conflict studies and environmental peacebuilding. I argue that environmental issues, especially related to the distribution of natural resources, are central to understanding structural conditions allowing for both conflict and peace. In order to answer the research question, I explore how nature is understood, valued, and exploited and how this contributes to the creation of unjust structures that promote conflict and violence. I center resource inequality at the root of environmental conflicts, thus providing a structural account of how they affect violence. Ultimately, I show that building sustainable peace requires reshaping structures of distribution of both resources and power to promote not only negative peace but also create the conditions for positive peace.

Barbara Magalhães Teixeira is a peace and conflict scholar and teacher. Her research touches on issues of nature, peace, and development, with a focus on environmental conflicts and the socio-ecological transition. Building on feminist and decolonial commitments, Barbara's research and teaching are oriented toward fostering liberatory peace for people and planet.



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Barbara Magalhães Teixeira

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