Disputes of Decarbonization – Ecuador between Green Extractivism and Green State Transformation

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Para lxs defensorxs de la vida – en todas sus formas y en todas partes

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Abstract

The rise of national Green New Deals and net-zero policies suggests the emergence of green states as ecological stewards and facilitators of socio-economic transformations. However, current proposals face criticism for primarily focusing on decarbonization and the energy transition. The increasing demand for minerals gives way to a novel form of "green extractivism", exacerbating environmental degradation and historic inequalities in the South. At the same time, green state theory has neglected analysing the possibility of green states in the South.

This thesis addresses these issues by examining how global pressure for decarbonization is appropriated by the Ecuadorian state to justify further extraction of minerals. It also illustrates forms of greening the state beyond decarbonization such as the promotion of alternative lifeworlds, ecological democracy, and green social movements. It does so through an analysis of a popular consultation against the expansion of mining in the Northern forests of Quito, the Chocó Andino. Based on document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with state officials, activists of the campaign *Quito sin Minería*, and researchers, this thesis outlines an emerging dispute between a "Green Extractivist State" and "Transformative Green State" in Ecuador.

For the former, state officials promote the increasing extraction of minerals for decarbonization and development, declaring rural peripheries as green sacrifice zones while continuing to obstruct forms of direct democracy by social movements. For the latter, *Quito sin Minería* uses the tool of the popular consultation as a form of direct democracy to push for transformative visions of green statehood. These are based on valuing life, promoting alternative forms of development and re-existence, and forming

green social movements to defend the territory. Ultimately, this thesis highlights the importance of paying close attention to the implications of predominant proposals of decarbonization as well as the emergence green states in the South.

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List of Abbreviations

AE	*Acción Ecológica* (Ecological Action)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
ENAMI	*Empresa Nacional Minera* (National Mining Company)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GAD	*Gobierno Autónomo Decentralizado* (Autonomous Decentralized Government)
GND	Green New Deal
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEA	International Energy Agency
IIGE	*Instituto de Investigación Geológica y Energetíca* (Institute for Geological and Energetic Investigation)
IMF	International Monetary Fond
MAATE	*Ministerio de Ambiente, Agua, y Transición Ecológica* (Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition)
MEM	*Ministerio de Energía y Minas* (Ministry of Energy and Mines)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
PND	*Plan Nacional del Desarrollo* (National Development Plan)
PNDSM	*Plan Nacional del Desarrollo del Sector Minero* (National Plan for the Development of the Mining Sector)
PRODEMINCA	*Proyecto de Asistencia Técnica para Desarrollo Minero y Control Ambiental* (Project of Technical Assistance for the Mining Development and Environmental Control)
RJCA	*Red de Jóvenes del Chocó Andino* (Youth Network of the Chocó Andino)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank

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1. Introduction

"The European Green Deal is delivering the change we need to reduce CO^2 emissions. It does so while keeping the interests of our citizens in mind, and providing opportunities for our European industry. The legislation to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 is now in place, and I am very happy that we are even on track to overshoot this ambition. This is an important sign to Europe and to our global partners that the green transition is possible, that Europe is delivering on its promises."

– Ursula von der Leyen on the completion of 'Fit for 55' legislation, October 2023

"Under the rhetoric of 'sustainability,' a new phase of environmental dispossession of the Global South is initiated, affecting the lives of millions of human beings, further compromising biodiversity, destroying strategic ecosystems and other non-human sentient beings. In this way, the Global South has once again become a sacrifice zone, a storehouse of supposedly inexhaustible resources, from which strategic minerals are extracted [...]. We believe that a just ecosocial transition, as a process of comprehensive transformations, is not and cannot be a promise of the future. [...]. Transitions are already happening in a multitude of experiences in communities and territories, in rural and urban areas, as well as in territorial resistances around the world."

– Bogotá Declaration of the Eco-Social Pact of the South, March 2023

In the context of an exacerbating climate crisis, green policies have effectively reached political arenas. Alongside international agendas such as the Paris Agreement or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), national green pacts, net-zero goals, and just transition policies are multiplying. Thus, it seems as if the formation of green states is on the horizon. Green state theory explores how states can act as ecological stewards and facilitators of socio-ecological transformation (Bäckstrand and Kronsell 2015; Barry and Eckersley 2005; Dryzek et al. 2003; Duit et al. 2016; Eckersley 2004, 2020b, 2021). But how do current visions of a green state affect countries in the Global South[1]? And what

[1] I will use an uppercase North/South if I refer to the geopolitical global position and north/south for geographical locations.

other understandings of green statehood exist beyond electric cars, carbon off-setting, and nationally determined contributions? As the quotes above demonstrate, there are divergent visions of what constitutes a transition towards green statehood. This thesis explores the conflict-ridden negotiation between them.

On the one hand, initiatives like the European Green New Deal (GND) advocate for a green state based on decarbonization by decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions and a transition towards renewable energies (Hickel and Kallis 2020). However, the base of this global "consensus of decarbonization" (Svampa and Bringel 2023) are mineral-intensive technologies such as electromobility, solar panels, and wind turbines. Given that many of the required minerals are located in the Global South, the aim to green the state through decarbonization risks exacerbating existing inequalities (Hickel and Slamersak 2022; Lang et al. 2023; Svampa et al. 2023). Consequently, scholars warn about the emergence of "green extractivism" as a continuation of earlier extractivist paradigms under a green banner (Dietz 2022; Dorn et al. 2022; Dunlap and Riquito 2023; Noever Castelos 2023; Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2022). Indeed, as my analysis will show, the global pressure for decarbonization is increasingly adopted by states in the Global South to legitimise further extraction of minerals for national transitions and global markets. This is especially relevant for Latin America as a region rich in resources that are needed for the energy transition, leading to the deepening of resource extraction and contestation (Acosta et al. 2009; Gudynas 2009; Svampa 2019).

On the other hand, green state theory has focused almost exclusively on welfare states in the North, questioning the possibility of Southern green states due to weak state institutions and pressing developmental needs (Barry and Eckersley 2005). Some scholars have criticized this Eurocentric bias, arguing that "Global South exceptionalism

in the field of green state theory should only be considered once there is much greater empirical data from the Global South" (Chandrashekeran et al. 2017: 11). This lack of attention on Southern green states also includes an omission of other dimensions of green statehood beyond decarbonization such as forms of direct ecological democracy, green social movements, and constructing alternative lifeworlds (Hausknost and Hammon 2020). This is not only a significant conceptual but also practical concern as it is precisely Southern states that hold the resources for global energy transitions.

1.1 Research Context and Questions

Thus, it is vital to analyse the effects of the global decarbonization agenda in the Global South, challenge the Eurocentric focus of green state theory, and highlight local attempts at green state-making. Based on a critical re-reading of green state theory, my thesis aims to address these issues by exploring how green statehood is actively disputed in Ecuador. Ecuador offers fascinating insights into different visions of a green state beyond decarbonization: On the one hand, its constitution shows clear characteristics of a green state by granting rights to nature (Valladares and Boelens 2017, 2019), promoting the indigenous cosmovision of *buen vivir* (living well) as its guiding principle (Acosta 2015; Radcliffe 2012), and enabling different forms of direct democracy on environmental concerns (Vela-Almeida et al. 2022a; Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021).

Nevertheless, the constitution also determines the state as an inalienable owner of the natural resources and declares resource extraction as a national interest. Since the 1970s, the Ecuadorian state has depended on oil exports as a major source of state revenue. In the 1980s and 1990s, various administrations enforced neoliberal[2] policies

[2] I will provide a more detailed definition of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism in the literature review.

such as market liberalization, deregulation, privatisation, and reduced state intervention, leading to the increased presence of transnational oil companies (Sawyer 2004; Alcívar 2020; Chiasson-LeBel 2019). The election of Rafael Correa (2007 – 2017) marked a significant shift towards post-neoliberalism, characterized by an active state, the redistribution of extractive revenue through public investments, and the regulation of private actors (Riofrancos 2020; Vela-Almeida 2017). However, shortly after Correa's administration drafted the new constitution in cooperation with indigenous and social movements, it started expanding large-scale mining to generate state revenue for its social investments. This ambivalence of promoting progressive social policies while expanding extractive industries has been captured in the term neo-extractivism (Acosta 2013; Burchardt and Dietz 2014; Svampa 2019; van Teijlingen 2016). Subsequent administrations under President Lenín Moreno (2017 – 2021) and Guillermo Lasso[3] (2021 – 2023) have shifted back to austerity and neoliberal policies aimed at reducing state capacity and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) (Vela-Almeida et al. 2021).

Consequently, while Ecuador might be a less obvious battlefield of the energy transition than other Latin American countries, it provides a fascinating context to examine the impacts of decarbonization agendas on a country that promotes rights of nature and indigenous cosmovisions but is deeply embedded in extractivism. How is green statehood debated in this political, social, and economic context?

To explore the contesting visions of an Ecuadorian green state, I analyse a popular consultation that took place in Quito in August 2023. This consultation aimed to stop the

[3] Lasso was succeeded by the current President Daniel Noboa in October 2023. However, since Lasso was still in charge during my fieldwork, this thesis focuses predominantly on Lasso's administration.

expansion of metallic mining concessions in the Chocó Andino[4], a cloud forest within Quito's administrative district. The consultation was initiated by a collective of Chocó inhabitants and urban environmentalists who formed the campaign *Quito sin Minería* (Quito without Mining). Even though the concessions in the Chocó are not for transition minerals such as copper, the Chocó Andino constitutes an insightful case study as only the third legally binding popular consultation against mining in Ecuador and the first in a Latin American capital (Samaniego 2023). Simultaneously, the Yasuní popular consultation[5] aimed to stop oil extraction in the Amazon rainforest on a national scale. This indicates an escalation among strategies of social movements to make the protection of contested territories legally binding for the Ecuadorian state (Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021; Walter and Urkidi 2017). Both consultations were set against the backdrop of early presidential elections after Lasso had dissolved parliament to avoid impeachment (Pazan 2023). Consequently, from July to August, avid debates on the consultations articulated competing visions for the future of Ecuador. On August 20th, 2023, both the Chocó Andino and Yasuní consultation won in a demonstration of public support for the protection of nature - a historic moment for Ecuador as a country dependent on natural resource extraction.

Thus, I see the consultation as a prism, illuminating and sharpening different visions of green statehood. My thesis aims to capture these by answering the following research

[4] I will refer to the Chocó Andino and the Chocó interchangeably.

[5] The Yasuní consultation demanded an oil moratorium in the Amazonian Yasuní National Park, first voiced by indigenous communities in the 1990s. In 2007, in an alliance with social movements, Correa established the Yasuní-ITT initiative with the aim to collect international funds of half of the expected oil revenue in exchange for keeping the oil underground (Espinosa 2013). When Correa ended the initiative in 2013 due to lacking financial support, activists united as *Yasunidos* to organize a popular consultation and challenge his decision (Picq et al. 2016; Alarcón et al. 2018). This consultation was continuously rejected until its approval in May 2023.

question: **What are the competing visions of a green state articulated in the context of the popular consultation on the Chocó Andino?** The analysis is separated into two sub-questions: *1) What rationalities do state actors employ in their vision of a green state and what are their strategies of legitimisation?* And *2) What (counter)rationalities do social movements employ in their vision of the green state and what are their strategies of contestation?*

1.2 The Argument in Brief

My argument is threefold. Viewing the state as a relation between different social forces that constantly (re)negotiate their influence on state structures (Jessop 2018; Poulantzas 2021), I identify a dispute between different visions of an Ecuadorian green state: On the one hand, a "Green Extractivist State", envisioned by the state and mining industry; on the other hand a "Transformative Green State", pushed for by *Quito sin Minería* through the popular consultation. While my analysis can only offer a glimpse into this historical conflict, the popular consultation represents a pivotal moment in which these visions were clearly articulated. I analyse the materialization of these competing visions in five dimensions: 1) **Value** – what is valued? 2) **Development** – what constitutes development? 3) **Territory** – how is it conceptualized? 4) **Democracy** – how is it used? and 5) **Social Movements** – what is their role?

What I call the Green Extractivist State is shaped by a global consensus on decarbonization that pushes for the expansion of mineral extraction for the energy transition. These notions are adopted and re-shaped by Ecuadorian state officials, building upon earlier extractivist paradigms and creating novel justifications for extractivism. This Green Extractivist State promotes the value of minerals as the replacement for decreasing oil reserves and highly demanded elements for the energy

transition. While it perpetuates Correa's neo-extractivist link between mineral extraction and national development, state officials now promote mining exports as a tool for sustainable development and decarbonization. This Green Extractivist State continues a view of rural territories as empty land to be sacrificed for the greater national good of development, declaring green sacrifice zones within the peripheries of Ecuador. While these three dimensions demonstrate uneven changes from earlier extractive paradigms, the Green Extractivist State continues to block forms of direct democracy by civil society and the criminalization of anti-extractivist social movements. Ultimately, this vision of a green state constitutes a continuation of a technocratic, top-down, and extractivist state. Concurrently, the transition towards a Green Extractivist state is shaped by recent neoliberal and austerity policies. As a result, both the mining industry and social movements negotiate for scarce state capacity and criticize the "weakness" of the state in their attempts to capture the state for their agendas.

However, a critical reading of green state theory provides an illuminating discussion of green state characteristics beyond decarbonization such as green movements and public spheres that push for ecological democracy to legitimise alternative lifeworlds. I argue that the campaign of *Quito sin Minería* mobilizes these dimensions of green statehood enabled by the constitution, promoting a Transformative Green State. This vision is based on the value of life by strategically appropriating concepts such as biodiversity and ecosystem services to challenge the predominant monetary value of minerals. The inhabitants of the Chocó also promote development based on dignity and re-existence as a way to provide local alternatives to mining. Furthermore, by forming urban-rural alliances, the campaign highlights the value of the territory as part of Quito and challenges the notion of the Chocó as a sacrifice zone. These three dimensions

constitute examples of alternative lifeworlds that are then legitimised by the popular consultation as a strategy of direct democracy. In this process, *Quito sin Minería* and its allies form green social movements and engaged green public spheres by assembling different strategies of indigenous, rural, and urban groups. However, this political project is fragile and undermined by manifold tensions within the movement and territory.

I recognize that neither the binary "the state" versus "social movements" nor "The Green Extractivist State" versus "The Transformative Green state" can account for the complexity of reality. Instead, I actively highlight the internal debates as well as external forms of contestation. Furthermore, I do not conceptualize the green state (in either conceptualization) as finalized but demonstrate an uneven and unfinished movement *towards* a green state. Lastly, the terms North/South are helpful in illuminating a territorial, relational, and structural position within the global system (Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea 2022: 55). Yet, they also run the risk of perpetuating a dichotomy that obscures the complexity of the post-colonial encounter (Death 2016b). Therefore, I aim to demonstrate how the current consensus of decarbonization reinforces marginalisation beyond South/North binaries and instead creates peripheries within the peripheries.

Ultimately, my thesis illustrates how competing actors mobilize and capture different dimensions of green statehood that are inscribed into the Ecuadorian state. However, I also recognize that using green state theory in a context that does not debate the current trajectory in these terms can be seen as an imposition of Northern theory and a disregard for Southern epistemologies. Acknowledging this tension, I employ a critical re-reading of green state theory to demonstrate how green states are articulated in different terms, fought for through different strategies, and envisioned in different images as theorized so far. I thereby aim to challenge the assumption that there cannot be Southern green states

and instead demonstrate how “the [green] state is always in the making” (Lund 2016: 1200).

1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, I define key theoretical concepts such as the state, green extractivism, and green state theory before applying them to Ecuador for a broader historical context. In Chapter 3, I present a detailed introduction to my case study, the applied methods as well as a reflection on my positionality and ethical challenges. Chapter 4 focuses on my first research question by analysing the vision of a Green Extractivist State employed by state officials. I begin with a historical contextualization of the mining sector in Ecuador before I explore the five dimensions of value, development, territory, democracy, and the role of social movements, each as one subchapter. Finally, I analyse the state as a relation by examining the critiques of a “weak state” expressed by the mining industry and activists. Chapter 5 tackles my second research question, focusing on the vision of a Transformative Green State articulated by the actors of the consultation. I follow the same dimensions of value, development, territory, democracy, and the role of social movements in five subchapters before outlining the tensions within the campaign and the aftermath of the consultation. Chapter 6 summarizes my results and highlights considerations for further research.

2. Literature Review

This literature review explores the tensions between different understandings of green statehood. I first outline a green state based on decarbonization and green extractivism before engaging with a critical re-reading of green state theory that emphasises other dimensions such as alternative lifeworlds, ecological democracy, and green social movements. After the theoretical introduction of the relevant concepts, I apply them to Ecuador for a historical and conceptual contextualization of my case study.

2.1 A Decarbonized Green State?

The rising number of green pacts and national net-zero goals highlights an expanding role for state institutions in navigating the climate crisis (Hausknost 2020; Svampa et al. 2023). For example, the European GND aims to reduce 55% of emissions by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050 (European Commission 2019, 2023). Similarly, states that signed the Paris Agreement committed to reaching nationally determined emission contributions in their "race to zero" (UNFCCC 2024). Scholars call this trend an emerging "consensus of decarbonization" (Svampa and Bringel 2023) or "climate change consensus" (Dorn et al. 2022). In this consensus, renewable energies function as a technological fix for the decoupling of growth from greenhouse gas emissions (Fox 2023; Hickel and Kallis 2020).

However, renewable energies heavily rely on the increased extraction of minerals such as lithium, copper, cobalt, and nickel, so-called "green minerals" (Herrington 2021; Hine et al. 2023). While it is important to highlight that the extractive frontier is also expanding into marginalized regions in the Global North (Dunlap and Riquito 2023; Noever Castelos 2023), the majority of the required minerals are located in the Global South (Zografos

2022; Zografos and Robbins 2020). The increased extraction of minerals in the South thereby perpetuates and exacerbates historical patterns of resource exploitation and environmental destruction, in what has been termed "green extractivism"[6] (Andreucci et al. 2023; Dietz 2022; Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2022). But how is green extractivism embedded in prior forms of resource extraction?

2.1.1 The Legacies of Extractivism

The concept of extractivism describes the massive "appropriation of natural resources in large volumes and/or high intensity where half or more are exported as raw materials" (Gudynas 2018: 62). Jorge Forero (2023) further differentiates three predominant understandings of extractivism: First, as a particular set of economic activities with negative economic, social, and environmental impacts (Bebbington et al. 2008b; Bebbington 2012), second as a pattern of capitalist accumulation from the periphery to the centre (Acosta et al. 2009, 2013, 2016; Gudynas 2013, 2015), and third, as a mode of development (Burchardt and Dietz 2014). Other scholars go beyond this material dimension and define extractivism as a "complex of self-reinforcing practices, mentalities, and power differentials underwriting and rationalising socio-ecologically destructive modes of organising life" (Chagnon et al. 2022: 760). In this sense, extractivism is not only the extraction of resources but also a way of relating to nature that is based on human-nature dualisms, the exacerbation of inequalities, and the consolidation of power (Ekowati et al. 2023: 26).

[6] In reference to Quijano (2003), some scholars also speak of green colonialism and climate coloniality (Andreucci et al. 2023; Dorn 2022; Jerez et al. 2021; Lang et al. 2023; Sultana 2022) to describe the ongoing legacies of colonialism exposed by climate change.

Nevertheless, extractivism often remains a vague concept that can easily lead to “an acceleration of analysis” (Riofrancos 2020: 57) by linking different phenomena across vast dimensions of time and space. It also does not define clearly until what point an activity constitutes *extraction* and when *extractivism* (ibid.: 74). Therefore, it is useful to analyse struggles on resource extraction through the lens of materiality. This approach highlights how “resources do not exist as such; rather, they result from processes of ‘resource-making’” (Nygren et al. 2022: 737). This makes conflicts around extractivism “a problem of social struggle, distribution, and the exercise of political and economic power, marked by alternative futures and by clashes between alternative values and imaginaries” (Calvário et al. 2022: 5). To understand the specific contexts and conditions of extractivism, it is vital to historize these struggles.

Maristella Svampa’s (2019) analysis of different consensus demonstrates the shifting forms of extractivism: During colonial conquest, imperial powers violently appropriated primary commodities such as rubber, silver, and sugar (Chagnon et al. 2022: 765; Machado Aráoz 2018). In contrast, the Washington consensus marked a trend of economic liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, and the reduction of the state in favour of market forces (Svampa and Bringel 2023: 53). This facilitated a rising influence of transnational corporations and widespread land-grabbing for oil and mining concessions in the Global South (Svampa 2019: 8). As a response, in the early 2000s, the post-neoliberal “Pink Tide” in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela declared an end to neoliberalism by nationalising resource extraction to finance social development (Acosta 2013; Burchardt and Dietz 2014). This form of extractivism, fuelled by a commodity consensus to meet the increasing demand for minerals, was termed neo-extractivism (Burchardt and Dietz 2014; Svampa 2013). What distinguished this form

of extractivism was the active role of the state in the promotion of resource extraction (Acosta et al. 2009; Gudynas 2009, 2012) along with the use of novel technologies and the expansion of the extractive frontier (Svampa 2019).

2.1.2 The Greening of Extractivism

The emergence of green extractivism represents a continuation of these prior paradigms of resource extraction, reshaping and adapting their legacies in the context of a forming consensus of decarbonization. First, the international institutions that advocated for private investment during the Washington consensus now promote the extraction and export of critical raw materials for the energy transition (Lang et al. 2023: 59). For example, in its report "Minerals for Climate Action" (2020), the World Bank (WB) highlights how the extraction of minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and graphite will have to increase by 450% from 2018 levels while copper and aluminium production will have to rise to 29 million and 103 million tons respectively by 2050 to reach the 2°C aim of the Paris Agreement (ibid.: 11). Thus, international institutions discursively "green" minerals by linking them to the energy transition, decarbonization, and climate action (Hine et al. 2023: 235).

Second, neo-extractivism created a strong connection between resource extraction and development by financing public investment through extractivist revenue (Burchardt and Dietz 2014). Today, green extractivism is increasingly linked with development and decarbonization, adding climate action as a further layer of moral justification for mineral extraction (Dorn et al. 2022: 2; Barandiarán 2019). As such, mining "is no longer just about development, but about green modernization, green progress, sustainability and the solution to the climate crisis" (Dietz 2022: 9).

Third, green extractivism creates zones and populations whose livelihoods are sacrificed for decarbonization. The concept of sacrifice zones describes how peripheral territories are sacrificed in return for the "greater national good" (Reinert 2018; Scott 2020) such as development or economic growth. While the European GND includes a Just Transition Mechanism to ensure that the "transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind" (European Commission 2024), considerations of justice regarding the environmental and social impacts of increased resource extraction in the Global South remain invisible (Zografos 2022). Thus, scholars have suggested the term green sacrifice zones to describe "places and populations that will be affected by the sourcing, transportation, installation, and operation of solutions for powering low-carbon transitions" (Zografos and Robbins 2020: 543).

Fourth, green extractivism entails a shift in the role of the state. During the Washington consensus, state intervention was minimal except for providing legal, fiscal, and proprietary incentives for extractive industries (Nygren et al. 2022: 739-740). During neo-extractivism, states evolved into active regulators and beneficiaries of resource extraction. Today, Maristella Svampa and Breno Bringel (2023: 64) detect the formation of an eco-corporative state that seeks to combine "green transition with the promotion of private funds and the financialization of nature". As corporate and state visions of decarbonization increasingly merge, so do the interests of the public and private sector in expanding mineral extraction.

In sum, current visions of a green state prioritize decarbonization based on mineral extraction and green extractivism. In other words, national policies for a "Clean Green State" in the North require a Green Extractivist State in the South as the provider of the necessary minerals. How do states like Ecuador navigate this consensus of

decarbonization based on their extractivist path dependencies? It is this relation that I will analyse further in my empirical chapters. But before delving deeper into this dynamic, I provide an alternative understanding of green statehood based on a critical re-reading of green state theory.

2.2 A Transformative Green State?

For this, it is important to have a clearer understanding of how I conceptualize "the state". Weberian theory sees the state as a separate entity from society ruled by state imperatives while in Marxist theory the state is a tool of the capitalist class (Eckersley 2021: 249-251). My approach aims to integrate these perspectives by conceptualizing the state as a social relation (Jessop 2018; Poulantzas 2021). In this understanding, the state is a "reflection and refraction of the changing balance of forces that are seeking to advance their respective interests, in, through, and in opposition to the state" (Jessop 2018: 48). Thus, the state is part of society, influenced by social forces and state imperatives that condensate in state institutions. On the one hand, it guarantees capitalist production and accumulation through legal and fiscal regulations and the protection of private property. On the other hand, social struggles are inscribed into the state, reflecting, to a certain extent, the interests of the dominated (Brand 2013: 109; Lang 2022: 147; Radhuber 2014: 60-61).

Seeing the state as a relation highlights the importance of analysing state structures and practices within their social contexts (Lang 2022: 149). For instance, the state as an institutional ensemble cannot exercise its power until activated by a specific set of politicians – what I refer to as state officials or government (Jessop 2018: 48). At the same time, social movements mobilize and shape state structures in their attempts to influence state policies (Riofrancos 2020). Thus, public policies are not fixed but "a result

of disputes and conflicts between various heterogeneous forces that influence the state institutions" (Lang 20022: 149). It is in this struggle where the possibility of greening the state lies, as competing actors can activate different state structures based on their understanding of a green state (Duit et al. 2016: 4). By diving deeper into green state theory, I demonstrate alternative visions of green statehood that go beyond decarbonization and, if activated, hold profoundly transformative potential.

2.2.1 Three Currents of Green State Theory

Green state theory emerged in the early 2000s to highlight the crucial role and resources of the state in environmental governance. In its early conceptualizations, green states were based on the concept of ecological modernization, aiming for greater efficiency in environmental governance, the market economy, and technological innovation. This approach saw the emergence of a green state as a linear development from the welfare state without changing the underlying structures of capital accumulation (Hausknost and Hammond 2020: 2). However, scholars increasingly emphasise the need for "a change of perspective and a renunciation of modernization thinking as the guiding principle of environmental politics" (ibid.: 6). In the following, I will provide a critical reading of green state theory to elaborate these underrecognized transformative dimensions.

Green state theory can broadly be differentiated into three currents[7]. First, the comparative-empirical approach describes green states as "arrangements that may be taking shape in the developed countries today, where ecologically oriented intervention comes to constitute [...] an essential responsibility of the public power" (Meadowcroft 2005: 4). This current emphasises the vital role of social movements in the process of

[7] I am aware of the various terms such as green, environmental, or eco-state that each of these currents refer to. However, for better readability, I use green state as an umbrella term throughout the thesis.

greening of the state. For example, James Meadowcroft (2005) compares the worker's struggle for a welfare state in the 20th century with the emergence of green states, highlighting the crucial importance of public pressure as a response to market failures and lack of voluntary action. Similarly, John Dryzek et al. (2003) analyse different models of green states and their links to civil society, emphasizing how state and society shape each other through public disputes on green statehood.

Second, the functionalist approach defines the green state as "a significant set of institutions and practices dedicated to the management of the environment and societal environmental interactions" (Duit et al. 2016: 5). This approach acknowledges the challenges in green state transformations by highlighting different state imperatives acting in conflict with a possible green state (Dryzek et al. 2002: 662-663). For instance, in trying to satisfy imperatives such as growth, legitimation, and wellbeing, the state runs against a "glass ceiling of transformation" (Hausknost 2020: 19) as a boundary that cannot be overcome without transforming its underlying structures. One way to break through this glass ceiling is to disarticulate the growth and wellbeing imperative by building alternative lifeworlds beyond material growth (ibid.: 32). These alternative lifeworlds can then circumvent the legitimation imperative if they are legitimised though through forms of direct democracy (ibid.: 32).

While the first two currents focus on the analysis of empirical green states, the third approach takes a normative stand (Barry and Eckersley 2005; Eckersley 2004, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). For Robyn Eckersley (2004: 111), a green state is based on the concept of ecological democracy in which all those potentially affected are represented or able to participate. This includes the interests of those who cannot represent themselves such as future generations and non-human beings (ibid.: 114). Ecological democracy therefore

constitutes a shift from liberal representative democracy "towards more radical and participatory forms of democracy 'from below'" (Eckersley 2020a: 223). One pillar of ecological democracy is green constitutions as "a structure of government that enables, and where necessary enforces, ecological responsibility on behalf of the broader community at risk" (Eckersley 2004: 245). Additionally, engaged green public spheres and green social movements play a critical role in questioning and evaluating the objectives and means of ecological transformation (ibid.: 246).

This brief introduction demonstrates dimensions of green statehood beyond ecological modernization such as green social movements and public spheres that use forms of direct democracy secured in green constitutions to advocate for alternative lifeworlds. This understanding of green statehood entails a transformative potential regarding the role of the state, democratic participation, and state-society relations (Hausknost and Hammond 2020: 6).

2.2.2 The Missing Green States of the Global South

However, green state theory has predominantly focused on Northern welfare states (see for example Bäckstrand and Kronsell 2015; Dryzek et al. 2002; Huh et al. 2018) and has repeatedly dismissed the possibility of Southern green states due to lacking state capacities and pressing developmental needs (Barry and Eckersley 2005: 268-270). Scholars have criticized the resulting research gap on Southern green states and suggested a wider definition of what constitutes a green state (Chandrashekeran et al. 2017; Death 2016a). For example, in his work on green states in Africa, Carl Death (2016b: 15-16) argues that:

> The green state in Africa is not the next stage in a modernisation project or the successor to liberal or welfare states but the effect of an assemblage

> of environmental rationalities, discourses, and technologies of government. [...]. All states in Africa - and indeed all states everywhere - can be thought of as green states in these terms.

By focusing on the transformative potential of green states in the case of Ecuador, I aim to contribute to this emerging research agenda on Southern green states. This is vital not only to fill empirical gaps but also because Southern experiences have been doubly disregarded: green state theory has continuously questioned their possibility and they are the regions most impacted by the increasing demand for minerals to achieve a decarbonized green state.

However, green state theory was not a concept I encountered inductively during my fieldwork. Thus, one might argue that I am applying a Northern theory to a postcolonial context without engaging with Southern epistemologies such as the manifold Latin American theories of political ecology (Lander 2003; Machado 2017). This was reiterated during my interview with the Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta: "Sometimes we have to be careful [...] of not simply looking for an ecological state. Maybe that concept doesn't appear with those names, but in practice, that's what we're dealing with."[8] By focusing on transformative dimensions of green statehood in Ecuador as a country in the Global South, I aim to "talk back" (hooks 2015) to dominant green state theory and its inherent Eurocentric bias. Instead, I hope to demonstrate how green statehood is actively disputed in Ecuador in dimensions that go beyond ecological modernization and decarbonization.

[8] Interview Alberto Acosta, 08.09.2023, online.

2.3 Ecuador Between Green Extractivism and Green State Transformation

Following this theoretical discussion, I now apply the concepts of green extractivism and green statehood to Ecuador for a broader contextualization before diving into my case study of the Chocó Andino.

2.3.1 Ecuador as a Green State

Based on the critical reading of green state theory, Ecuador demonstrates several characteristics of a green state. For instance, the Ecuadorian constitution can partly be considered a green constitution. Article 71 grants rights to nature arguing that "Pacha Mama where life is reproduced and realized, has the right to full respect for its existence and the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes" (Constitutional Court 2008). This demonstrates a commitment to providing rights for those who cannot represent themselves as one of the cornerstones of ecological democracy (Eckersley 2004: 243).

The Ecuadorian constitution also promotes alternative lifeworlds beyond material growth. For example, in Article 14, the constitution declares *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* (living well) as its guiding principle. *Sumak Kawsay* is an indigenous cosmovision that emphasises a holistic relationship with nature based on care, respect, and mutual wellbeing (Acosta 2015; Altmann 2017; Radcliffe 2012). Furthermore, Ecuadorian communities, researchers, and social movements engage in rich discussions on alternative lifeworlds such as plurinationality, pluriverse, or political ecology from the South (Altmann 2016; Carbonnier et al. 2017; Escobar 2020; Forero et al. 2022; Kothari et al. 2019; Mokrani Chávez and Lang 2013; Walsh 2013). However, the Ecuadorian state has also repeatedly appropriated *buen vivir* and rights of nature to legitimise a development model linked to extractivism (Valladares and Boelens 2017, 2019).

Consequently, *buen vivir* and rights of nature represent battlefields in themselves that actors can leverage for diverse objectives (Forero 2021; Merino 2016). Indeed, to break the glass ceiling of transformation, these alternative lifeworlds have to be legitimised through forms of direct democratic participation.

For this, the Ecuadorian constitution establishes three forms of consultations such as prior, informed, and free consent for indigenous nationalities (Article 57.7), the environmental consultation (Article 398 and 395.3), and the popular consultation on any topic for any Ecuadorian citizen (Article 104 and 106), being the only legally binding consultation (Constitutional Court 2008). Until recently, communities have mostly focused on demanding prior, informed, and free consent to stop extractive projects. There is a vivid debate about whether the administrative and bureaucratic procedures of these consultations restrict or support communities in their struggle for self-determination (Hoetmer 2017; Merino 2018; Perreault 2015). Yet, some scholars argue that consultations constitute "a novel space of struggle that combines direct action, the language of democratic participation, and a claim to popular rights that may offer a grassroots legal alternative to top-down judicialisation of inequality" (Gustafson and Guzmán 2016: 152). This is supported by an increase in successful popular consultations through bottom-up social mobilization in recent years (Vela-Almeida et al. 2022a; Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021; Walter and Urkidi 2017).

Lastly, green state theory emphasises the crucial role of "active ecological citizens that take responsibility for their state as their creation, and bring to life the kinds of green constitutional reforms" (Eckersley 2004: 245). In Ecuador, indigenous, peasant, and environmental movements increasingly form alliances with their aim to defend communities and territories from extraction (Svampa 2013: 40-41). The use of popular

consultations also engages the wider public on environmental concerns, thereby strengthening green public spheres. Hence, based on a critical reading of green state theory, Ecuador does demonstrate essential elements for a green state: Green social movements and public spheres use popular consultations as a form of direct democracy secured in its green constitution to push for alternative lifeworlds.

2.3.2 Ecuador as an Extractivist State

Nevertheless, there are also considerable obstacles to realizing this potential green state (Lang 2022: 150-153). For instance, Ecuador is shaped by the legacies of its colonial past. The continuation of colonial power relations, described as coloniality by Aníbal Quijano (2003), suppresses the diversity of its population, perpetuates racialized hierarchies, and fosters the formation of powerful national elites that promote linear ideas of modernity and development based on economic growth (Escobar 2012; Ferguson 1994).

Ecuador also occupies a peripheral position within the global capitalist markets as it mostly exports primary goods and is dependent on the extraction of natural resources for state revenue (Acosta 2009; Wallerstein 2000). Since its discovery in the 1970s, oil has been proclaimed a source of economic growth and prosperity for the Ecuadorian people (Rival 2012: 154). From 1972 to 1976, the military government under Guillermo Rodríguez-Lara linked the idea of resource extraction with developmentalism in anti-imperialist and nationalist terms (Riofrancos 2020: 8). However, insurmountable debt in combination with a sharp decline in oil prices marked the beginning of a neoliberal extractive governance paradigm. What constitutes neoliberalism is highly disputed and definitions range from a set of economic policies to an all-permeating rationality of the market (Ferguson 2010; Harvey 2005; Gold and Zagato 2020). In this thesis, I focus on the Ecuadorian experience of neoliberalism which was based on market liberalization,

deregulation, privatisation, and a reduced role of the state. These policies were accompanied by austerity programmes, trade liberalization, and the promotion of FDI, leading to an increased influence of international financial institutions and transnational corporate actors (Alcívar 2020; Chiasson-LeBel 2019; Riofrancos 2020; Vela-Almeida et al. 2021). For instance, between the 1980s and 1990s Ecuador implemented structural adjustment programmes in agreement with the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Acosta 2006; Sawyer 2004). By the end of the 1990s, Ecuador fell into a severe economic recession with high inflation rates, leading to the dollarization of the economy in 2000 under intense popular unrest (Rival 2012: 154).

The election of Correa in 2007 marked the beginning of a post-neoliberal resource nationalism (Riofrancos 2020: 50; Vela-Almeida 2018: 127). Aiming to undo the legacies of neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism promotes the role of an active state involved in planning, the redistribution of extractive revenue, and the regulation of private actors (Riofrancos 2020; Vela-Almeida 2017). For instance, Correa increased public spending on social security, health, and education as part of his "Citizen's Revolution". These measures were financed by nationalizing resource extraction and increasing taxes and royalties (Arsel and Angel 2012; Rival 2012). It was in the context of this emerging neo-extractivism that Correa's government initiated the drafting of a new constitution in close cooperation with indigenous and environmental movements. Therefore, the same constitution that grants rights to nature and promotes *buen vivir* also declares that "non-renewable natural resources belong to the inalienable and imprescriptible patrimony of the State" (Constitutional Court 2008). This illustrates an ongoing dispute between different visions of statehood in Ecuador. In the words of former Supreme Court judge Ramiro Ávila:

> "The constitution is a constitution in transition. And, when I say transition that means that it has to play between the models: The traditional and the more sustainable one. [...] The Constitution coexists with systems, with regimes to see property in a different way, [...] to see nature as property, as a natural resource, and as a subject of rights. And what we have now is to dispute which of those senses is the one that has to prevail in Ecuador. This is disputed in many ways. It is disputed in the Constitutional Court; it is disputed in the territory. It is disputed in the consultation; it is disputed in the resistance in the communities where there are extractive activities. [...] Because at the heart of the dispute is the regime we have here.[9]

It is this fundamental dispute that I analyse through the lens of green state theory as it is also a debate about which kind of green state Ecuador moves towards: Is it more of the same, a Green Extractivist State that continues resource exploitation for decarbonization? Or can green social movements use popular consultations to push for a Transformative Green State based on the promotion of alternative lifeworlds?

Based on my field observations, I noticed five reoccurring dimensions of conflict through which I will analyse this dispute: 1) **Value** – what is valued? 2) **Development** – what constitutes development? 3) **Territory** – how is it conceptualized? 4) **Democracy** – how is it used? and 5) **Social Movements** – what is their role? Each empirical chapter follows these five dimensions in the same order to contrast the competing green state visions. While the deeper connections between them need further analysis, the popular consultation of the Chocó Andino provides an insightful case study to first clarify the role of each dimension in the current dispute between a Green Extractivist and a Transformative Green State.

[9] Interview Ramiro Ávila, 01.09.2023, Online.

3 Case Study, Methodology, and Ethical Reflections

In this chapter, I introduce my case study of the popular consultation in the Chocó Andino and provide an overview of my methodology. I begin with the context of the Chocó before I outline my methods, positionality, and ethical challenges.

3.1 The Case Study of the Chocó Andino

To understand the nuances of the popular consultation, it is vital to locate the Chocó Andino historically, socially, and geographically. The Chocó Andino is named after the collision (*choque*) between the Magdalena Cordillera and the Andean tropical forests. While this area includes a large area, my research focuses on the six *Gobiernos Autónomos Decentralizados* (Autonomous Decentralized Governments, GADs) Calacalí, Nono, Nanegal, Nanegalito, Gualea, and Pacto in the North-West of Quito. Since 2015, these GADs have been combined in the umbrella governance system of the *Mancomunidad del Chocó Andino* (henceforth *Mancomunidad*). The Chocó has 18.112 inhabitants and is part of the administrative Metropolitan District of Quito, which is why the popular consultation was held for all of Quito's 2,5 million inhabitants (Balarezo Bustillos and Guerra Garcés 2021: 5-10). It is a cloud forest and a hotspot of biodiversity due to its unique geological location (ibid.: 12; Guevara Andino and Fernandez-Fernandez 2020).

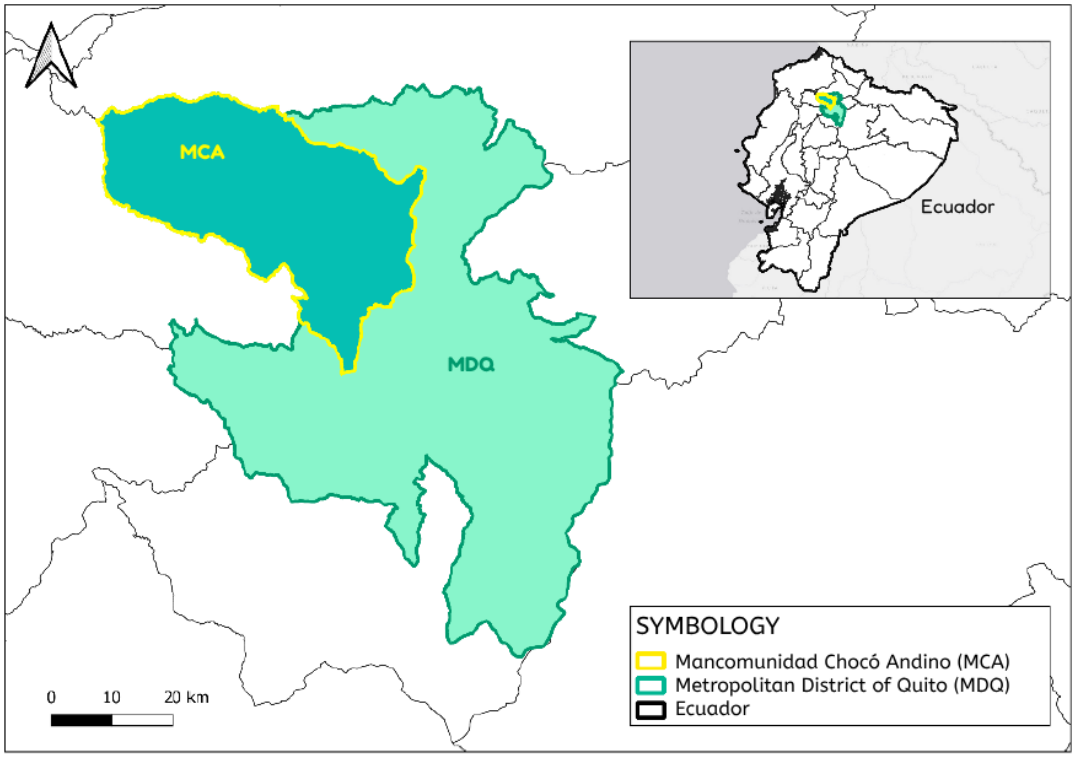

Figure 1: The Chocó Andino within the Metropolitan District of Quito and the national borders. Courtesy of Álvaro Robles (2023: 44).

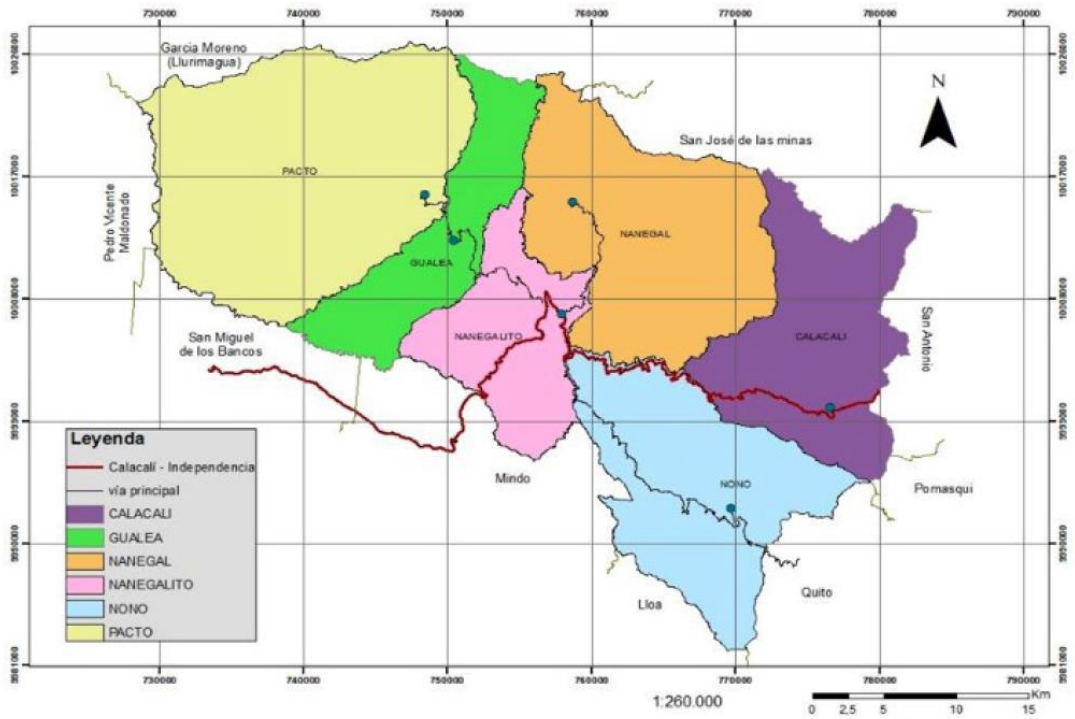

Figure 2 Map of the Decentralized Autonomous Governments of the Chocó Andino (Balarezo Bustillos and Guerra Garcés 2021: 10).

The Chocó is not predominantly inhabited by indigenous communities but by mestizo settlers, so-called *colonos*. Many *colonos* arrived in the course of agrarian land reforms in the 1960s that promised land titles to settlers who cultivated the "empty land" (Davidov 2014; Solo De Zaldívar 2015). The primary economic activities include livestock farming, tourism, the production of sugarcane, milk, cacao, coffee, and palm trees (Balarezo Bustillos and Guerra Garcés 2021: 23). The poverty rates in the Chocó exceed those of urban Quito, ranging between 60 and 80% (Torres and Peralvo 2019: 13).

Parts of the Chocó such as the GAD Pacto have a long history of artisanal mining. However, in the 1990s, the WB project *Proyecto de Asistencia Técnica para Desarrollo Minero y Control Ambiental* (Project of Technical Assistance for the Mining Development and Environmental Control, PRODEMINCA) financed the geological exploration of the Western Cordillera of the Andes and opened a wide area, including the Chocó, for mining concessions (Davidov 2014: 43-44). Today, there are 20 concessions for gold and silver that range from small to large-scale mining. In contrast to large-scale mining regions in Zamora in the south or Intag in the north of Ecuador, these concessions are only partially owned by transnational companies. Notable examples include the concession Melina by the company Ecuamin S.A., a Chilean subcontractor, and the concessions Rumiñahui and Bettys by Natural Resources, a Canadian subcontractor. Although none of the concessions have the necessary permits for the extraction of minerals, Ecuamin S.A. and Natural Resources have been illegally extracting material, causing environmental degradation and social tensions within the Chocó.

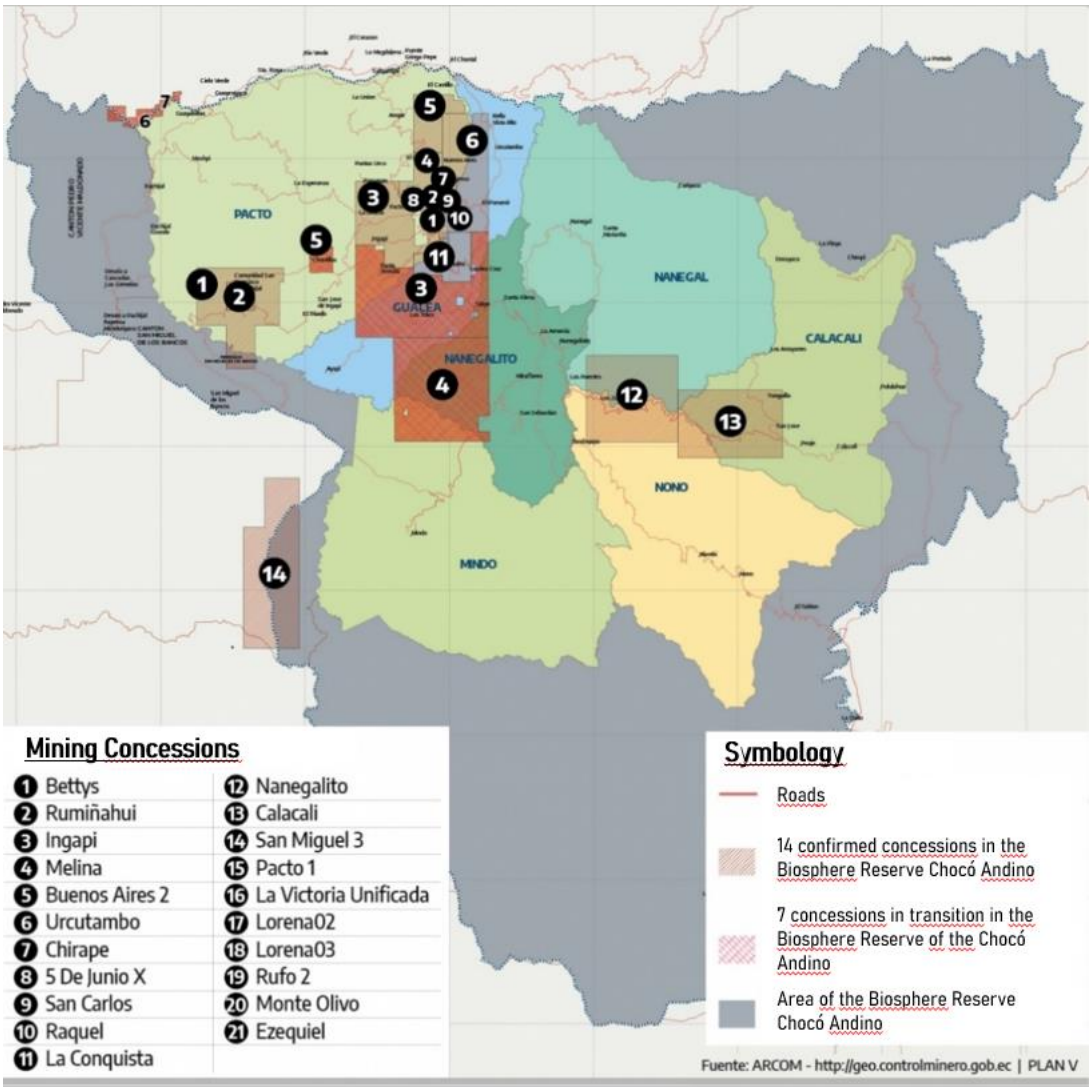

Figure 3 Map of the concessions in the Chocó Andino. Concession 14 is outside of the *Mancomunidad* and therefore not included. Translated by author from Plan V (2021) available on https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/panela-vs-mineria-la-batalla-escondida-el-noroccidente-quito.

To counter the expansion of mining concessions, local NGOs have been establishing international, national, and private reserves as protected areas such as the recent declaration of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (Robles 2023: 51). In 2015, Pacto also conducted a non-binding consultation in which 90% of the population rejected mining (León 2015). However, in 2020, Moreno re-opened the mining catalogue for new concessions as a response to the severe economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Vela-Almeida et al. 2021: 32). When the illegal extraction of minerals also increased dramatically, local communities organised blockades on the main roads

leading to the concessions (Novik 2022; Cashell 2022). The most notable is the blockade *La Victoria* in Pacto which was held consistently for two years by community members that later formed the *Frente Anti-Minero Pacto para la Vida, Agua y Naturaleza* (Pacto's Anti-Mining Front for Life, Water, and Nature, henceforth Anti-Mining Front Pacto).

Figure 4 Blockade at *La Victoria*. The poster says, "the gold leaves, misery, hunger, and death stay" (Plan V 2021).

Faced with the high costs and exhaustion of continuing the blockade, the communities began discussing the possibility of a popular consultation. While there have been many top-down referenda[10] aimed at legitimising presidential policies, the first initiative for a popular consultation from civil society was led by the collective *Yasunidos* in 2013. They contested Correa's decision to end the Yasuní-ITT initiative which had proposed an oil moratorium in the Amazonian Yasuní National Park in exchange for international financial support (Kingsbury et al. 2018; Alarcón et al. 2018). However, in 2014, the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (National Electoral Council, CNE) invalidated a great number of the

[10] I refer to referendum if it is a top-down consultation by the President and popular consultation if it is a bottom-up consultation by civil society.

signatures collected by *Yasunidos* on unclear grounds and thereby impeded the popular consultation (Coryat and Picq 2016). *Yasunidos* continued to pressure the Constitutional Court to review the case until it eventually approved the consultation in May 2023 (Puga 2023). In the meantime, popular consultations emerged in other parts of the country such as Girón and Cuenca as a successful strategy to halt extractive mining projects (Picq 2023; Ramos 2021).

This inspired local NGOs and residents to attempt a consultation in the Chocó Andino. They founded the campaign *Quito sin Minería* as a rural-urban alliance of environmental groups and residents. Its most notable members include *Acción Ecológica* (Ecological Action, AE), Ecuador's oldest and most influential environmental organisation, the local non-governmental organisation (NGO) IMAYMANA, and the *Consorcio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecoregion Andina* (Consortium for Sustainable Development in the Andean Ecoregion, CONDESAN). Local groups included the youth network *Red de Jóvenes del Chocó Andino* (RJCA), the *Corporación de Productores Paneleros Pacto* (Cooperation of Sugarcane Producers Pacto, COPROPAP), as well as the Anti-Mining Front Pacto. While the campaign did not receive international funding directly, some NGOs are funded through international institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or national development agencies (Robles 2023: 59).

After *Quito sin Minería* had collected and verified signatures for nine months, the CNE eventually approved the consultation in February 2023 (Acción Ecológica 2023; Consejo Nacional Electoral 2023a). The consultation compromised four questions, namely "Do you agree to forbid metallic mining in the parishes Calacalí, Nanegalito, Nanegal, Nono, Gualea, and Pacto that form the Mancomunidad in artisanal/small/medium/large

scale?", each scale forming one question. While the consultation cannot undo confirmed concessions, it prevents further concessions and the extension of environmental permits. In May 2023, the Constitutional Court also approved the consultation on the oil moratorium in the Yasuní (Noboa 2023) and only a week later Lasso dissolved parliament to avoid impeachment and announced early elections for August (Pazan 2023). To save costs, the CNE decided to combine the two popular consultations alongside the presidential elections on August 20th, 2023 (Puga 2023).

There are several reasons for selecting the Chocó Andino as my case study. While the case of Yasuní is an incredibly important consultation with a long and complex history, the approbation of the consultation came unexpectedly when I had already reached out to *Quito sin Minería*. Including Yasuní in my analysis would have meant a broader but less in-depth analysis. Therefore, I decided to primarily focus on the Chocó Andino but include perspectives from *Yasunidos* activists to recognize the shared impact of both campaigns.

Furthermore, while there is invaluable research on indigenous struggles against oil extraction in the Amazon, it is crucial to also analyse struggles with "different nuances and different 'scripts'" (Davidov 2014: 35). Research on mining conflicts in the regions of large-scale miming has been flourishing (van Teijlingen 2016; Velásquez 2017; Vela-Almeida 2018), but so far there are very few analyses of the mining conflict in the Chocó Andino (see Robles 2023 for a recent contribution). Even though the Chocó Andino is not a site of large-scale mining and before any (legal) exploitation, it constitutes an insightful case study to shed light on the first popular consultation against mining in a Latin American capital. Moreover, although there are officially no concessions for copper, the energy transition was a reoccurring topic in my state interviews, shifting my research

focus towards green extractivism in the course of my fieldwork. Similarly, interviews and a report by AE (2022) indicated that even though the concessions in the Chocó are for silver and gold, mining corporations also search for copper. Finally, as oil reserves are decreasing, mining is being positioned as its future replacement. This underscores the relevance of focusing on mining struggles from an anticipatory perspective, especially since many of the mining sites of strategic national interest are copper mines (ibid.). Thus, the Chocó Andino popular consultation is an insightful case study to examine disputes regarding value, land, development, democracy, and the role of social movements in the context of competing green state visions. In the following, I will outline my methodology to analyse this conflict.

3.2 Methods

Between July and September 2023, I conducted 2,5 months of fieldwork in urban Quito and the Chocó Andino. For this, I employed a qualitative approach to dive into the fluid and complex construction of green state visions as "the meaning that actors use to make sense of their world" (Morris 2009: 211). Despite the short time in the field, I attempted to follow an ethnographic approach by deeply immersing myself in the field and using a variety of methods for a nuanced and informed understanding of the lived realities of my research participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019: 3).

My detailed methods were as follows. First, to "gain in-depth knowledge of an environment and its practices" (Uldam and McCurdy 2013: 942), I engaged in participant observation. This enabled me to capture the daily discussions, interactions, and practices within the campaign as well as between state and corporate actors. In total, I participated in 28 events, including six visits to neighbourhoods in Quito for the

campaign, a protest in front of the regional court, a weekend of workshops organised by *Quito sin Minería*, the annual festival of the Chocó, various academic discussion panels both for and against mining, and the EXPOMINAS mining fair (for a full list see annex 3).

However, especially my role in the campaign can be better described as observant participation as I attended several campaign events as a volunteer (Seim 2024: 123). This position was not only crucial to accessing the research site but also allowed me to include the embodied experience of a volunteer for the campaign. Nevertheless, this personal involvement sometimes blurred the lines between my role as a researcher and a volunteer for the campaign. Forms of engaged research such as these can create "dual loyalties" (Hale 2006, 2008) between political struggles and academia that are often in tension with each other. Furthermore, there is the potential to romanticize, homogenize, and uncritically endorse the agendas of social movements, thereby inhibiting rigorous research (Edelman 2009: 249; Hale 2006: 106; Kirsch 2018: 10). My close cooperation with the campaign also affected my results in the sense that they are "skewed" in depth: the sustained engagement with the activists enabled a deeper understanding of their vision of green statehood than individual interviews with state officials. Additionally, my affiliation with *Quito sin Minería* affected my relationship with the state: As the political situation became more antagonized in the aftermath of the consultations, I worried if state actors would recognize me from photos with *Quito sin Mineria* that had been published since I started volunteering with them. This demonstrates how research, especially in extractive contexts, "requires an approach attuned to the multiple positionings of scholars" (Johnson et al. 2021: 385).

I am aware of these issues and aim to circumvent any "dual loyalties" by producing a second body of work in Spanish focused on the relevant issues for *Quito sin Minería*. I also conducted an in-depth documentary analysis of government reports to counterbalance the difference in depth. Ultimately, conducting fieldwork "based on political engagement rather than sociological detachment" (Sawyer 2004: 22) was the most viable approach due to the debated topic of my research and my positionality as an outsider. Through the continuous cooperation with the campaign, I built trust and relationships which enabled me to speak with criminalized activists who were highly suspicious of interviews with outsiders. As a result of my close engagement, I am able to provide a more nuanced understanding of the tensions and challenges within the movement (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 190).

Second, I conducted 44 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with different stakeholders (see annex 1). I approached these interviews as "collaboratively constructive of the meanings of experience" (Gubrium et al. 2012: 4): Asking open-ended questions (see annex 2) allowed me to gain in-depth information, reiterate certain themes, ask clarifying questions, or let the participants guide the conversation (Knott et al. 2022; Skinner 2012). To encompass the diversity of members, I followed Devault's (1990: 97) feminist strategies for interviewing which insists "on the importance of following out the implications of women's (and others') various locations in socially organized activities" (see also Crenshaw 1991; Oakley 2016). Most of these interviews were conducted in-person in offices, in public cafes, or participants invited me to their homes. Only some interviews were conducted online when it was more convenient for the interview partner.

I conducted 7 elite interviews with state officials from different institutions such as ministries, the state-owned mining company, and research institution as well as some members of the mining sector. Even though the definition of elite is contested, the "social capital and strategic positions within social structures" (Harvey 2011: 433; Liu 2018; Morris 2009) of elite actors can offer valuable insights into the official narratives surrounding an Ecuadorian green state. Furthermore, I conducted 27 interviews with activists from *Quito sin Minería* and residents of the Chocó. The selection of interview participants followed a differentiated snowball system in which I prioritized different roles and experiences within the campaign based on age, gender, and class to ensure a nuanced and intersectional analysis. I also conducted 6 interviews with researchers from Ecuadorian universities in which I probed emerging hypotheses with their expert knowledge of the political context in Ecuador.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was not able to include all relevant actors in these interviews. For instance, I did not interview the state agency responsible for the regulation of mining activities which would have deepened my understanding of the recurring theme of a "weak state" in my interviews. Also, my observations focus on the national scale of central state institutions and local communities which was the most viable approach given the limited time. Consequently, my analysis is missing the municipal scale as an important intermediary between central state policies and local contestation. Lastly, as I was focusing on the vision of state officials, I was only able to superficially engage with the private sector in my interviews. I attempted to balance this by attending several academic discussions organised by the mining industry to understand its role in the making of an Ecuadorian green state.

Third, I conducted two focus group discussions with volunteers of the campaign and residents of the Chocó that ranged between 4 to 10 participants. Focus group discussions allowed me "to observe participants engaging in interaction that is concentrated on attitudes and experiences which are of interest to the researcher" (Spanish and Morgan 1984: 259; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2013). In facilitating these joint and informal discussions, I could closely analyse the converging or diverging positions of my research participants regarding the consultation.

Fourth, I conducted a documentary analysis of international and national policy documents. I read these documents "along the grain" (Stoler 2009), following their structure, assumptions, and arguments. Since documents are situated products subject to contestation (Tight 2019), they also illustrated continuities and shifts in official narratives of green state visions. Lastly, I included campaign posters in this analysis as a medium of visual political communication (Geise and Vigsø 2017: 34).

All interviews and field notes were transcribed and analysed using the coding software NVivo. I applied an inductive thematic analysis in which codes were aggregated to themes and linked with other reoccurring themes (Scharp and Sanders 2019). Eventually, this aggregation and an in-depth literature review led me to the five dimensions that will structure the empirical chapters. To highlight the reasoning of my participants, I often use longer quotes that were slightly adapted for better readability by cutting repetitions or filling words. Finally, all original Spanish quotes, both from literature and interviews, have been translated using translation software and checked by me and/or a native speaker. In cases of an ambiguous translation, I added the Spanish word in brackets.

3.3 Positionality and Ethics

I understand research as a fundamentally socially embedded practice, making a continuous reflection of power relations, positionality, and ethical implications vital (Folkes 2022; Haraway 1988; Lichterman 2017).

Living in Ecuador from 2016 - 2017 first introduced me to the Ecuadorian political context. However, as a white German woman from a British elite university and unrelated to environmental struggles in Ecuador, I was clearly an "outsider" (McCurdy and Uldam 2014). For interviewing elite state actors, this outsider position proved helpful since my positionality seemed "'neutral' or non-threatening" (Johnson et al. 2021: 402; England 1994). Consequently, some of my interlocutors adopted a patronizing attitude towards me as a young woman with a background in social sciences. During the interviews, my fluency in Spanish and genuine concern for understanding Ecuador's current challenges led state actors to address contradictions more openly and ensured further contacts in state institutions.

In contrast, I often caught myself leveraging on my limited "insiderness" in the first meetings with *Quito sin Minería* by referring to specific colloquial words or recent political events. This reflects the shifting dynamic between insider/outsider positions beyond static and dichotomous categories (McCurdy and Uldam 2014: 942–943; Folkes 2022). Indeed, these insider-outsider differences varied across research participants: in the urban spheres of *Quito sin Minería*, I shared a similar background with many of my interlocutors. However, differences in class, education, and race were radically emphasised in the rural areas of the Chocó which underscores the importance of an intersectional research approach (Crenshaw 1991; Devault 1990; Oakley 2016).

Furthermore, it is paramount to prevent research on resource extraction from becoming extractive itself (Cruz and Luke 2020). I quickly realized that my initial aim to conduct collaborative research was too ambitious for such a short time and without the base of long-term engagement (Arribas Lozano et al. 2020; Arribas Lozano 2022). Nevertheless, I still hold a commitment to reciprocity, for instance by supporting the events of the campaign as a volunteer and by making the results accessible to the participants through a summary tailored to their concerns in Spanish (Johnson et al. 2021: 407).

Lastly, the increasing violence against environmental defenders in Latin America (Global Witness 2023) constituted a main ethical concern and I continuously sought consent throughout my research. For the elite interviews, I attached participant information sheets informing about the aims of my research to my emails. For interviews with members of the campaign, I carried copies of the information sheet with me but often summarised them orally, allowing space for questions and concerns. All interview participants were asked to sign consent sheets, informing them about their right to revoke their participation as well as different degrees of anonymity. When participants were illiterate or it was a spontaneous interview in which I had no consent sheets at hand, I asked for consent orally and recorded it. Except for two participants, I received consent to use their original names in this thesis. Nevertheless, after closely observing the current increase in state repression and to assure protection for the environmental defenders facing criminalization, I have applied pseudonyms for all participants involved in the campaign.

4 Towards a Green Extractivist State

In this chapter, I address my first research question: *what rationalities do state officials employ in their vision of a green state, and what are their strategies of legitimisation?* I argue that Ecuadorian state officials envision a Green Extractivist State that builds upon neo-extractivist institutions and legitimisations for mining articulated during Correa's government. However, in the context of an emerging consensus of decarbonization and neoliberal shift under Correa's successors Moreno and Lasso, these are adopted in the name of decarbonization, energy transition, and sustainable development. This process is far from neat or finished; instead, my analysis illustrates ongoing continuities and ruptures. Ultimately, my analysis suggests that state officials continue a technocratic, top-down, and extractivist understanding of green statehood.

I begin by outlining the historical trajectory of making Ecuador, historically an "oil country", a "mining country" (*país minero*). For this, I introduce Correa's neo-extractivist resource governance paradigm and its articulations in institutions, laws, and the legitimisation of mining. I then examine the movement towards a Green Extractivist State in the context of a neoliberal shift and increasing pressure for decarbonization through the five dimensions of value, development, territory, democracy, and the role of social movements. While plunging oil reserves and the consensus of decarbonization increase the symbolic and material value of minerals as strategic national resources in the future, the rising demand for minerals is also seen as an opportunity for development as it attracts FDI and increases mining exports. For this, state officials promote the idea of responsible and sustainable mining that follows strict environmental regulations and supports local development. This vision underlies a view of territory based on its geological potential, creating green sacrifice zones that disregard local livelihoods in the

name of development and decarbonization. While these three dimensions demonstrate uneven changes, some aspects remain the same in this vision of a Green Extractivist State: the state continues the obstruction of direct democracy such as the popular consultation as well as the criminalization of anti-mining activists. In the last subchapter, I analyse the state as a relation by outlining the contestations from the mining industry and anti-mining activists which both criticize the "weakness" of the state. I demonstrate how austerity and neoliberal policies have affected the state's capacity and ability to perform its vision of a Green Extractivist State based on sustainable and responsible mining. While corporate actors lament the lack of state planning and active support of their agendas, activists are struggling to leverage laws and environmental regulations for their interests due to limited state capacities.

4.1 The Making of a "Mining Country"

To understand the current dispute, it is important to embed it in the ongoing process of making Ecuador a "mining country". Historically, Ecuador has been focusing on the extraction of oil (Espinosa 2013; Rival 2012; Sawyer 2004). However, with the implementation of the controversial Mining Law in 2009, Correa's neo-extractivist administration began a transition towards large-scale mining (Acosta et al. 2021b; Sacher and Acosta 2012; Vela-Almeida 2018; Vela-Almeida et al. 2018). The law emphasised mining as a strategic national interest and made the state the owner of underground resources irrespective of the property rights on the surface. It thereby continued colonial definitions of property and land appropriation (Vela-Almeida 2018: 130). As part of neo-extractivist policy, the law also determined high royalties and community investment taxes for local development (van Teijlingen 2016: 904).

Furthermore, the mining law strengthened the role of state institutions in the promotion of mining. The *Ministerio de Energía y Minas* (Ministry of Energy and Mining, MEM) is responsible for the policies to develop the mining sector while the *Ministerio de Ambiente, Agua, y Transición Ecológica* (Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition, MAATE) provides the environmental permits and licenses (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables 2020: 47). The law also created new institutions such as the *Instituto de Investigación Geológica y Energética* (Geological and Energetic Research Institute, IIGE), a research department for the MEM, the state-owned mining company *Empresa Nacional Minera* (National Mining Company, ENAMI), and the *Agencia de Regulación y Control de Energía y Recursos No Renovables* (Agency of Regulation and Control of Energy and Non-Renewable Resources, ARCRNR) for the supervision and regulation of mining activity (Ley de Minería 2009: 4-6). These institutions administer the making of a mining country by renewing concessions, endorsing environmental licenses, and providing geographical information (van Teijlingen 2016: 904).

Moreover, Correa declared 11 large-scale mining projects of strategic national interest. Two of them, *Mirador* and *Fruta del Norte,* are the two only large-scale mines in the south of Ecuador that are currently in operation (Acosta et al. 2021b). The case of *Mirador*, owned by the Chinese corporations Tongling and CRCC, exemplifies the increasing role of China during this phase of neo-extractivism as it heavily invested in large-scale mining in Ecuador (Sacher 2017). Finally, Correa's administration created a discursive link between development and mining. The combination of longstanding corporate social responsibility strategies with neo-extractivist policies led to the formation of the state as "the prime promotor and practitioner of this local mining-development nexus" (van

Teijlingen 2016: 910). In sum, William Sacher (2017: 313-315) characterizes the Ecuadorian state under Correa as a Mineral State in which "an important section of its entire apparatus [was] at the service of promoting mega-mining."

In 2017, Correa's decade-long presidency ended with what seemed a seamless continuation through his former Vice President and political ally Moreno. However, Moreno quickly cut ties with Correa and implemented a range of austerity policies in response to the fall of commodity prices (Acosta and Guijarro 2018; Riofrancos 2020: 180). For instance, Moreno privatised state-owned companies, dissolved several ministries, and promoted private enterprise by deregulating the market and setting financial incentives for natural resource extraction (Vela-Almeida et al. 2021: 32). Moreno also firmed an agreement with the IMF for a credit of 4200 million USD to implement his National Development Plan, causing nation-wide unrest in 2019 [11] (ibid.: 30). The following COVID-19 pandemic caused the worst economic recession in Ecuador's modern history, leading to an increase of austerity policies (Acosta et al. 2021a: 2). Moreno further dismissed state officials, combined the former Ministry of Environment with the Ministry of Water, and significantly decreased its budget leading to "the absolute inoperation of the Ministry of Environment and Water and the weakening of environmental management" (Vela-Almeida et al. 2021: 30–31). Equally, the Agencies of Regulation and Control for oil and mining were combined, severely limiting their capacity to fulfil their regulatory obligations (ibid.: 32).

[11] The credit was signed under the condition of removing subsidies on petroleum with grave implications for socio-economically marginalized groups. As a result, Ecuador experienced the largest protests of the last fifteen years, led by a broad coalition of indigenous, workers, human rights, and peasant groups. Moreno declared a state of emergency and severely curtailed human rights such as the right to assembly and free speech while protesters were met with extreme police and military violence. The protests eventually forced Moreno to bring back the subsidy on petroleum (Vela-Almeida et al. 2021).

In 2021, the election of Lasso, owner of Ecuador's largest bank and long-term member of Ecuador's right-wing oligarchy, consolidated the shift towards neoliberal economic policy (Banchón 2021). His *Plan Nacional del Desarrollo* (National Development Plan, PND) "Creating Opportunities" reads like a manifesto for market liberation. In its first sentence, it condemns the Correa administration as "15 years of one single vision, imposed by the state, of how society is supposed to be" (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación 2021: 7). Instead, the plan introduces the new paradigm of "freedom" and a state that is "small, solid, and efficient" (ibid.: 21). For the future, it envisions Ecuador as a market-based economy where there is "as much market as possible and the state regulations for the economic activities are the least possible" (ibid.). Citing textbook economists Milton Friedman and David Ricardo, also highlights "international trade as a fundamental tool for the growth of the whole economy" (ibid.: 51).

Despite the stark contrast to Correa's post-neoliberal vision only a decade ago, these state policies are interconnected and ultimately build upon each other. In her historical analysis of different resource governance paradigms, Thea Riofrancos (2020: 6) demonstrates how "each model of governance bequeathed institutional and ideological legacies that shaped the subsequent moments of policymaking and protest". This not only includes the role of state officials and corporate actors but also social movements whose practices of resistance have continuously contested and thereby molded extractive state policies (ibid.: 13-14). William Sacher described this paradox the following in our interview:

> I believe that we are definitely in another phase in which the prerogatives and margins of manoeuvre of all the institutions, whatever their sector or sphere, have been considerably reduced and therefore, we have returned to a dynamic of the early neoliberal era. [...] It seems to me that [...] somehow the period of *Correismo* and the return of a kind of state

> interventionism was necessary to focus a series of necessary conditions for mining investment.[12]

Thus, there are discursive, institutional, and material traces of former extractive governances that restrict, enable, and lead the direction of emerging ones. It is based on this historical perspective that I will analyse how an emerging green extractivist resource paradigm is adopted, providing novel legitimations for extractivism in the name of decarbonization and consolidating a Green Extractivist State.

4.2 "Fortunately, we have copper…" – The Many Values of Minerals

The first characteristic of this emerging Green Extractivist State is the increasing value of minerals in the context of decreasing oil reserves and a global consensus on decarbonization. For this, it is helpful to remember how resources are in "a fluid and temporary state that is contingent on symbolic and political economies that define 'value'" (Davidov 2014: 39). In the following, I will outline how this value is constructed and reshaped through a combination of technologies, discourses, and practices (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 16).

First, minerals are increasing in value as a result of Ecuador's depleting oil reserves. Traditionally, Ecuador has ascribed value to oil as the main source of state revenue (Rival 2010). Since these reserves are now decreasing, many state officials expressed their preoccupations about the future. In the words of the CEO of the ENAMI:

> We will barely have oil for 16 years […]. There is no investment for exploration, therefore we have not found delimited new deposits in the first product in exports, the one that generates the most foreign currency in our country, well, it is going to be extinguished or it is going to be reduced.[13]

[12] Interview William Sacher, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[13] Interview Santiago Davalos, 31.08.2023, Quito.

While this does not mean that the Ecuadorian oil sector will be extinct in 16 years, the Ecuadorian government officials envisioned mining to compensate for the losses in oil revenue. In the words of the Vice Minister of Mining, mining was "the future of the country."[14] This future was also anticipated in the *Plan Nacional del Desarrollo del Sector Minero* (National Plan on the Development of Mining, PNDSM). It envisions that in 2030, "mining in Ecuador will be considered as one of the pillars of the national economy" (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables 2020: 137), aiming for an increase in concessions between 32% to 95% (ibid.: 161) and an increase in state revenue by an impressive 1119% to 2414% by 2030 (ibid.: 166). These are very ambitious objectives for a country that had no large-scale mine in operation before 2017. As mining is conceptualized to replace oil in the future, the value of minerals increases respectively.

But the value of minerals was also closely tied to the consensus of decarbonization. In its report "The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions" (2022), the International Energy Agency (IEA) emphasises how the transition towards renewable energy is much more mineral-intensive than energy systems fuelled by hydrocarbons. It projects that reaching the 2°C goal of the Paris Agreement would mean "a quadrupling of mineral requirements for clean energy technologies by 2040" (ibid.: 8). This increasing demand for minerals is closely linked to Latin America as a region rich in resources. A report by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB 2023: 6) stresses how Latin American countries face "a window of opportunity to take advantage of the significant increase in demand for these minerals and to drive a process of sustainable and fair economic growth."

[14] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.

Ecuadorian state officials reproduced these narratives of global decarbonization that increased the value of minerals to legitimise further extraction. For example, the CEO of the ENAMI clearly echoed the perspective outlined in the IEA and IADB reports:

> Unfortunately, without minerals, we are not going to be able to make that energy transition, that change in the energy matrix. [...] Today the use of copper in a vehicle increases 12 or 15 times more than what a previous vehicle has. So, the leap two a change in the energy matrix is unquestionable.[15]

The energy transition was also closely linked to the ecological transition, a transversal policy established by Lasso in 2021. The NPD defines the ecological transition as "a subsystem of territorial planning that includes adaptation, climate change mitigation, environmental preservation, and sustainable management of natural heritage" (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación 2021: 36). This policy also renamed the former Ministry of Environment and Water to the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition. In our interview, the Minister of Environment proudly stated that "we are the fourth in the world, the first in Latin America [...] to have the ecological transition incorporated not only in the name of the Ministry but as a public policy."[16] He further asserted this as an important step towards a green state:

> You have a country like Ecuador that finances the majority of its general budget through hydrocarbons. We are not ready to leave it today, that is the reality, [...] so what? There is a long way to go of course, but I think that in going towards that ecological state to which you refer, the issue of sustainable development and ecological transition is a very good first step.[17]

When I asked about what policies Ecuador implements for the ecological transition, the minister talked in length about the Ecuador Net Zero programme, green and blue carbon

[15] Interview Santiago Davalos, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[16] Interview José Antonio Dávalos, 09.08.2023, Quito.
[17] Interview José Antonio Dávalos, 09.08.2023, Quito.

bonds, and electric mobility. Indeed, a National Plan Towards Decarbonization, financed by the French Development Agency, was published in August 2023 (Ministerio del Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica 2023). This plan again emphasised a focus on "renewable energies, application of energy efficiency, implementation of sustainable mobility" (Ministerio del Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica 2021). Thus, the ecological transition is predominantly reduced to the energy transition, a broader trend in global policies (Svampa and Bringel 2023: 52). Following this logic, the ecological transition necessarily requires the expansion of mining, as the director of the IIGE asserted:

> In our case, fortunately, we have copper that is fundamental for the change of the matrix, without copper, how? And we want to see if we have the critical minerals, [...] lithium, exactly, that is in Chile, that is in Bolivia. And, because if we change, for example, to electromobility, we need to find out from where to import everything, this is going to cost us tremendously, and economically we are not in that capacity.[18]

The director then continued that "you are going to need more minerals. And that is the truth. So, mining has to develop, [...] there is no alternative."[19] This demonstrates how minerals for the energy transition and decarbonization were seen through a lens of urgency and lack of alternatives, very similar to narratives on development (Mokrani Chávez and Lang 2013).

As a result, the Ecuadorian government played an active role in promoting green extractivism. This reflects a broader trend observed by Kristina Dietz (2022: 5) as countries in the Global South push for "the exploitation of critical raw materials and the expansion of renewable energies in order to bring about an energy transition in their own

[18] Interview Jaime Javier, 23.08.2023, Quito.
[19] Interview Jaime Javier, 23.08.2023, Quito.

countries." Indeed, minerals are vital for Ecuador's *national* ecological transition, pushing the extractive frontier even towards lithium of which Ecuador has no significant reserves. As the replacement of oil and a globally demanded element for net-zero futures, the material and symbolic value of minerals therefore increased significantly. Interestingly, in this form of green extractivism under the banner of decarbonization the Ecuadorian government takes a similarly active role in the promotion of mining as during Correa's neo-extractivism, despite a much more reduced state capacity. This indicates the continuation of extractivism under a green banner as well as a technocratic and top-down approach to greening the Ecuadorian state through decarbonization.

However, as a peripheral country, Ecuador's position is also one of *providing* raw materials for global markets. William Sacher emphasised how the energy transition reinforces this position since "now, more than ever, with this famous energy transition we are seeing a deepening of the role of mining in global capitalism and in the supply of a series of needs that exist in terms of materials and energy. [...] Ecuador was placed on the world map from that perspective, that need."[20] This position was closely linked with visions of green development which I will discuss in the next subchapter.

4.3 "Mining will be a motor of our development." – Neo-Extractivist, Neoliberal, and Green Development

There is a long history of linking development with extractivism, both in the context of oil (Rival 2012) and mining in Ecuador (Bebbington et al. 2008a; Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington 2018; van Teijlingen 2016). In my interviews, state officials reproduced these

[20] Interview William Sacher, 31.08.2023, Quito.

well-known narratives but altered them in a novel combination of neo-extractivist, neoliberal, and green extractivist visions of development.

On the one hand, state officials reinforced the link between mining and development that had been formed during Correa's nationalisation of extractive projects. Karolien van Teijlingen (2016) describes in her research how under Correa billboards, schools, and government discourses aggressively promoted development through mining. Similarly, a recurring theme in the elite interviews was the imperative to use Ecuador's wealth in natural resources for its people. For example, the director of the IIGE provocatively asked "How can we afford this luxury [of not mining]? A poor country that has many resources?", arguing that ultimately "we must take advantage of that wealth to improve the quality of life of the people."[21] For the CEO of ENAMI, rejecting mining meant to "turn off the light and go to the cave."[22] Thus, mining was equalized with development, modernity, and national well-being, reflecting a longstanding neo-extractivist legitimation for mining (Acosta et al. 2012; Burchardt and Dietz 2014).

Similarly, the PNDSM argued that "mining will be a motor of our development" (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables 2020: 17). Referring to the Mining Law, it argues that mining supports "the local development of the communities [...], while facilitating the generation of public goods aimed at sustainable local development" (ibid.: 67). This was also clearly reflected in my interviews. The director of the IIGE described Zamora, the province with Ecuador's only large-scale mines in operation, the following:

> Zamora Chinchipe lives from mining. [...] There are new roads, there will be a hospital [...], in the communities the people have employment. And I am not doing propaganda, you just need to go and see yourself. They have work. And

[21] Participant Observation IIGE Event "Mining in the Chocó Andino", 09.08.2023, online.
[22] Interview Santiago Davalos, 31.08.2023, Quito.

> the quality of life, not only of the ones who work there but also the people who offer services there. And the education too, there is a centre in Zamora for the capacitation of operating heavy machines for mining.[23]

Nevertheless, while development and mining remain closely linked, there is an important shift in how development is *achieved*. As a result of the austerity and neoliberal policies under Moreno and Lasso, development is no longer defined as the state-led redistribution of extractivist revenue but as FDI and mining exports. For example, in 2021, Lasso published the Plan of Action for the Mining Sector aimed at attracting foreign investment by ensuring juridical security and re-opening the mining catalogue for further concessions (Secretaría General de Comunicación de la Presidencia 2021). Correspondingly, Lasso's PND planned to increase the export of mining products from 921 million USD to 4 billion USD and FDI from 1 million USD to 2 million USD until 2025 (ibid.: 52). This focus on neoliberal development was also echoed by the Vice Minister of Mining. In his statement, he emphasised the aim to "position the mining sector as a relevant industry of the national economy, promoting a higher level of investment with a competitive and sustainable development."[24] He also remarked on the increase of exports of mining products by 21% since 2022, making minerals the fourth most exported item after oil, shrimp, and bananas.[25] Thus, for state officials, mining contributes to development as a way to attract FDI, increase exports, and foster economic growth for development.

Yet, there is a third dimension to this vision of development. The Vice Minister also emphasised the need for "sustainable development" by linking it with the energy transition:

[23] Interview Jaime Javier, 23.08.2023, Quito.
[24] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.
[25] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.

> Worldwide environmental awareness has made renewable energies become the way towards a sustainable and environmentally friendly energy model. Thus, metals and minerals for the manufacture of wind turbines, batteries, or solar panels, for example, depend on mining activities. As renewable energies continue to advance, the demand for minerals such as copper or lithium, among others, will continue to increase. *With this vision and global perspective of the copper market, there is a great opportunity in the region to attract investments that contribute to the generation of new mining projects and with it the creation of sources of employment and development for our countries*.[26] (emphasis added)

This illustrates how the energy transition and the increasing demand for minerals were seen as an opportunity for this vision of development based on mining exports and international investment. Following this logic, mining was a crucial part of sustainable development:

> Under the 2030 Agenda, all nations adopted a commitment to meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet, and improve the lives and prospects of people around the world. In this context, sustainable development is defined as development that is able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. *This definition applies to mining, as it is an important sector for the energy transition and its growing impact on the Ecuadorian economy*.[27] (emphasis added)

A recent IADB report on Ecuador (2023: 6) reflects a similar position, emphasizing that the energy transition is a "unique and transitory opportunity" to become "attractive destination for investments with a transformational impact on the economies of the region". This suggests that both, the Ecuadorian government and international institutions, perceive a "win-win" in the energy transition by providing resources for development *and* decarbonization. In other words, the pressure of a global consensus on decarbonization coupled with governments opening natural resources for international investment leads to the promotion of green extractivism under the banner of

[26] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.
[27] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.

development and climate action. It also illustrates how sustainable development presents inherent contradictions that can easily be coopted to legitimise further resource extraction (Hausknost 2020; Kothari et al. 2019).

To obtain this double win, the Ecuadorian state adopted policies of responsible (for development) and sustainable (for the environment) mining. The greenwashing of mining as well as programmes of corporate social responsibility have a long history in the mining industry (Billo 2020; Kirsch 2010). For instance, last year's EXPOMINAS, Ecuador's largest annual mining fair, ran under the theme "Sustainable Industrial Mining". Walking through the exhibition stands and listening to discussion panels, I could not ignore the posters promoting sustainable mining through images of lush green plants, forests, and planets. Next to these posters, indigenous Shuar women sold artisanal souvenirs in what I perceived as an attempt by the organisers to demonstrate how indigenous communities supported mining in their communities. During the conference, both the Minster of Energy and Mining and the Minster of the Environment were present in panel debates on sustainable and responsible mining.[28] EXPOMINAS thereby became a space in which novels forms of green and neoliberal development coded in the policy of ecological transition increasingly merged with corporate agendas (Svampa and Bringel 2023: 64).

However, beyond official narratives, sustainable and responsible mining was also a subject of tension, revealing how the state is "a multiplicity of bureaucratic practices rather than a unitary monolith" (Riofrancos 2020: 110). While the MEM was convinced of responsible and sustainable mining, the Minister of Environment acknowledged that "they [the MEM] will hate me for this, but I don't think that you can talk about sustainable

[28] Participant Observation EXPOMINAS 14.07.2023, Quito.

mining because it is a resource that is exhausted. You extract minerals and you cannot extract them again." At the same time, the MAATE was criticized by the MEM and IIGE for delaying environmental permits and following environmental regulations which, in their argument, led to an increase in illegal mining (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables 2020: 61). Thus, while the MEM further facilitated corporate agendas, it undermined the very idea of sustainable mining by pushing for less rigorous environmental regulations.

This analysis does not negate the significance of international agreements on climate action nor the urgency of phasing out fossil fuels. Instead, I aim to visualize how international pressure for decarbonization is appropriated by the Ecuadorian government to legitimise further mineral extraction. I have illustrated a forming process of changing legitimisations of mining as a promoter of sustainable development for the energy transition in the context of a neoliberal shift. In this sense, green extractivism differs from neo-extractivism by offering an added layer of legitimacy for mining as "climate-friendly, development-promoting, sustainable, progressive and ecologically modern" (Dietz 2022: 9). But what is the impact of these green extractivist imaginaries?

4.4 "The great is yet to be discovered." – The Making of Green Sacrifice Zones

The rising demand for minerals enforced a view of the national territory as reduced to its geological potential and mineral exports. By doing this, state officials employed the notion of sacrificing supposedly empty land for the greater national good of development and decarbonization.

For example, state officials repeatedly used the image of a necessary "balance" between extraction and conservation. In the words of the Minister of Environment, the aim was to

have “neither too much nature that generates poverty nor too much wealth that destroys nature.” [29] This image was also articulated through appropriated notions of “Pachamama” or “ancestors”. In my interview with the CEO of the ENAMI, he argued that “if we go back to the subject of our ancestors, I was taught to have a balance. 22% of the country has [natural] reserves [...]. But on the other hand, only 10% of the country has been geologically explored.”

Indeed, the lack of knowledge of Ecuador’s geology was mentioned in almost every interview with state officials. The director of the IIGE, the main geological research institution, illustrated how the only part of the Andes that had been studied in the WB programme PRODEMINCA was the Western Cordillera. He then excitedly explained that there are still many deposits to be explored in the Eastern Cordillera “to see if there is anything, better said, how much there is”, emphasizing that “the great is yet to be discovered.”[30] As mentioned before, this was not only limited to copper but also included the search for critical minerals such as lithium. The director further mentioned a recent project by the IADB to fund this geological exploration. While I could not identify this specific project, a report by the IADB (2023: 13) indeed emphasises that “Ecuador's mining potential is considerable but has only been partially recognised.”

The recurring vision of Ecuador’s untapped mining potential by state officials and international institutions reflects an understanding of territory as “empty land”, reminiscent of imperial geopolitics (Lang et al. 2023). Seeing the national territory as a possible mining concession demonstrates “elite visions of how national space should be ordered so that the contents of its subsoil might be brought into national economic and

[29] Interview José Antonio Dávalos, 09.08.2023, Quito.
[30] Interview Jaime Javier 23.08.2023, Quito.

political life in ways that can enhance accumulation and foster economic development" (Bebbington et al. 2013: 246). Moreso, advocating for further exploration and concessions of Ecuador's territory disregards the livelihoods of the affected communities that are seen as disposable zones and people. Reinert (2018: 599) describes this dual modality of sacrifice particularly well:

> Something has been sacrificed, for the gain of something else. Offering and return may belong to different orders of value, brought together – commensurated - in the sacrifice: the land may have seemed barren, useless, uninhabited, strategically unimportant, insignificant; its destruction, conversely, may have ensured a return in wealth, national security, energy independence, military advantage, the good of the many. [...] Sacrifice thus articulates a particular relation between two terms, such that the destruction of one brings about the gain of another. It also imputes an element of calculated, agentive will to the situation: a sacrifice does not happen by accident.

The idea of sacrifice is closely linked to Correa's neo-extractivist rhetoric of ensuring a national project of *buen vivir* through the extraction of natural resources (Shade 2015). This appropriation of *buen vivir* thereby created zones in which "people and their desired land practices are sacrificed in the name of national growth and development aspirations" (ibid.: 776). These sacrifice zones are created through processes of slow violence such as eroding social cohesion in the territories, criminalizing environmental defenders, and violently repressing protests against extractive projects (Shade and Ramírez 2018).

Today, scholars increasingly speak of green sacrifice zones to describe people and territories that are affected by the environmental and social impacts of mining for the greater global good of decarbonization (Andreucci et al. 2023; Zografos 2022; Zografos and Robbins 2020). However, I would go beyond this binary view and argue that green sacrifice zones do not only move along a North-South binary but also within the South.

Indeed, the statements by state officials demonstrate an internal designation of sacrifice zones. This "internal green colonialism" (Svampa and Bringel 2023: 57) creates the conditions for green extractivism based on alliances between national and global elites and the continuation of colonial power relations. Thus, Ecuador is declared a sacrifice zone in a double sense: Firstly, within the global consensus of decarbonization whose policies assume Latin America as a territory of extraction, serving the energy transitions of Northern states (ibid.). Secondly, state officials declare sacrifice zones for mining in the national territory, creating peripheries within the periphery. In the words of Alberto Acosta:

> There is not only the centre-periphery relationship, the Global North and the Global South, but within the South there are centres and there are peripheries. Our periphery, Ecuador, is a peripheral country at the global level, but our periphery is the Amazon, and those areas such as the Chocó Andino, such as Girón, such as the moors of Cuenca, [they are] sacrifice zones [...]. The patriarchal colonial extractivist nation-state is built from sacrifice zones. [...] The colonial state starts from that logic. Quito starts from the construction of sacrifice zones. The ecological state that you are proposing has to put an end to the sacrifice zones.[31]

This underscores the need for a multi-scalar analysis of green extractivism to encompass the complex relations of power acting beyond binary axes such as centre/periphery or North/South. Instead, the energy transition suggests the further marginalization of territories and people in the global peripheries, including the North, as Carla Noever Castelos (2023) or Xander Dunlap and Mariana Riquito (2023) have shown in their research on lithium extraction in Spain and Portugal.

While the last three subchapters on value, development, and territory have outlined an uneven but emerging process of linking global decarbonization and national extractivist

[31] Interview Alberto Acosta, 08.09.2023, Online.

agendas, the next two subchapters focus on dimensions where state positions have remained largely the same. I begin with the state's position towards the popular consultation before examining the repression of anti-mining activists.

4.5 "We cannot be neutral either." – Challenging the Popular Consultation

The consultation of the Chocó Andino constituted a significant threat to corporate and state agendas by limiting further mining concessions and creating legal uncertainty for international investors. As a result, state institutions employed several strategies to obstruct the consultation.

For instance, as a first step for the consultation, *Quito sin Minería* was required to collect signatures of 10% of Quito's population in favour of the consultation. According to the CNE's regulations, these signatures had to match exactly those on the national IDs and any discrepancies led to the rejection of the signature. Following these standards in the context of increasing violence and post-pandemic insecurity was extremely challenging for the volunteers of *Quito sin Minería*[32]. Nevertheless, they managed to collect the doubled number of signatures of which many were annulled by the CNE. Additionally, the CNE applied an incorrect electoral pattern that did not include the residents of Quito who had turned eighteen since the previous election. As a result, the consultation was first rejected by the CNE due to the lack of valid signatures until *Quito sin Minería* recognized the error.[33] This shows how state institutions actively impede consultation initiatives from below by imposing various bureaucratic obstacles, undermining rights of direct democracy in the constitution (Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021). These obstacles stand in

[32] Interview Jessica, 22.08.2023, Quito.
[33] Interview Angela, 23.08.2023, Quito.

stark contrast with the ease with which presidents can call for top-down popular referenda in an asymmetry of democratic power (ibid.: 186).

Furthermore, state officials expressed varied degrees of opposition in our interviews. The Minister of Environment ambiguously declared that "this government decided not to campaign for either of the two positions. We have been very respectful of democracy from day one. But we cannot be oblivious to the issue, we cannot be neutral either."[34] Other state officials expressed their opposition to the consultation more directly. For instance, the Vice Minister of Mining hoped that "the outcome of the referenda will be in the country's favour."[35] What the country's favour meant was then clarified a sentence later: "Anti-extractivism is a brutal brake on development, which goes against the grain of the rest of the world's countries."[36] While state institutions remained neutral in official communication, they tacitly supported the extractive industries. One example in the case of Yasuní was a report by the Central Bank (2023) that was circulated a week before the consultation and reproduced incorrect economic figures that overestimated the negative economic impact of stopping oil drilling in the Yasuní. This represents an example of "unreliable statistics, ostensibly inflated economic projections, or simply replications of the information provided by corporations" (Svampa 2019: 4) that state institutions produce to increase uncertainty about the consultations in the public. The absence of reliable information on the consultation was therefore part of a deliberate omission to hinder the conditions for an informed public debate (Riofrancos 2020: 154).

[34] Interview José Antonio Dávalos, 09.08.2023, Quito.
[35] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.
[36] Written statement by Juan Jose Espinosa Cordoba, 02.08.2023, Quito.

However, the deeper opposition was directed against the constitutional mechanism of the consultation per se. In our interview, the CEO of the ENAMI clearly expressed his frustration towards all three forms of consultation secured in the constitution:

> We have projects that are on the verge of exploding in the country, we have legal complications, we have a constitution that is extremely protective and that places obstacles through three types of consultation, popular consultation, environmental consultation, and free, prior, and informed consultation. [...] So, if it doesn't fall into one it falls into the other. [...] I think that this constitution was conceived to obviously block extractivist projects.[37]

His choice of words aptly illustrates the opposition against the constitution that enabled the consultations as a form of direct democracy. The statement also reflects Ramiro's image of the Ecuadorian constitution as a constitution in transition, encompassing both traces of an anti-extractivist alliance aimed to enable communities to contest extractive projects as well as neo-extractivist agendas securing the state's control of natural resources (Riofrancos 2020).

Ultimately, the rejection of the consultations from the side of state officials was linked to the threat of these direct democratic decision-making tools. Legally binding consultations against extractive projects destabilise Ecuador's image as a state providing legal security for transnational investors. The PNSDM acknowledges this by illustrating different scenarios for Ecuador's mining future: The optimist scenario paints the picture of mining that is "socially accepted and recognised for its great contributions to the country" (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables 2020: 177), leading to the implementation of all planned mining projects. In contrast, the pessimist scenario highlights the influence of anti-mining opposition and popular consultations: "Mining

[37] Interview Santiago Davalos, 31.08.2023, Quito.

continues to be attacked by multiple anti-mining fronts, and *requests for popular consultations against mining are multiplying* [...]. Foreign investors no longer want to invest in the country, whose international image is deteriorating" (ibid.: 177, emphasis added). As a result, Ecuadorian state officials significantly compromise democratic practices by blocking popular consultations (Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021).

In sum, as the activists' strategies are escalating from non-binding consultations to the popular consultation, so is the state's opposition. While interviews have not criticized the consultation as a way to hinder decarbonization, it remains to be seen if this argument will emerge in the future with a possible consolidation of a Green Extractivist State and further global pressure for critical minerals. This is especially relevant for territories such as Zamora and Intag where several large-scale copper mines are in different phases of exploration. Communities have been resisting these mining projects for decades but are facing an increasing level of criminalization and state-led repression. In the following, I will analyse the state's perception of social movements in more detail.

4.6 "Until we kill this one..." – State-led Criminalisation and Repression of Social Movements

Similarly to the blocking of consultations, the repression of anti-extractivist movements continued earlier patterns under Correa's neo-extractivist agenda. To discredit *Quito sin Minería'*s claims, state officials referred to various strategies of delegitimisation.

For instance, the director of the IIGE described anti-mining activists as led by "ignorance and naivety."[38] During interviews, activists would also be accused of falsely "politicizing mining" despite its inherently "technical" nature. This set "rational experts" apart from

[38] Interview Jaime Javier 23.08.2023, Quito.

the “naïve and childish activists”, a legacy of Correa’s post-neoliberalism that emphasised the “technocratic administration of socioeconomic life grounded in state expertise” (Riofrancos 2020: 162). Indeed, ascriptions of misinformation, naivety, or childishness to environmentalists have a long history in Ecuador. Many activists still remember when Correa referred to anti-mining activists as “infantile ecologists”, marking a rupture between the environmental movement and Correa’s “Citizen’s Revolution” that continues to this day (Acosta et al. 2021b: 74).

Furthermore, opposition to mining was frequently associated with an “ecologist system.” This framework depicted anti-mining activists as driven by economic interests or connected them with illegal mining and organized crime. For example, the CEO of the ENAMI claimed that “the second most economically profitable activity after mining is to oppose mining. […] We have managed to determine that there are certain groups dedicated to illegal mining that are sponsoring the groups that oppose responsible mining.”[39] These accusations aimed to delegitimise activists by aligning them with illegal mining and organized crime. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5.6, this notion of an “ecologist system” was also reproduced on a local level, causing significant conflicts and economic grievances within communities.

Worse than these accusations were the acts of intimidation, criminalisation, and violence against activists perpetrated by the national police and/or the military in what has been termed a resources-criminalisation nexus (Shade and Ramírez 2018). In my interview with Carmen, the lawyer of Pacto’s Anti-Mining Front, she illustrated how a total of 28 individuals in the Chocó have been reported since 2020. While the majority of these

[39] Interview Santiago Davalos, 31.08.2023, Quito.

reports originated from mining companies, Carmen also highlighted the complicity of the state: "The National Police itself, in the same context of *La Victoria* [blockade], files a complaint for allegedly paralysing public services. So not only the companies denounce you, but also the state."[40] Similarly, Louis, former president of the Anti-Mining Front Pacto, shared his experience during the inspection of a mine in 2020 which he was forced to enter alone and without his mobile phone:

> I was afraid because there were 30 policemen, there were state officials, and then they told me, 'the one who fucks around [*jode*]', in those rude words, 'the one who makes trouble here in the territory is this one', they told me, 'this sugarcane producer [*panelero*] and until we don't kill this one, until that one is…' And without anything to record![41]

When he complained to the Ministry of Energy and Mining and the Agency of Regulation and Control, they dismissed his case precisely because of the missing evidence. This is one example of how the making of sacrifice zones is based on processes of slow violence such as criminalisation and intimidation, ultimately producing "environments in which people become both politically and economically marginalized such that opposition no longer seems viable" (Shade 2015: 782).

Unfortunately, violence against environmental defenders is on the rise globally. Latin America, once again, leads the statistics with 56 environmental defenders murdered in 2022 (Global Witness 2023). However, these assassinations represent only the tragic tip of the iceberg in a broader spiral of violence that includes intimidation, isolation, threats, and both physical and psychological harm (Hofmann and Cabrapan Duarte 2021: 53; Alliance for Land, Indigenous, and Environmental Defenders 2022). It remains to be seen how these conflicts develop with further pressure for minerals and the expansion of

[40] Interview Carmen, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[41] Interview Louis, 13.08.2023, Pacto.

mining projects in Ecuador. However, as I will indicate in Chapter 5.7, current conflicts around the *Loma Larga* copper mine suggest an increase of state-led repression against environmental defenders in the consolidation of a Green Extractivist State.

These five subchapters have analysed the making of a Green Extractivist State through the dimensions of value, development, territory, democracy, and the role of social movements. I argued that there is an emerging shift towards a green state based on decarbonization and green extractivism. However, to fully grasp this dispute, it is crucial to further break open "the state" as a social relation shaped by different interests and agendas.

4.7 "We lack that little bit of help." – The Double Weakness of the State

Seeing the state as a relation illuminates how different actors activate and leverage state structures. Interestingly, the state was criticized for being "weak" both by the mining industry and anti-mining activists. In the following, I will analyse how this "weakness" is understood by each actor.

During an academic debate called "The Geological Mining Potential: Motor for the Development of Ecuador?" at the Central University, corporate actors consistently repeated the same themes of energy transition, development, and Ecuador's mining potential. For instance, the director of the Mining Chamber almost literally echoed the words of the director of the IIGE when she remarked "imagine if we discover all that is yet to be discovered."[42] Throughout the event, I experienced a sense of déja-vu, feeling as if "one's eyes were closed, the presentations of state and industry actors were often indistinguishable" (Riofrancos 2020: 106). This illustrates the entanglements between

[42] Participant observation, 09.08.2023, Quito.

state and corporate actors. While I only marginally engaged with the mining industry in my research, the repeating themes and presence of state officials in the events of the sector illustrate a strong corporate-state alliance to promote mining. Some scholars argue that it was ironically Correa's post-neoliberal government that intensified the corporatization of the state as a "growing penetration of corporate interests into the centre of ostensibly nationalist development projects [...] whereby mining projects [...] become financially central to the sociopolitical transformations promised by the 'citizen's revolution'" (Fitz-Henry and Rodríguez 2020: 100). As exemplified by the EXPOMINAS, when a Green Extractivist State promotes development and decarbonization through mining, state interests "practically merge with [green] corporate transitions in a dynamic of submission of the public sector to private interests" (Lang et al. 2023: 31). Seeing the state as a relation, this indicates how corporate actors leverage and mobilize state structures for their agendas.

However, the mining industry also expressed frustration with the state, criticizing its "weakness" or even "failure". While there is a debate on labelling postcolonial states in these terms (Death 2016b), for the corporate actors, weakness meant a lack of further state support. In the words of the president of the National Mining Chamber:

> The National Plan [on the Development of the Mining Sector] was drawn up in the belief that the state would obviously facilitate much of the process of developing mining projects. Permitting had a much stronger government structure than it does today, remember that there was even a Ministry of Mines [...]. The plan was structured to have a development with the help of the government. We lack that little bit of help, that little push.[43]

Moreover, corporate actors criticized the delay of environmental permits, legal uncertainty due to an increasing number of consultations, and the diminished state

[43] Participant observation, 09.08.2023, Quito.

capacities to plan and implement a coherent mining strategy. Thus, “a strong state” for the mining industry meant a state that readily prioritizes its interests and provides the necessary institutions, resources, and clear state planning, similar to Correa’s Mining State (Sacher 2017). This supports the hypothesis that Correa’s neo-extractivism was an indispensable part of the consolidation of the mining sector in Ecuador. In this context, Moreno’s austerity measures such as the combination of the Ministry of Mines with the Ministry of Energy and Non-Renewable Resources, along with Lasso’s neoliberal vision of a leaner state have ambivalent consequences for the mining industry. Corporate actors now criticize the absence of state-led support through dedicated institutions and national planning.

However, the consequences of austerity politics also caused “more uneven and unequal ‘environmentally’ and ‘socially’ developmental practices and policies" (Calvário et al. 2022: 1) that affected the communities contesting extractive projects. Many activists directly experienced the effects of austerity policies on environmental regulation. I accompanied Carmen, Pacto’s Anti-Mining Front lawyer, on a visit to the Secretary of Water as she sought approval for a community water council in the Chocó. The secretary was in Correa’s former Ministry of Environment, where the washed-out letters “Ecuador loves life” still adorned the building that seemed to be slowly falling apart. In a way, it felt like a fitting metaphor for the ghost of past times that continues to shape Ecuador’s present. While we waited for the bureaucrat to sort through Carmen’s numerous files, they argued about the defunding of the Ministry of Environment:

> We do not know exactly what the economic conflict of the Ministry of the Environment is. But we do understand that there are very few technicians. And that unfortunately they are undergoing a process of suppressing even the control power of the Ministry of the Environment. [...] So, unfortunately,

> the task for the whole of Ecuador is to strengthen the state, not so much in the number of officials, but in the quality of them.[44]

The bureaucrat continued: "The Ministry of the Environment is underfinanced. It does not have the resources to carry out the work of the ministry that it is responsible for."[45] Thus, a result of neoliberal and austerity policies was the reduced capacity of the MAATE as well as the ARCERNR to control and implement the strict environmental regulations that underly current visions of responsible and sustainable mining. As a result, many researchers and activists disagreed with the binary framing of "sustainable and responsible mining regulated by the state" vs. "illegal mining". To them, all forms of mining were irregular:

> Unfortunately, there is no example of responsible mining in Ecuador. [...] For example, in the Choco Andino, all the mining concessions have some irregularity. None of the mining concessions granted in the Choco Andino have environmental licenses. [...] Unfortunately, the authorities have been very distant from the issue on this side of Quito.[46]

Thus, activists protested the absence of the state in the regulation of illegal mining activities. They did not differentiate between companies operating within officially registered concessions and illegal concessions as both failed to comply with environmental regulations. This constitutes a critique against the complicit absence of state institutions that fail to implement their norms and regulations of sustainable and responsible mining, suggesting a departure from earlier resistance against an active promotion of mining during Correa's neo-extractivist state (van Teijlingen 2016).

Another striking example of the state's absence was the case of the Chilean company Ecuamin S.A., owner of a concession in Pacto. Pacto's Anti-Mining Front had collected

[44] Participant observation, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[45] Participant observation, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[46] CNE debate, 16.08.2023, online.

evidence to demonstrate the extraction of material without the necessary environmental permits but was met with complicit silence by the responsible state institutions:

> There are a lot of photos with which we went back to the authorities, to the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Ministry of Labour, in other words, all the ministries, and we showed how they were destroying the water sources. But they always passed the ball from one to the other.[47]

When the concession was finally inspected by government authorities and the national police, they confirmed the illegal extraction, storage, and transport of materials without the necessary licenses and grave environmental damage (Robles 2023: 65). Ecuamin S.A was fined 40.000 USD, a penalty that has not been paid to this day. The case was then brought to the regional Constitutional Court under the regulation to issue a ruling within 55 working days. However, this time has been significantly exceeded. During a protest in front of the court, Carmen expressed her frustration: "We are waiting. We have spent 16 months and one week, that is, 355 working days, waiting for a sentence via the Constitution."[48] As of writing, there is still no ruling on the case nor has ECUAMIN S.A paid the fine.

This illustrates the frustration felt by activists as they faced numerous obstacles in their attempts to leverage state structures such as environmental regulations, ministries, and the judiciary system to protest irregular mining practices. Since these institutions were drastically reduced to the point of not complying with their roles, activists were hindered from accessing these tools of the state to contest mining. This was much less so the case for corporate actors, creating a highly unequal playing field within the state-as-relation. Thus, the state is a battleground and platform on which social forces negotiate for

[47] Interview Louis, 13.08.2023, Pacto.
[48] Participant observation, 12.09.2023, Quito.

influence. Nevertheless, my analysis has shown that, to an extent, activists also understood that "the only viable way of confronting dispossession in the long run is through the state" (Bebbington et al. 2013: 265). Therefore, activists were "far from being romantically subaltern" (ibid.: 265) but strategized possible entry points to leverage state power, such as the popular consultation of the Chocó Andino that I will explore in the next chapter.

4.8 Preliminary Conclusion

Before turning to this strategy in more detail, let me summarise the arguments presented so far. I have illustrated one side of the dispute, namely the emerging vision of a Green Extractivist State employed by state officials. This emerging vision reformulates the ideological and institutional legacies of Correa's neo-extractivist resource governance paradigm according to current pressures for decarbonization and the expansion of mining for decarbonization. In this process, state officials attribute an increasing symbolic and material value to minerals as a replacement for oil and as a strategic national resource for the energy transition. The Green Extractivist State is based on previous links between development and mining but reinforces them through the lens of responsible and sustainable mining for development and decarbonization. However, development is now achieved via exporting minerals and satisfying the global demand for transition minerals. For this Green Extractivist State vision, national elites view territory and local livelihoods as internal peripheries and declare them green sacrifice zones. While the making of a green state constitutes an emerging but uneven trajectory in these three dimensions, the state continues the obstruction of popular consultations as a form of direct democracy that threatens the expansion of mining. Furthermore, it exacerbates its hostile position towards social movements, resorting to strategies of criminalisation

and violence. This vision thereby continues deeply embedded extractivist path dependencies and does not transform underlying economic, political, or social structures. Instead, due to the recent neoliberal and austerity policies, the state is criticized by the mining industry and activists for not having the capacity to comply with its norms of responsible and sustainable mining. This demonstrates an ongoing dispute about how to leverage state power in the context of a retreating state.

5 Towards a Transformative Green State

This chapter explores the making of a Green Transformative State in the context of the Chocó Andino consultation. It thereby addresses my second research question *what (counter)rationalities do social movements implement in their vision of the green state and what are their strategies of contestation?* To recapitulate: a critical reading of green state theory highlights novel dimensions of green statehood: state imperatives of growth and wellbeing are circumvented by the promotion of alternative lifeworlds. An engaged green public sphere and green social movements push for these alternative lifeworlds to be legitimised through forms of ecological democracy that are secured in green constitutions.

In the following, I explore how activists in the Chocó and the *Quito sin Minería* campaign articulate a Transformative Green State beyond a technocratic fixation on decarbonization and green extractivism. Their vision, therefore, aims for "a broader process of cultural transformation, of the economy, politics and society and its relationship with Nature" (Lang et al. 2023: 30). I will analyse this process through the same five dimensions that I applied in the previous chapter, beginning with a focus on the construction of alternative lifeworlds. I illustrate how the campaign highlighted the value of life instead of minerals, as well as their vision of development centred on dignity in contrast to mineral exports and FDI. Development was also embedded in the concept of re-existence to contest extractivism by promoting local production and rural identity. Moreover, I analyse how urban-rural alliances challenged the designation of the Chocó territory as a sacrifice zone. In the following subchapters, I analyse the consultation as an important tool of direct democracy, a step towards ecological democracy, and a process that strengthened green social movements and public spheres. Finally, I

examine tensions within the movements that threaten the cohesion of this Transformative Green State and outline the aftermath of the consultation.

5.1 "The Chocó is our Wealth!" – The Value of Life

The following three subchapters will focus on the construction of alternative lifeworlds in the Chocó Andino. In predominant green state theory, these are defined as "alternative conceptions of work, welfare and social security" (Hausknost 2020: 32). However, my analysis goes beyond that by focusing on alternative conceptions of value, development, and territory.

For instance, the discussion of value in Chapter 4 has illustrated how international institutions and Ecuadorian state officials link the value of territory with its geographical potential and the export worth of minerals. Joan Martínez Alier (2008: 27) voices a clear critique of this monetary evaluation:

> Are ecological values worth only if they are translated into money or are they worth in their own right, in their units of biomass and biodiversity? Is it worth arguing in terms of human health, livelihood and well-being directly, or do they have to be translated into money? What is a landscape worth, not in money but in itself? What is human life worth, not in money but in itself? [...] Hence the question with which I conclude: who has the social and political power to simplify complexity by imposing a certain language of valuation?

Indeed, what is valued in what language of evaluation is a question of power (Svampa 2013). To counter the monetary value of minerals, the *Quito sin Minería* campaign therefore promoted alternative languages of evaluation that focused on the value of life, expressed through the concepts of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The value of life was a reoccurring theme in the campaign and is especially visible in the campaign poster for the Chocó Andino consultation that was widely distributed in Quito

before the consultation. It says, “Yes to Life”, illustrated with flowing water, plants, frogs, and the Andean bear in the Centre.

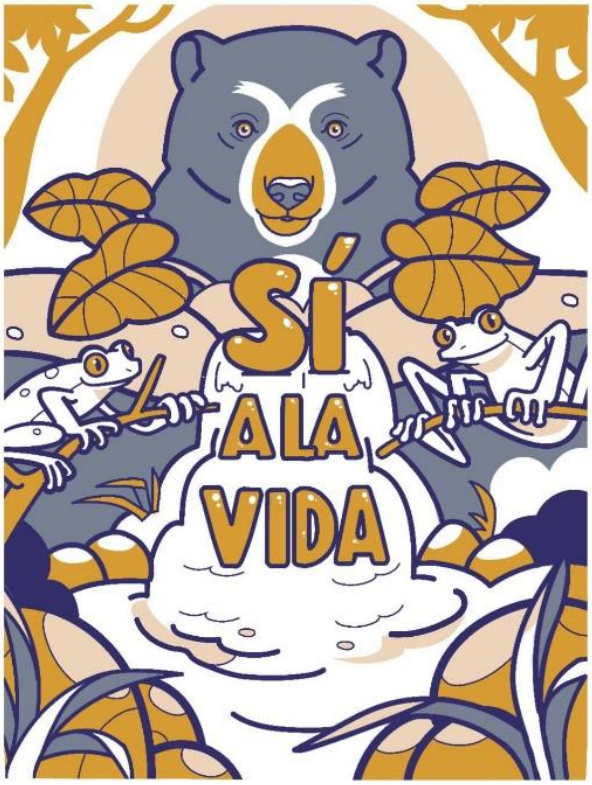

Figure 5 Campaign poster. Courtesy of *Quito sin Minería*.

Figure 6 *Campaign poster Amanzonía por la Vida* (Yanez 2000).

Comparing this to a poster from the 1990s campaign *Amazonía por la Vida* (Amazon for Life) reveals a striking resemblance. Led by indigenous groups and environmental NGOs such as AE, the campaign *Amazonía por la Vida* aimed to protect the Amazon and its indigenous populations against the expanding oil frontier (Yanez 2000). For this, among other strategies, it highlighted the biodiversity of the Yasuní forest, a continuous strategy up to the 2023 Yasuní consultation (Sí al Yasuní 2024). Similarly, *Quito sin Minería* repeatedly mentioned the numbers of species in the Chocó in their communication materials or events. The cloud forest is home to 150 species of mammals, 30 species of reptiles, 120 species of amphibians, 640 species of birds, and 3000 species of plants,

some of them endangered and endemic. Especially the significance of the "endemic value" was underscored by the fact that if these species were to become extinct, they would be lost forever.[49] While biodiversity has also been criticized as a hegemonic concept that perpetuates a division between humans and nature (Escobar 1998), it can be used in local struggles to contest monetary regimes of value. As the use of biodiversity in the strategies of *Quito sin Minería, Yasunidos*, and *Amazonía por la Vida* demonstrate, there is a historical continuity and apparent success in contesting the commodification of nature by formulating "regimes of re-evaluation" (Rival 2010: 364) based on biodiversity. This has also been observed in Veronica Davidov's (2013, 2014) research on Intag, a territory geographically and socially very close to the Chocó. She describes how Inteños' "subsequent discursive and political representation of Intag as an environment of biodiversity" (Davidov 2013: 489) enabled their resistance against a copper mine. This further indicates regional micro-histories between similar struggles that support and learn from each other. Thus, appropriating biodiversity as a strategy for the defence of territories constituted an important local strategy for countering the monetary values of natural resources (Escobar and Pardo 2008).

Another strategy to demonstrate the value of life was highlighting the ecosystem services provided by the Chocó. The campaign repeatedly emphasised the 250 tons of CO2 that the Chocó binds every year as a contribution to mitigating climate change. As a cloud forest, the Chocó also captures water from the clouds and channels it into the rivers, serving as freshwater sources for the Chocó, Northern neighbourhoods of Quito as well as the neighbouring coastal state of Esmeraldas (Chocó Andino 2024). Food security was

[49] Participant observation, 05.08.2023, Intillacta.

another example frequently mentioned during the campaign: while many people in Quito experienced empty supermarket shelves during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chocó served as a supplier of local and fresh food such as plantain, milk, meat, and fruits.

The concept of ecosystem services gained prominence with the publication of the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment Report (2005) which promoted payments for ecosystem services (PES) as a tool for environmental governance by integrating the natural environment into market mechanisms (Muradian and Rival 2012). PES operates as a voluntary transaction wherein a buyer purchases a well-defined service from a provider of ecosystem services under the condition that the provider ensures the provision of this service (Wunder 2005: 1). Sven Wunder, one of the pioneers of PES, initially developed this concept based on his work on deforestation in the Ecuadorian Andes near to the Chocó Andino (Wunder 1997, 2000, 2015). However, PES has faced criticism for its underlying utilitarian perspective of nature which promotes a narrow and compartmentalised view of ecosystems as definable services and calculable capital assets (Muradian and Rival 2013; Joslin 2023).

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the Chocó attached their own meanings to ecosystem services, adopting the concept "to serve their broader need for legitimacy and recognition" (Joslin 2023: 8). Although the campaign did not explicitly promote PES, the campaign strategically employed the concept of ecosystem services to advocate for an alternative regime of re-evaluation. In the words of Laura, a member of the motor group of the campaign:

> That's where we were strategic. [...] Okay, water is the issue that people care about more, so let's talk more about water. Okay, they care about the Andean bear, so let's talk more about the Andean bear. They care very little, they know very little, they understand very little what an ecosystem

> service is, so we're not going to say those words very much, even though that's what we're talking about.[50]

This demonstrates how the campaign translated the academic concept of ecosystem services to ideas that both rural and urban Quiteños could grasp based on their lived experiences. Jorge, one of the main initiators and spokespeople of the campaign, promoted this use of ecosystem services during the official televised debate against the president of the Mining Chamber:

> The Chocó Andino is part of Quito's lungs, it is part of Quito. We don't want to damage the lungs that all Quiteños are breathing from. We don't want to damage the place where our water comes from, we don't want to damage the place where we can dream of a different future. […] That is our wealth, that is what we are defending. We Quiteños have to feel proud of the paradise we are living in, but we have to take care of it, we have to treat it very, very delicately, very sensitively.[51]

Here, Jorge referred to ecosystem services through vital metaphors such as "Quito's lungs" which constitute "our wealth", directly linking ecosystem services and their value for Quiteños. In doing so, Jorge entangles the concept of ecosystem services with the value of life based on community, health, and well-being. This has also been observed regarding *buen vivir*: despite its appropriation by Correa's administration to promote a developmentalist and neo-extractivist state project, it is also strategically employed by marginalised communities in their everyday relation to the state (Lyall et al. 2018). Similarly, social actors in the Chocó appropriate concepts in their attempt to re-evaluate the Chocó beyond the monetarized value of mining exports. By doing so, they go beyond a single interpretation of dominant concepts and instead slightly reinterpret and adapt them to fit their objectives (Escobar and Pardo 2008).

[50] Interview Laura, 22.08.2023, Quito.
[51] CNE debate, 16.08.2023, online.

Another strategy of *Quito sin Minería* was using the Andean bear as the official face of the campaign, easily recognizable as a mascot, on t-shirts, and flyers. The bear was also the centre of a second poster that was distributed for the consultation. In this poster, the Andean bear looks directly into the viewer's eye, saying "I just watch how they destroy my house. You can avoid it."

Figure 7 Campaign poster, courtesy of *Quito sin Minería*.

In this poster, the bear becomes a moral agent calling for its own protection. This agency was also expanded to the forest. In a workshop after the consultation, a member of the NGO IMAYMANA reflected:

> Until the last day came people who were still going to vote Yes for the Choco Andino and No for the Yasuní and I said, 'Take a little walk through the forest, what do you feel?' And I didn't say anything, but the forest spoke to them and said, 'No, the Yasuní matters too.'[52]

[52] Participant observation workshop, 26.08.2023, Mashpi.

Here, bears and forests are not just seen in terms of biodiversity or ecosystem services but become "earth-beings" (de la Cadena 2015) and active participants in the political arena. This reflects a fundamental challenge of modern divisions between humans and nature that has been mostly analysed in the context of indigenous ontologies (de la Cadena 2010: 357). By bringing bears and forests into the political arena, the campaign attempts to bridge the gap between their realities of destruction and human experiences. This constitutes a different strategy of evaluating the Chocó based on empathy and identification with earth beings. Moreover, emphasising bears and forests as moral agents is an example of representing those who cannot represent themselves in the protection of the territory – a vital dimension of ecological democracy (Eckersley 2004, 2020a).

In sum, by integrating biodiversity, ecosystem services, and earth beings, the activists create counter-values to challenge predominantly monetary regimes of evaluation, transforming the territory into “not only a living ecological and cultural landscape, but a moral-political agent” (Riofrancos 2020: 140). Although this process is still nascent in my observations, the reformulation of value beyond human-nature divisions constitutes an important dimension of constructing alternative lifeworlds and ecological democracy in the making of a Transformative Green State. The reference to earth beings also illustrates how urban, indigenous, and peasant struggles in Ecuador influence and intersect with each in the process of forming green social movements - a process that I will analyse in more detail in subchapter 5.5.

5.2 “That they dignify people’s lives.” – Alternative Lifeworlds and Development

Challenging traditional notions of development and proposing alternatives constitutes a second cornerstone of constructing alternative lifeworlds in the Chocó. This builds upon

a vibrant debate regarding whether and how territorial movements foster alternative forms *of* development or alternatives *to* development (Carbonnier et al. 2017; Escobar 1992, 2008, 2018, 2020; Kothari et al. 2019; Mokrani Chávez and Lang 2013). In the following, I will outline how notions of development in the Chocó move between these dimensions.

While the vision of a Green Extractivist State was based on development as exporting minerals, the people in the Chocó promoted alternative conceptualizations of development. However, these cannot be easily categorized under a single umbrella. For example, Jorge articulated a clear critique of the dominant development model which he characterized as centred on economic growth, consumerism, and extractivism, emphasising that "we don't want to be a dumping ground for so-called development."[53] This represents a post-developmental critique and call for alternatives *to* development as suggested by Arturo Escobar (1992, 1995). Furthermore, in his critique of development, Jorge rejected the energy transition as a false solution, arguing that "if the politicians continue to see the development of the countries of the North and they think that the alternative is electric cars we are screwed because if we all buy an electric car [...], we need 14 planets!"[54] Thus, Jorge directly criticizes the legitimation of mining for development and decarbonization as proposed by state officials. However, most research participants generally did not reference the energy transition. Indeed, as Anne Tittor (2023: 246) has observed, the influence of the consensus on decarbonization as justification for mining varies across different geographical and social scales, often playing a subordinate role on the local level.

[53] Interview Jorge, 04.08.2023, Intillacta.
[54] Interview Jorge, 04.08.2023, Intillacta.

Nevertheless, many inhabitants expressed a critique against the development-mining nexus articulated by the state officials and corporate actors. They questioned the contribution of mining to local development and criticized the mining industry for its environmental destruction and divisive social impact on communities. This rejection was summarized in the well-known saying that mining brings "bread for today and hunger for tomorrow."[55] But many residents also underlined the need for a regular income, arguing that "people can't wait to eat either."[56] How was development conceptualized in this conundrum?

One definition that stood out to me came from Juan, a member of the local youth network. He describes his vision of the Chocó in the future the following:

> I would like to see a territory that is preserved with its natural landscape [...]. With the species that live here, with the populations of animals that live here. [...] In which we humans feel that we are part of this ecosystem and that we maintain this balance. I love that. That people know that a stream has to be preserved. That a water source has to be kept clean. That livestock or agriculture can be responsible and sustainable without the need to expand the agricultural frontier so much. That it should be a territory of peace where people feel that the good life [*buen vivir*] is here. Also, that we don't have so many problems with access to services, for example, that people don't have to migrate so much to the city to go to study. That we can have universities nearby. That we can have better access to health care. That they dignify people's lives.[57]

Here, Juan includes many aspects such as the protection of water, forest, and life, but also access to basic services, peace, and *buen vivir*. His vision of development in the Chocó therefore encapsulates many aspects of development and demonstrates how, despite the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of development, there were numerous overlapping constructions of alternative forms of development. While further

[55] Interview Silvia, 04.08.2023, Gualea.
[56] Interview Veronica, 14.09.2023, Pacto.
[57] Interview Juan, 11.08.2023, Tulipe.

research would need to explore these conceptualizations in more depth, what they had in common was their departure from seeing development based on exports, growth, and FDI the way state officials understood development.

As Juan's last sentence indicates, dignity was perhaps the most common denominator in defining development in the Chocó. For Luz, a human rights activist from the Chocó, dignity entailed providing the conditions that people need to develop "as a whole."[58] She contended that "dignity has to do with well-being [...] which means: What do people need to be well?" and with "concrete things in life, with having access to resources, with having access to conditions."[59] This closely resonates with the capabilities approach that emphasises creating the conditions for humans to expand their full potential (Nussbaum 2003; Sen 2001).

Indeed, there were several tangible efforts aimed at fostering this form of dignified development, mostly based on eco-tourism[60] and sustainable agricultural production. One notable example is COPROPAP, a cooperation of sugarcane farmers producing organic and fairtrade granulated sugarcane (*panela*). Their *panela* is exported to Europe and provides an income to a total of 1400 families (Aguirre 2023), making COPROPAP a crucial economic actor in Pacto and an example of successful sustainable agricultural production. Although I was unable to visit the factory itself, I had the opportunity to meet Diana and Monica, two long-term members of COPROPAP. We met on a hot Sunday, waiting for two large transporters to be filled with thousands of *panela* boxes about to be shipped to Italy. Monica, a small but sturdy woman in her late sixties, had come to Pacto

[58] Interview Luz, 14.08.2023, Mindo.
[59] Interview Luz, 14.08.2023, Mindo.
[60] For more examples and an analysis of eco-tourism see Robles (2023).

many decades ago. She and her husband had greatly benefitted from joining COPROPAP which is why they supported the blockade and consultation:

> We are fighting to ensure that there is no mining so that we can all be organic, as our *panelita* is [...]. So here we are, happy, fighting to maintain our business that we have, because when it no longer exists, if mining enters as they say, we no longer have the option to sell [*panela*]. The land, everything, will be destroyed. So, we fight for the consultation.[61]

Coincidentally, were sitting right at the *Y de la Victoria*, the crossroad where COPROPAP and other community members organised a blockade of the road leading to the mining sites for two years. This blockade and the subsequent idea of the popular consultation were vital for the farmers since their *panela* faced the risk of losing the organic certification if mining continued to contaminate their sugarcane plantations.

Speaking to Silvia, the founder of an agrological association for women and local council member of her GAD Gualea, she expressed very similar concerns regarding the mining industry in the Chocó:

> As farmers, it is obvious that we are going to be worried. Perhaps at some point, we want to export a product to another country. If we have a mining authorization, it is impossible for them to give us at least one organic certificate to be able to export. For us, organic certification, it is an endorsement, and it is a very big door through which we can enter other countries.[62]

When I asked her about her vision of the Chocó in the future, she told me that "it would be a goal fulfilled to see a product of Gualea in another country. [...] That product would mean a lot; it would mean development."[63] For this, she called upon the state to focus on local production:

> "Because not even the state is the one that extracts the resources – it sells the concessions. Here the one who wins is the buyer, the big miners, the

[61] Interview Diana and Monica, 18.09.2023, Pacto.
[62] Interview Silvia 04.08.2023, Gualea.
[63] Interview Silvia 04.08.2023, Gualea.

> big companies. Why doesn't the state [...] invest in productivity? [...] We are a small country but millionaires in production!"[64]

Her statement demonstrates how the state was perceived to ultimately lose out on extractivism as well. Instead, Silvia hoped for state-led support of local agricultural production and the opportunity to export her products to other countries as a vital strategy to provide rural opportunities and development. However, there were many obstacles to reaching this dream of independent production, such as a lack of economic resources for machines and tools to provide the consistent quality of the products needed for export. This made it challenging for Silvia to go beyond the production of primary products, reflecting broader structural constraints due to Ecuador's colonial legacies and peripheral position in global markets. Despite these difficult circumstances, COPROPAP and Silvia's vision constitute "struggles *against* development oriented towards economic growth, and *for* development as a process that fosters more inclusive (albeit smaller) economies" (Bebbington et al. 2008b: 901, emphasis added). Their proposals ultimately aimed to "dignify people's lives", in Juan's words, by providing decent work, a regular income, and opportunities for the people of the Chocó.

But Silvia also emphasised another dimension of development, arguing that "a community that does not have an identity will not value how rich it is, the wealth it has within its territorial space. If we are ashamed of where we are from, if we are ashamed of who we are, we will never achieve great development."[65] Strengthening this rural identity was one of the primary objectives of the annual Festival of the Chocó. For one weekend in September, the RJCA, the *Mancomunidad*, and local NGOs organized a weekend of art, workshops, and community events under the overarching theme "Territories in Re-

[64] Interview Silvia 04.08.2023, Gualea.
[65] Interview Silvia 04.08.2023, Gualea.

Existence." During a workshop on governance in the Chocó, the director of the NGO IMAYMANA argued that re-existence meant that "we have to resist, but from our existence, that is, not resisting, simply by saying no, but also resisting so we can continue doing what we do."[66] For this, he emphasised that the importance of horizontal learning and the appreciation of different forms of knowing:

> Because knowledge as it is generated now is hegemonic. [...] We value certain knowledges more than others, even though perhaps the knowledge of farmers and ranchers are knowledges of the base which we do need to live [...]. This new way of generating knowledge has to be precisely a dialogue of knowledges.[67]

The festival aimed to facilitate this dialogue by bringing together many local actors, state institutions, and small businesses from the Chocó and Quito. It included a fair of the agricultural products cultivated in the Chocó Andino, from a variety of jams, over concentrated aromatic oils, to award-winning chocolates. Numerous municipal and communal representatives participated in workshops on territorial governance, discussing the future of the Chocó after the consultation. This was embedded in a diverse cultural programme, including an art exhibition, film screenings, dance and theatre performances, and a full day of live music. The residents of the Chocó also organised activities throughout the weekend to demonstrate the beauty of their home, such as visits to their farms, a bike tour, and a hike to a local waterfall. It was a colourful weekend oscillating between recreating indigenous dances and feminist rap performances in Kichwa.

The festival thereby created a space to articulate the *existence* of the Chocó as a strategy of *resistance*. Re-existence is a decolonial concept that aims to "de-centre established

[66] Participant observation Festival 16.09.2023, Gualea.
[67] Participant Observation Festival 16.09.2023, Gualea.

logics in order to search [...] for the keys to organisational, production, food, ritual and aesthetic forms that allow life to be dignified and re-invented" (Achinte 2013: 455). Thus, the people of the Chocó not only rejected mining but also constructed alternative forms of development by bringing together territorial governance, local products, and cultural identity. Consequently, the inhabitants of the Chocó were engaged in a permanent "movement of reinvention and reorganisation, drawing from the past, from tradition, from present struggles in order to invent the future" (Hurtado Gómez and Porto Goncalves 2022: 5). As such, the festival became a space to construct and debate alternative lifeworlds of dignified development.

At the same time, the festival constructed a network of care and urban-rural alliances for the Chocó territory. When I spoke to Juan, one of the main organisers of the festival, he explained his engagement for the festival with a "sense of belonging or rootedness. It's the place where you live and where you see yourself and where you want to be [...]. So, we defend it, right? We defend it in different ways, we defend it by loving it, by taking care of it."[68] This expression of care towards the territory exemplifies a relationship that goes beyond seeing the Chocó as a site of extraction like state officials did. But how do you foster that relationship of care without a sense of "rootedness"? In the following, I examine ways to unmake the Chocó a sacrifice zone for the urban population as a final strategy to construct alternative lifeworlds.

5.3 "There can be no sacrificial territories." – The Unmaking of Sacrifice Zones

Making the Chocó known and appreciated by the urban population was a vital strategy of the campaign to challenge the making of sacrifice zones. Indeed, a major challenge in the

[68] Interview Juan, 11.08.2023, Tulipe.

defence of territories is the distance between the semi-isolated rural or indigenous territories affected by extractive projects and social organisations within the urban centres of power (Svampa 2019: 43).

The inhabitants of the Chocó emphasised this disconnect by highlighting the harsh realities of the rurality and feeling misunderstood by the urbanity:

> They are far from understanding exactly what the reality of the people here is like. All the attention goes to the cities, all the qualified people, all the economic resources, to the city. And the people of the city depend on the water here, the food here, the air that we provide them with, we that take care of the forests.[69]

Indeed, despite the proximity to Quito's urban centre and being part of the same administrative district, many Quiteños were unaware of the Chocó. Thus, the campaign was an opportunity to build bridges between the rural and urban populations. As Jorge explained, this relationship was "a process under construction, and we took the consultation as a tool to begin to form these links so that the Quiteños of the city understand that this place exists and that it is important for them too."[70]

One of the major strategies to raise awareness about the Chocó was the organisation of nine community events[71] in different parts of Quito. Every weekend from July until the consultation in mid-August, a team of volunteers from *Quito sin Minería* would meet in a different neighbourhood for another *Vive el Chocó* (The Chocó Lives). The neighbourhoods were specifically chosen to reach people in the socio-economically marginalized southern or northern areas with a high population density. As a volunteer for

[69] Interview Mayra, 28.08.2023, Nanegalito.
[70] Interview Jorge, 04.08.2023, Intillacta.
[71] There were also many other strategies of the campaign, but I focus on the *Vive el Choco* as the most relevant during my fieldwork. For a full list of events, see annex 3.

the campaign, I accompanied six of these events in the month leading to the consultation.

Every Saturday and Sunday we would arrive in the *Chiva*, the campaign's truck decorated with paper leaves and colourful posters, at the centre of the neighbourhood, often a little park, playground, or a football field. In a swift and well-practiced symphony, the volunteers quickly put on their *Quito sin Minería* t-shirts, and set up flags, banners, and inflatable figures, all in the recognizable bright orange colours of *Quito sin Mineria* and featuring the Andean bear. In every *Vive el Chocó*, there were three tents with different activities: The first tent was conceptualized and implemented by Scientific Rebellion Ecuador, a scholar-activist group that supported the campaign through research on its ecosystem services and biodiversity. Using interactive quizzes, puzzles, and posters, they explained the location of the Chocó and the ecosystem services it provides in a playful and accessible manner. At the second tent, volunteers offered face painting for children, drawing little Andean bears or birds, engaging with the children and their parents in conversations about the Chocó. I primarily worked at the third tent, where we prepared *salak* and *chicle*, two fruits from the Chocó, for visitors to taste. As we distributed the bite-sized pieces of fruit, we shared information about their origin and the significance of the Chocó. Throughout the event, the volunteers also organised Zumba dances, rides on the *Chiva* around the neighbourhood, and a theatre play that explained the consequences of mining from the perspectives of an Andean bear and a pelican in the Chocó Andino.

Figure 9 Cutting *salak*, personal photograph, 08.07.2023, Quito.

Figure 8 The trivia tent, personal photograph, 16.07.2023, Quito.

It was an inclusive and accessible event for families, children, and residents alike. Moreover, it did not approach learning about the Chocó only on a cognitive level but through the senses: visitors were able to taste, touch, and smell the fruits, watch the theatre play, hug the Andean bear mascot, and feel the paint on the skin. This contributed to remembering the consultation and established positive links with what the Chocó meant for Quiteños. Thus, the *Vive el Chocó* was a crucial strategy to engage with different populations, educate them, and form links with the territory. During the televised debate at the CNE, Jorge clearly addressed the importance of creating these urban-rural connections:

> We do not have first- and second-class Quito. There can be no sacrificial territories in Ecuador nor sacrificial people. [...] Fellow Quiteños and Quiteñas, we have the opportunity now to decide! We cannot allow that at one and a half hours from La Carolina [a central park] they open a mine, that they destroy the Panecillo [a popular hill]![72]

By bringing the mine figuratively into the very heart of urban Quito, Jorge stressed the closeness of the Chocó to the residents of Quito. However, his words also indicate another dimension of this construction between rural and urban alliances by emphasising that the Chocó and its people are more than sacrifices zones or populations. Jorge therefore contested the making of the Chocó as a sacrifice zone for development and the energy transition as the "greater national good" even though (legal) mining had not yet begun. This shows the importance of investigating the making of sacrifice zones from an anticipatory perspective, acknowledging that "for a sacrifice to be consummated, many things must first be in place" (Reinert 2018, p. 602). The *Vive el Chocó* and the Festival of Re-Existence discussed earlier constitute attempts to contest the elitist view of territory as geological potential and concessions and instead showcase its value of life, community, and productivity to Quito's broader public. This also closely links with the discussion on value from chapter 5.1 – highlighting biodiversity and ecosystem services, the campaign attempted to counter the state's narrative of an "empty land" that is only viable for mining exploitation.

In sum, there were three ways of constructing alternative lifeworlds based on emphasizing the value of life, different understandings of development as dignity and re-existence, and highlighting how the Chocó is more than a sacrifice zone. This highlights one dimension of a Transformative Green State that imagines alternative futures and thereby challenges a green state based only on decarbonization. In the following

[72] CNE debate, 16.08.2023, online.

subchapters, I will explore the two other dimensions of a green state: ecological democracy as well as green public spheres and social movements.

5.4 "The people have a role in the decisions of a country." – The Consultation as a Form of Direct Democracy

I spent August 20th, the day of the consultation, at the office of AE alongside a diverse ensemble of Ecuadorian activists, academics, and artists. Nervously waiting for the results, we were sipping *canelazo*, a hot cinnamon drink, debating possible outcomes, and reflecting on the past month of campaigning. When the results finally trickled in, emotions ran high – the Chocó Andino consultation won with 68% in favour of stopping mining. Even more surprising, the Yasuní consultation also won with 58% of Ecuador's population supporting the end of oil extraction in the Yasuní National Park (Consejo Nacional Electoral 2023b). This constituted a historic moment for Ecuador as a country heavily dependent on extractivist revenue (Donziger 2023; Samaniego 2023). Despite numerous obstacles and after decades of struggle, for the first time, civil society demanded the legally binding end of mining expansion in its capital as well as the termination of oil drilling on a national scale via direct democratic participation. In the following, I will outline how the consultation constituted a cornerstone of the Transformative Green State by activating spaces of contestation in the Ecuadorian constitution.

After the consultation, I spoke to Mayra who had organized the signature collection and electoral control with the CNE. For this, she and other volunteers spent three months sitting next to CNE bureaucrats to compare every signature with the one in the database of the computer. She reflected how "at the beginning, the CNE people used to call us something like 'childish ecologists', 'romantic ecologists.' [...] But little by little, since we

lived so much in the CNE for all those 3 months, [...] that army of officials little by little changed their vision of us."[73] Thus, the sustained presence of the activists built a relationship between them and the state officials despite the deeply engrained ascriptions of "childish environmentalists" discussed before. This was also reflected during my interview with a CNE bureaucrat in which he stressed the absolute neutrality of the CNE regarding the results in the beginning. However, in the course of the interview, he acknowledged that "despite the economic needs, we are a people who love nature. [...] While it is true that this is economically damaging, it will help us in the long run."[74] Thinking back to the disagreement regarding the possibility of sustainable mining between the MEM and the MAATE, the relation of the CNE with *Quito sin Minería* is another example of how the state is not a monolithic entity but made from a diversity of actors and structures. The resulting tensions, ruptures, and pressures can be activated by social movements in their attempt to green the state (Riofrancos 2020: 110; Walter and Urkidi 2017: 276).

The consultation was also a way of "keeping constituent politics alive" (Riofrancos 2020: 87). Riofrancos describes how during prior non-binding community consultations, there still prevailed the sense that urban consultations were too risky due to the detachments of Quito's inhabitants from territorial struggles (ibid.: 129). But based on the recent successes of the consultations in Girón and Azuay, *Quito sin Minería* decided to expand the constitutional right of legally binding popular consultations to the capital. By activating and interpreting the articles of the constitution that served their interests, activists therefore claimed constituent power to constitutionally legitimise their

[73] Interview Mayra, 28.08.2023, Nanegalito.
[74] Interview Diego Toledo, 24.08.2023, Quito.

alternative lifeworlds (ibid.: 113). This also highlights the transitionary nature of the constitution as a living document, continually being redefined and deployed by different actors in an ongoing dispute (ibid.: 80). Thus, instead of grassroots movements going always "against the state", *Quito sin Minería* is an example of a movement that used the constitution to push for their vision of a green state based on life, development as dignity, and the Chocó beyond a sacrifice zone.

Finally, the consultation reshaped the understanding of democracy as a tool for the citizens and, to a certain extent, earth beings. In the words of Jorge, democracy was reconfigured to "not only giving power to the politicians every four years but also the people. The people have a role in the decisions of a country and not necessarily to choose a guy, but to choose what you want."[75] Thus, popular consultations as a form of direct democracy mark a transition from liberal representative democracy towards bottom-up participatory democracy and is a vital step towards achieving a green state based on ecological democracy (Eckersley 2020a: 223). Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the poster by *Quito sin Minería* showed the Andean bear as an earth-being asking voters to protect its habitat. Thus, in a sense, the campaign also aimed to include the rights of those who cannot represent themselves as Eckersley's (2004) definition of ecological democracy suggests. Despite this being the lesser focus of the campaign, it constitutes an important step towards ecological democracy (Eckersley 2020a: 223).

But the consultation was not an inherently straightforward or reliable tool and many activists expressed doubts about its applicability during the campaign. In my interview with Luz two weeks before the consultation, she worried that "a consultation is

[75] Interview Jorge, 04.08.2023, Intillacta.

dangerous. You have to be very sure that you are going to win [...]. In other words, if the yes wins, we are going to support it and if the no wins, then what are we going to protest?"[76] Similarly, Carmen, the lawyer for Pacto's Anti-Mining Front, expressed doubts about the constant effort and vigilance a popular consultation requires:

> For it to be a tool, we have to work, we have to promote, we have to denounce, we have to sue, [...] we have to create oversight bodies to ensure compliance with the consultation, we have to ask for access to information and we have to replicate it at the national level so that all peoples have the right to be consulted on any environmental issue. [...] I think this is Ecuador's opportunity to be able to carry out this popular consultation and build the ecological state that you are looking for.[77]

Consequently, activists emphasised that while consultations are valuable tools to challenge extractive projects and contest state structures, they are also only one of many tools. In the words of former Supreme Court Judge Ramiro, "legal tools make sense when they strengthen social movements and struggles. Consultation is not an end in itself, but rather another means."[78] This indicates the crucial role of social movements pushing for a green state, which I will explore in the following subchapter.

5.5 "It's incredible that we made it!" – The Formation of Green Movements and Public Spheres

All currents of green state theory emphasise the crucial role of green social movements in pressuring state structures to employ their visions of a green state (Eckersley 2004: 246). However, they also acknowledge that these movements face "considerable resistance from a variety of social actors and organisations whose material interests and/or political ideals are threatened by the case for a more ecologically sustainable society and economy" (ibid.: 247). Indeed, the activists for the Chocó (and Yasuní)

[76] Interview Luz, 14.08.2023, Mindo.
[77] Interview Carmen, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[78] Interview Ramiro Ávila, 01.09.2023, online.

consultation had to deal with endless administrative obstacles as well as continuous threats and intimidation. They collected and controlled signatures for a total of nine months and led a campaign with diverse stakeholders and limited financial resources. Considering these (powerful) odds, there prevailed the sense that "it is incredible that we made it" [79] after the successful consultation. In the following, I will outline how the consultation shaped the formation of green movements by uniting indigenous, peasant, and urban struggles.

Perhaps most importantly, the process of the consultation strengthened the environmental movement in Ecuador. The cooperation between communities and activists from prior consultations in Girón and Azuay as well as between *Yasunidos* and *Quito sin Minería* formed networks of cooperation to share resources, experiences, and strategies across different geographical and social scales. Thus, the consultations facilitated a vital learning process that will feed into possible future consultations (Walter and Urkidi 2017: 276). The consultation also united different groups for an objective on which everyone agreed – it was always clear that both consultations had to succeed. This cooperation fostered an integration of indigenous, peasant, and urban environmental struggles. Susana, a spokesperson from *Yasunidos*, reflected on this link the following:

> We see it [the consultations] as an opportunity for all these organisations to be able to think collectively about solutions for a possible ecological transition that is also socially just. And to think about it, from a policy that does not have to be partisan, but precisely from all these organisations that have opted for something different.[80]

This shared political project is vital in uniting different movements: As Eckersley (2021: 254) argues, "societal transformation demands not only new ideas but also hegemonic

[79] Interview Angela, 23.08.2023, Quito.
[80] Interview Susana, 24.08.2023, online.

countermovements, which only become a political force if they can unite around an alternative hegemonic project."

However, the formation and integration of these movements is not a smooth process as every movement brought in different assumptions, aims, and strategies in their "environmentalisms". For instance, Alier (2002) famously coined the concept of the "environmentalism of the poor" to describe subaltern groups defending their environment, local identities, and right to place-making (Anguelovski and Martínez Alier 2014: 174). While this focused mostly on indigenous groups, Kuecker (2007) and Davidov (2014) proposed a "folk environmentalism" to describe how Andean *colonos* "recreated themselves as agricultural environmentalists, thus inhabiting a position that enabled them to oppose the resource extraction model in a way that unsustainable agriculture never would have" (Davidov 2014: 48). Finally, Rival (2010) and Barnard (2011) propose an "environmentalism of the people" that does not necessarily focus on the defence of territorial livelihoods or indigenous ontologies but demands "that the state fulfils its duty of care for the people and the places where the people live" (Rival 2010: 364).

Rather than ascribing the "correct environmentalism" to the movements that facilitated the consultation, I see these environmentalisms as fluid and overlapping. Based on local, national, and international concepts such as *buen vivir*, earth-beings, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, the campaign made of rural and urban actors created strategies to articulate their vision of a green state. In this process, they brought in indigenous ontologies beyond human-nature divides by making the Andean bear and the forest moral agents in the campaign. At the same time, Quito's urban and initially detached population voted to protect what they learned to be an invaluable part of their home. Through the interweaving of these strategies to "re-evaluate" the Chocó beyond a

sacrifice zone, these overlapping environmentalisms formed a fragile but powerful cohesion among Chocó inhabitants and urban environmentalists. One way to describe this process is through "partial connections", a concept by Marilyn Strathern (2004: 54) that describes not a "singular nor plural, neither one nor many, a circuit of connections rather than parts." Andrea Sémpertegui (2021: 221) observed a similar process between ecofeminist NGOs and Amazonian indigenous women. She argues that the "permeations between indigenous activism and Latin American ecofeminism are engendering creative strategies for resisting extractivism". The Chocó consultation fostered a similar process in the greening of social movements, leading to a partially connected green movement that draws from different experiences, strategies, and agendas in pushing for a Transformative Green State.

But green movements also require a green public sphere to critically engage with the goals and means of a green state (Eckersley 2004: 246). Susana, having travelled all around Ecuador for the Yasuní consultation, explained how the campaigns fostered an engaged green public sphere:

> The ecological issue is not an issue of a small urban group or a middle class. [...] Many Ecuadorians take pride in the diversity of their ecosystems, and the moment that this narrative is spoken about [...] it resonates with the disappointment that exists with an institutionalised policy that promised development with oil revenue but didn't work out.[81]

Thus, the consultations permeated the public debate nationally and locally by activating pre-existing grievances, support for environmental protection, and enabling a process of education within the public sphere. Consequently, Ramiro asserted that "without a doubt, it [the consultation] is one of the ways [to green the state]. And it is a super

[81] Interview Susana, 24.08.2023, online.

important way because a civilisational change [...] requires having information, requires having consciousness, and requires having different actions." [82] This stresses the importance of providing access to information for the broader public sphere, precisely what state institutions were preventing. Despite this, *Quito sin Minería* was able to inform and engage population groups that otherwise would have not learned about the consulation, for example by organising the *Vive el Chocó* in Quito's marginalized neighbourhoods. This strengthened the link between the green public sphere and green social movements, emphasising the importance of their cooperation in the construction of a green state.

In sum, the potential to influence extractive policy ultimately depends on the strength of green alliances, shared alternative lifeworlds, and collective subjectivities (Vela-Almeida and Torres 2021: 185; Riofrancos 2020: 180). However, this is a fragile and conflict-ridden process that inevitably entails many tensions – some of which I will outline in the next subchapter.

5.6 Navigating Tensions within Green Movements

The weakening of social cohesion is a well-known consequence of extractive activities (Bebbington et al. 2008b; Bebbington 2012; Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington 2018; Conde 2017; Conde and Le Billon 2017). However, as I will explore in this subchapter, the lines of social division often reinforced prior experiences of marginalisation, threatening the formation of vital green movements to push for a Transformative Green State (Bebbington et al. 2013: 258).

[82] Interview Ramiro Ávila, 01.09.2023, online.

The social division was most notable in Pacto, the GAD with the longest mining history and a sustained presence of families that were directly or indirectly benefitting from the mining activities. Since some families were also united in the COPROPAP and feared the loss of their organic certification, the social fabric in Pacto was deeply fractured, with grave consequences for the anti-mining activists living there. Louis, a COPROPAP member and former president of Pacto's Anti-Mining Front, faced persistent threats both from the mining industry and his community that accused him of collaborating with the miners. He saw this as a deliberate tactic by the mining companies: “People are poisoned, full of envy, full of hate. And they are poisoned by the mining businessmen themselves. That's their strategy, their strategy is to divide, and there are people who are weak, they are convinced.”[83]

Moreover, these divisions were exacerbating pre-existing tensions within the territory. This became clear when I spoke with the president of the *Mancomunidad* and the president of Pacto, whose election marked a shift from prior anti-mining administrations. During our interview, they expressed grievances with what they called “the ecologist system”, referring to the number of private natural reserves and NGOs in the Chocó. The presidents argued that the opposition to mining allows the foundations to receive international funding for conservation projects and carbon credits. Yet, these funds, requested for the benefit of the community, never reached the community but stayed in “certain families, let's say no more.”[84] The presidents also distanced themselves from *Quito sin Minería*, asserting that “this initiative of the consultation is not born from the people (*del pueblo*) itself”[85] but from the NGOs. They criticized the political power of the

[83] Interview Louis, 13.08.2023, Pacto.
[84] Interview Julio Flores and Christian Rodríguez, 04.08.2023, Gualea.
[85] Interview Julio Flores and Christian Rodríguez, 04.08.2023, Gualea.

"ecologist system", alleging that the NGOs had received funds from the mining industry to buy votes for their anti-mining candidate. This is the same narrative of an "ecologist system" with close financial ties to the mining industry that was expressed by central state institutions. The president of Pacto contrasted this "ecologist system" with himself as the president of "the people": "They don't live here anymore. We come from here. The people are with us."[86] Rather confused by these populist terms, I confronted members of the campaign with these grievances. They argued that the presidents had links to the mining companies and that the consultation was "literally a consultation of the peasant people. [...]. If you look at the petitioners, it's the people of the communities (*la gente del pueblo*)."[87] In turn, they criticized the presidents for their lack of engagement and failure to take responsibility for informing themselves about the consultation and the processes of the *Mancomunidad*.

This conflict illustrates the tense social relations in the Chocó. While the consultation was indeed initiated by residents of the Chocó, local NGOs undoubtedly played a vital role in the subsequent process of the consultation. In our interview, former president of the *Mancomunidad* Sandra acknowledged that, eventually, these NGOs "began to take up more space within the popular consultation and no longer left these spaces for participation of the citizens."[88] She explains how, there is a profound knowledge gap between the NGOs and the majority of residents in the Choco, closely relating this to my own positionality as a university student: "The NGOs and *Quito sin Minería* are made up of intellectual people like you [...]. You have an education that is not born from the reality

[86] Interview Christian Rodríguez, 12.08.2023, Gualea.
[87] Interview Carmen, 31.08.2023, Quito.
[88] Interview Sandra, 29.08.2023, online.

of your country, from your locality."[89] Juan suggested that this difference in cultural, social, and financial capital eventually led to the feeling of being left behind:

> The people of the Chocó Andino, I have noticed, are jealous. [...] I have realised that sometimes the authorities of the Chocó Andino are closed-minded. [...] Because, of course, there are people from here who come from outside and stay here to live. They don't accept them so easily. It's like that kind of zeal. [...] I don't know why, but I dare to think that it's because of some kind of sense of inferiority.[90]

These observations illustrate the uneven process of "becoming environmentalist." Davidov (2014) observed very similar tensions in Intag where conflicts were based on long-held class inequalities as a result of the agrarian reforms in the 1960s. However, I would argue these tensions also go beyond class and are exacerbated by today's international funding landscape. The presidents are correct in their observation that the NGOs receive external funding: Due to the lack of financial support from central and municipal state institutions for the GADs, many local foundations depend on international NGOs or development agencies for funding (Robles 2023: 58–59). At times, these constraints on funding position the NGOs as gatekeepers that control information, resources, and connections (Dunlap and Arce 2022: 464). Thus, contrary to romantic conceptions of territorial movements as post-capitalist, "grassroots movements act inside capitalist structures and opportunities in order to defend the commons" (Dupuits et al. 2020: 8). This causes dilemmas and tensions since the process of professionalisation needed for external funding can lead to a "disconnection with local realities" (ibid.: 8).

[89] Interview Sandra, 29.08.2023, online.
[90] Interview Juan, 11.08.2023, Tulipe.

These tensions also affected the relationship between the urban and rural members of the campaign. In subchapter 5.3, I argued how the consultation was a process aimed at constructing bridges between urban and rural populations. However, this process was naturally uneven and unfinished. One significant source of tension was the campaign's focus on Quito such as in the *Vive el Chocó* events that were held in neighbourhoods of urban Quito rather than in communities within the Chocó itself. Since the majority of voters were in Quito, this decision made sense strategically. Nevertheless, many people in the Chocó felt neglected and criticized the urban bias of the campaign:

> With Quito sin Minería there is a kind of unease. [...] Because Quito sin Minería has its base of action in Quito [...] what I felt was that there was a kind of disconformity. Because of the fact that here they didn't work so much with the people from the territory and that the people from the territory had to go to Quito to do things there and that the people from here were paid less than, for example, a communicator from there.[91]

These tensions were also reproduced on the broader scale of Quito. For example, *Quito sin Minería* was criticized for focusing on the upper-middle class in northern Quito and disregarding socio-economically marginalized populations in the south:

> Our Hercules heel as defenders of rights or as environmentalists [...] [is that] sometimes we form closed circles. You don't have to convince the convinced. [...] I have to convince the lady who lives [...] far away in the south from Quito that has a store and I have to talk to her. [...]. We have to generate dialogues with the people [...], talk to the mechanics, talk to the taxi drivers, talk to the shopkeepers.[92]

Additionally, there were tensions between *Quito sin Minería* and *Yasunidos*. While they had initially cooperated during the collection of signatures, *Yasunidos* later stepped away due to disagreements on the second national strike that took place in June 2022. While *Yasunidos* took a political stance close to its ally, the *Confederación de Nacionalidades*

[91] Interview Juan, 11.08.2023, Tulipe.
[92] Interview Luz, 14.08.2023, Mindo.

Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE), Ecuador's largest and most influential indigenous confederation, *Quito sin Minería* did not. As one member of the campaign explained: "We have to avoid the public seeing us as taking sides because our only side has to be the protection of nature."[93] Interviews also mentioned generational tensions between more senior and younger activists as well as incidents of sexualized violence and harassment both within *Quito sin Minería* and *Yasunidos*. These manifold tensions and conflicts demonstrate how the strength of social movements is undermined by relations of power and structures of discrimination such as gender, age, and class. Thus, to consolidate the vision of Transformative Green State, it is essential to "develop strategies of empowerment for systematically excluded groups" (Eckersley 2004: 247).

5.7 The Aftermath of the Consultation

These challenges are even more relevant today. Due to the legally binding nature of the consultation, technically there can be no new mining concession in the Chocó nor a renewal of current environmental permits. However, after the consultation, the mining industry openly rejected the results while the state demonstrated an ambivalent position (El Oriente 2023). Therefore, many activists expressed the need to protect the consultation, convinced that "they will give us war."[94]

Indeed, since returning from fieldwork, the mining industry and the Ecuadorian state have continuously disrespected the consultation and delayed the implementation of its result.[95] In February 2024, the MAATE initiated the process of citizen participation for the

[93] Interview Laura, 22.08.2023, Quito.
[94] Participant observation workshop, 26.08.2023, Mashpi.
[95] The Yasuní consultation is equally being disrespected (Acosta 2024b).

environmental impact assessment for the mining company Ecuamin S.A in Pacto despite the ban on further environmental licenses (Anti-Mining Front Pacto for Life, Water, and Nature 2024). Ecuasamin S.A. is also the company involved in the court case where activists continue to wait for a ruling. Furthermore, in March 2024, Daniel Noboa, newly elected President and heir of Ecuador's banana empire (Gerling and Bilbao 2023), visited the Canadian mining fair and signed investments of 4.8 billion USD with mining companies (Novik 2024). Shortly after, national police and armed forces attempted to implement an environmental consultation authorised by the MAATE for the copper mine *Loma Larga,* owned by the Canadian company Atico Mining. Over 70 community members protesting the consultation and mining project were criminalized and several protesters suffered injuries by rubber bullets, pepper spray, and pellets (Suárez 2024). Thus, the making of a "mining country" is rapidly progressing, as is the resistance by the activists protesting in various parts of the country.

Another factor in the aftermath of the consultation is the deteriorating security situation. In recent months, Ecuador has made headlines for an increase in drug trafficking, sequestrations, and assassinations (Collyns 2023). In response to the escalating violence, Noboa declared a state of internal war in January 2024 (Acosta 2024a; Reinecke 2024). The rise of narco-violence is a result of many interlinking causes such as a retreating state, continuously high rates of poverty and inequality after the COVID-19 pandemic, and Ecuador's strategic geopolitical position within international drug trafficking (Gabbert 2024). But the increase of organized crime is also closely linked to illegal mining, with grave implications for anti-extractivist struggles in Ecuador. Carla from the National Anti-Mining Front explained how these circumstances make being an environmental defender much riskier, arguing that "we as collectives, the territories, have

to rethink the ways in which we fight because the way we have been doing it, maybe it is no longer the right way if we want to be alive."[96] Thus, the combination of continuous disrespect of the consultation and a deteriorating security situation significantly complicates and threatens the process of constructing a Transformative Green State.

5.8 Preliminary Conclusion

What remains, then, of the process towards a Transformative Green State that I observed during my fieldwork? This chapter has examined how the campaign and the inhabitants of the Chocó pushed forward their vision of a Transformative Green State through the popular consultation. This included the promotion of alternative lifeworlds in three dimensions: First, inhabitants formulated regimes of re-evaluation to counter monetary notions of value based on mineral exports. Instead, they highlighted the value of life by adopting concepts such as biodiversity, ecosystem services, and earth-beings for their strategic objectives. Second, the campaign promoted alternative visions of development based on dignity, for example through local sustainable production and re-existence. Third, the campaign attempted to unmake the Chocó a sacrifice zone by showing the significance of the Chocó as a territory of life to urban populations. The consultation also functioned as a form of direct democracy to push for this vision through the legal mechanisms secured in the constitution. At the same time, the campaign educated and activated an engaged public green sphere and strengthened a broad green social movement. Nevertheless, this process of pushing for a transition towards a Transformative Green State is undermined by tensions and political divisions within the movement as well as the state's disrespect of the consultation in an increasingly more dangerous context.

[96] Interview Montserrat 05.09.2023, online.

6 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to answer the question **What are the competing visions of a green state articulated in the context of the popular consultation on the Chocó Andino?** For this, I have illuminated a dispute between an emerging Green Extractivist and a Transformative Green State.

On the one hand, in the context of an exacerbating climate crisis, there is a rise of national green pacts, net-zero policies, and green transition proposals. What these have in common is a consensus on decarbonization based on renewable energies. Ecuadorian state officials adopt this consensus as a further legitimation for the extraction of minerals in their vision of a Green Extractivist State that builds unevenly upon Correa's neo-extractivist institutional and discursive legacies. This Green Extractivist State promotes the value of minerals as the replacement for decreasing oil reserves and crucial resources for the ecological transition. Furthermore, it reinforces pre-existing links between mining and development by promoting responsible and sustainable mining for development and decarbonization. Yet, development is now achieved by taking advantage of the demand for minerals by increasing mining exports and FDI. In this vision, national elites see territories as empty land to be geologically explored and sacrificed for the greater national good of development and decarbonization, thereby creating peripheries within the peripheries. While these dimensions demonstrate an uneven shift, the state continues to oppose forms of direct democracy such as the popular consultation and criminalizes social movements that advocate for them. Simultaneously, the Green Extractivist State is shaped by neoliberal and austerity policies which lead to an increasing critique of a "weak state" by corporate actors and

activists. while the former demand further state-led support of their agendas, the latter struggle to activate state structures for their objectives.

On the other hand, based on a critical re-reading of green state theory, I have highlighted several transformative dimensions of green statehood such as the construction of alternative lifeworlds, ecological democracy, and the importance of green social movements and public spheres. I have analysed these in the context of the popular consultation on the Chocó Andino as a Transformative Green State. First, the campaign promoted alternative lifeworlds: By emphasising the value of life articulated through biodiversity, ecosystem services, and earth-beings, activists promoted alternative regimes of evaluation beyond the monetized value of minerals. Residents of the Chocó also expressed alternative conceptions of development based on dignity, sustainable production, and re-existence. Furthermore, the campaign built urban-rural alliances of awareness and care about the Chocó to counter the designation of the territory as a sacrifice zone. Additionally, the consultation is an example of direct and participatory democracy that emphasised the people as decision-makers with constituent power. Lastly, the consultations facilitated the education of an engaged public green sphere and the formation of a fragile but powerful green social movement compromising different environmentalisms. However, the political project of constructing a Transformative Green State is threatened by manifold tensions, a deteriorating security situation, and a state that does not respect the results of the consultation.

Thus, my thesis has stressed the importance of interrogating the impact of a global consensus on decarbonization. I have demonstrated how predominant green state visions centred on decarbonization promote novel forms of green extractivism by providing an additional justification for mineral extraction under a green banner.

Furthermore, by focusing on Ecuador my thesis has contributed to an emerging research agenda on Southern green states. I have also challenged the assumption that Southern countries cannot become green states by emphasizing how they move towards extractivist or transformative dimensions of green statehood. Seeing the state as a relation provides a useful lens for this analysis as it illustrates the ongoing dispute between different visions and actors in their attempt to green the state. This is especially relevant when considering the manifold challenges ahead: States will continue to play a crucial role in navigating socio-ecological change, be it by disaster or by design. Therefore, it is essential to shed light on the disputes between different visions of the future, critically interrogate hegemonic proposals, and highlight alternative conceptualizations of green statehood.

Therefore, further research should analyse the link between greening the state and facilitating the resulting processes of change. As my analysis has shown, the Green Extractivist State perpetuates legacies of extractivism without challenging the underlying structures of resource exploitation, technological fixes, and ecological modernization. In contrast, the Transformative Green State attempts to redefine democracy, development, and the relationship between humans and the territory. These observations can be productively linked with current debates in transformation theories. While notions of "just transitions" are multiplying, they need further rigorous academic analysis (Abram et al. 2022; Akuno et al. 2022; Linnér and Wibeck 2019). As the quote by the Eco-Social Pact of the South in the introduction indicates, dominant green transition theories do not challenge the underlying causes of the climate crisis and perpetuate pre-existing injustices, similar to the Green Extractivist State (Pacto Ecosocial del Sur 2022). Thus, further research is needed to examine the process of change towards a Transformative

Green State that addresses the root causes of a climate crises from a perspective of justice.

Yet this is not a straightforward task. My analysis has shown how Ecuador's peripheral position, colonial legacies, and deeply engrained extractivist path dependencies severely constrain more transformative dimensions of a green state. Consequently, this transformation cannot be reduced to the Ecuadorian state or civil society. In the words of Mayra:

> Who consumes our minerals? Not us, we consume a minimum part, so those who profit are outside. So, the pressure cannot only be from here and we cannot assume that the fault lies only with our state. There is a world outside that puts pressure and that perhaps is not aware of how much it costs a territory like ours.[97]

Thus, an in-depth analysis of power relations between international institutions, policies on decarbonization, and global capitalist relations is needed. It is vital to take this global perspective into account to understand how international capitalist relations and geopolitical interests interact in manifold ways with extractivist states in the Global South (Lang et al. 2023; Svampa et al. 2023). This also includes a closer analysis of the role of China as a significant investor in extractive industries to further destabilize the North-South binary.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that my thesis does not negate that rapid decarbonization is vital to tackle climate change. But the question remains how to facilitate the required changes without exacerbating pre-existing injustices. It is precisely the complexity and urgency of that question that makes greening the state such a pressing challenge. This is further complicated by rising authoritarianism, inequality, and

[97] Interview Mayra, 28.08.2023, Nanegalito.

violent conflict worldwide, making greener states more challenging every day. It is therefore important emphasise that green states are “most likely to be built, piece by piece, as the result of political struggles. This means that they will always be works in progress or ‘works in regress’” (Eckersley 2020b: 49). Thus, moments of progress will meet setbacks in a constant (re)negotiation of power relations within the dispute on the future. Ultimately, it is in this process where the possibility of moving towards a green state lies.

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Annex 1: List of Interviews

This list is ordered by interview groups and then by date. Urban members of the campaign are under the category of *Quito sin Minería*. Members based in the Chocó are under the category of Chocó Andino.

#	Name	Role	Place	Date	Category
1	Iliana Rodríguez, Carolina Orozco	President of the NGO Women in Mining, President of the Mining Chamber	Online	24.07.2023	Industry
2	Dario Ruiz, Estalin Andrade	Director of the magazine „Mundo Minero", mining engineer from Pacto	Central University	09.08.2023	Industry
3	Juan Jose Espinosa Córdoba	Vice Minister of Mining, Ministry of Energy and Mining	Written Statement	02.08.2023	State
4	Juan Dávalos	Minister of Environment, Ministry of the Environment, Water, and the Ecological Transition	MAATE Office	09.08.2023	State
5	Jaime Javier	Director of Institute for Geological and Energetic Research	IIGE Office	23.08.2023	State
6	Diego Toledo	Bureaucrat National Electoral Council	CNE Office	24.08.2023	State
7	Santiago Dávalos	CEO of State Mining Company	ENAMI Office	31.08.2023	State
8	8 volunteers (focus group discussion)	Volunteers for the campaign	Acción Ecológica Office	23.07.2023	Quito sin Minería
9	Jorge	Spokesperson campaign, NGO IMAYMANA	Home, Intillacta	04.08.2023	Chocó Andino
10	Silvia	Founder "Women's Producers Association Gualea"	Public park, Gualea	04.08.2023	Chocó Andino

11	Julio Flores, Christian Rodriguez	President of Mancomunidad and President of Pacto	Public park, Gualea	04.08.2023	Chocó Andino
12	Juan	Member of Youth Network Chocó Andino	Museum of Tulipe	11.08.2023	Chocó Andino
13	Maria	Member of Youth Network Chocó Andino	Home, Pacto	12.08.2023	Chocó Andino
14	Christian Rodriguez	President of Pacto	Restaurant, St. Helena	12.08.2023	Chocó Andino
15	Louis	Member of COPROPAP, President Anti-Mining Front Pacto	Restaurant, Pacto	13.08.2023	Chocó Andino
16	Blanca	Former bureaucrat for Quito municipality	Home, Mindo	13.08.2023	Chocó Andino
17	Luz	Founder NGO “Latin American Association for Alternative Development”	Home, Mindo	14.08.2023	Chocó Andino
18	Ana	Member Youth Network Chocó Andino	House of Culture Quito	17.08.2023	Chocó Andino
19	Laura	Coordinator volunteers, spokesperson	Acción Ecológica Office	22.08.2023	Quito sin Minería
20	Diego and Jessica	Coordinators of community events and volunteers	Acción Ecológica Office	22.08.2023	Quito sin Minería
21	Angela	Acción Ecológica, coordination of campaign	Acción Ecológica Office	23.08.2023	Quito sin Minería
22	Pablo	Lawyer of campaign	Mashpi	27.08.2023	Quito sin Minería
23	Edgar	Former president of Pacto	Office, La Armenia	28.08.2023	Chocó Andino
24	Mayra	Member of campaign responsible for collection and control of signatures, coordinator of the Andean Bear Corridor	Restaurant, Nanegalito	28.08.2023	Chocó Andino

25	Sandra	Former President of Mancomunidad	Online	29.08.2023	Chocó Andino
26	Carmen	Lawyer for the Anti-Mining Front Pacto	Secretary of Water, Restaurant, Quito	31.08.2023	Chocó Andino
27	Martha	Representative Foundation Future	Project facilities, Guayabilla	13.09.2023	Chocó Andino
28	Mercedes	Member Association of Women Guayabilla	Project facilities, Guayabilla	13.09.2024	Chocó Andino
29	Mariana	Member Association of Women Guayabilla	Project facilities, Guayabilla	13.09.2023	Chocó Andino
30	Gloria and sisters (focus group discussion)	Members Youth Network Chocó Andino	Home, La Armenia	13.09.2023	Chocó Andino
31	Veronica	Environmental defender, owner of a restaurant in Pacto	Restaurant, Pacto	14.09.2023	Chocó Andino
32	Rosa	Healthy Life Farm Chocó Andino	Festival Chocó Andino, Gualea	17.09.2023	Chocó Andino
33	Diana and Monica	COPROPAP members	La Y de Victoria, Pacto	18.09.2023	Chocó Andino
34	Alex Samaniego	Researcher at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar	Café, Quito	14.07.2023	Academic
35	Ivette Vallejo	Professor for Development, Environment and Territory at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO)	Office FLACSO	17.08.2023	Academic

36	Jorge Forero	Researcher at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar	Café, Quito	22.08.2023	Academic
37	William Sacher	Professor of Environment and Sustainability, Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar	Café, Quito	31.08.2023	Academic
38	Ramiro Ávila	Former Judge of Supreme Court, Professor of Law, Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar	Online	01.09.2023	Academic
39	Alberto Acosta	Economist, former Minister of Energy and Mines and President of the Constituent Assembly	Online	08.09.2023	Academic
40	Liliana	Collective Tena ama la Vida	Tena, workshop	26.07.2023	Other
41	Claudia Wisum	Indigenous mining engineer	Online	18.08.2023	Other
42	Sonya	Spokesperson Nationality of Waorani Ecuador	Restaurant, Quito	21.08.2023	Other
43	Susana	Spokesperson Yasunidos	Online	24.08.2023	Other
44	Carla	Spokesperson National Anti-Mining Front Ecuador	Online	25.08.2023	Other

Annex 2: Interview Questions

A. Reoccurring Questions for Elite Interviews with State Ministries

1) What is your role and primary responsibility?
2) What is the role of your institution?
3) What is the history of mining in Ecuador? What does mining mean for Ecuador now and in the future? What are challenges and opportunities?
4) What does the ecological transition mean for Ecuador? What is the role of your Ministry in it?
5) What is the context of the expansion of mining in the Chocó Andino?
6) How do you see the popular consultation in Chocó Andino? What happens if the Yes/No wins?
7) Green state theory so far only focuses on developed welfare states in the Global North. How do you see the possibility of an Ecuadorian green state?
8) What is your vision for Ecuador in the future?
9) Is there anyone else you recommend I talk to?

B. Reoccurring Questions for Interviews with Quito sin Minería and Residents of the Chocó

1) Tell me a bit about yourself. What do you do? Where do you live?
2) What does the Chocó Andino mean for you?
3) What are the most important issues in the Chocó?
4) What is the history of the mining conflict in the Chocó?
5) How did the idea of the popular consultation form? How was the process to implement it?
6) How do you see the relations with other organisations within the campaign? Who else is involved in what capacity?
7) What are your hopes and doubts regarding the consultations? What happens if the Yes/No wins? What would be your greatest learnings from the process?
8) What is your vision for Ecuador/the Chocó in the future?

9) Is there anyone else you recommend I talk to?

C. Reoccurring Questions for Interviews with Researchers

1) Tell me a bit about yourself. What is your research about?
2) How do you see the vision of mining change since 2008? What does mining mean for the Ecuadorian state?
3) How do you characterize the current government under Lasso in comparison to Correa and Moreno?
4) How do you see the consultation? What are its challenges and opportunities?
5) How do you explain the increase in popular consultations e.g. Girón and Cuenca? How are they connected?
6) What happens if the Yes/No wins?
7) Green state theory so far only focuses on developed welfare states in the Global North. How do you see the possibility of an Ecuadorian green state? Is the consultation a way to "green the state"?
8) What is your vision for Ecuador in the future?
9) Is there anyone else you recommend I talk to?

Annex 3: List of Participant Observation Sites

The sites of participant observation follow a chronological timeline.Events primarily based on the campaign are under the category of *Quito sin Minería*, events focused on the Chocó under the category Chocó Andino.

#	Event	Location	Date	Category
1	Conference: "Yasuni Academic Days to Think About the Future"	Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar, Quito	06.07.23	Academic
2	Vive el Chocó 1	Chillogallo, Quito	08.07.23	Quito sin Minería
3	Vive el Chocó 2	Mitad del Mundo, Quito	09.07.23	Quito sin Minería
4	Conference: "Weaving Territories of Life"	Universidad Salesiana, Quito	10-12.07.23	Academic
5	EXPOMINAS Mining Fair	Congress Centre, Quito	14.07.23	Industry
6	Vive el Chocó 3	El Calzado, Quito	16.07.23	Quito sin Minería
7	Discussion: "Yasuní, climate justice, and human rights"	Central University, Quito	18.07.23	Academic
8	Vive el Chocó 4	Mena del Hierro, Quito	22.07.23	Quito sin Minería
9	Preparation of campaign events	Acción Ecológica Office, Quito	23.07.23	Quito sin Minería
10	Conference: "International Meeting of Black and Afro-descendant Women Ecuador"	Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar, Quito	25.07.23	Academic
11	Workshop with Scientific Rebellion Ecuador: "Weaving Territories of Life – Art and Science against Extractivism"	Tena, Puyo	26-27.07.23	Academic
12	Vive el Chocó 5	La Floresta, Quito	28.07.23	Quito sin Minería
13	Vivel el Chocó 6	Calderón, Quito	29.07.23	Quito sin Minería
14	Workshop Forest School	Natural Reserve Intillacta	04.08.23	Chocó Andino

15	Filming of TikTok Video	Carolina Park, Quito	06.08.23	Quito sin Minería
16	Debate against Natural Resources S.A	Dessau Bar, Quito	08.08.23	Quito sin Minería
17	Discussion: "The Geological Mining Potential: Motor for the Development of Ecuador?"	Faculty of Engineering and Geology of Mines, Petroleum and Environment, Central University, Quito	09.08.23	Industry
18	Discussion: "Mining in the Chocó Andino"	Online, organised by IIGE	09.08.23	State/ Industry
19	Official debate on the Chocó Andino consultation	Online	16.08.23	State
20	Closing of the campaign	Carolina Park, Quito	17.08.23	Quito sin Minería
21	Ceremony for the consultation	Acción Ecológica Office, Quito	19.08.23	Quito sin Minería
23	Workshop on electoral control at the CNE	Tandana Restaurant, Quito	20.08.23	Quito sin Minería
23	Watching the results of consultation	Acción Ecológica Office, Quito	20.08.23	Quito sin Minería
24	Press round, Quito sin Minería	Acción Ecológica Office, Quito	21.08.23	Quito sin Minería
25	Press round, Yasunidos	House of Culture, Quito	21.08.23	Other
26	Protest against ECUASAMIN S.A	Regional Constitutional Court, Quito	12.09.23	Chocó Andino, Quito sin Minería
27	Workshop: "What's next after the consultation?"	Mashpi	26-27.08.23	Chocó Andino
28	Festival of the Chocó Andino: "Territories in Re-Existence"	Gualea	15-17.09.23	Chocó Andino
	Inaugural Ceremony	Gualea	15.09.23	Chocó Andino
	Workshop: "Governing Territories in Re-Existence"	Gualea	15.09.23	Chocó Andino
	Agricultural fair, cultural programme	Gualea	16.09.23	Chocó Andino