Indigenous women refusing the violence of resource extraction in Oaxaca

Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez

Abstract
This article examines the connections among the expansion of natural resource extraction, gender violence, and Indigenous refusal. It demonstrates how free market mining is operationalized through everyday violent practices that are perpetrated on human and nonhuman bodies. It moves from the global to the body to the community of bodies and the bodies of non-human entities to show the ways in which mining activities and violence are refused in Oaxaca, Mexico. By exploring Indigenous women’s practices of refusal, it critiques separations of mind and body, land and body, life and non-life, and centers the web of relationships that constitutes Indigenous life.

Keywords
body land, Indigenous women, mining, refusal, violence

Introduction
The staggering number of femicide in Mexico has become symbolic of the structural violence women face in that country and Latin America as a whole. Daunting as they are, these numbers have yet to tell the story of gendered violence, land dispossession, and natural resource extraction in Indigenous territories. Feminist scholars have argued there is a correlation between violence against women and the brutal territorial restructuring experienced in the region (Cruz Hernández, 2016; Marchese, 2019; Segato, 2014). While centering the body as site of conquest, these contributions are limited in their accounting of Indigenous women’s embodied experiences of dispossession. According to the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Women’s Earth Alliance (2016), in North America the connection between land, body, and extraction creates a powerful intersection for Indigenous communities, one that threatens their very survival and is often ignored. Similarly, Indigenous women in Latin America use the term territorio cuerpo-tierra (body-earth territory) as a political statement that connects the landscape of their bodies to the defense of land territory (Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2011).

Taking these previous works as a point of departure, this article explores the connections among the expansion of natural resource extraction, gender violence, and Indigenous refusal. I engage the concepts of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), transit (Byrd, 2011), and body land (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2020) to demonstrate how free market mining is operationalized through everyday violent practices perpetrated by the state and other actors on human and non-human bodies. I move from the global to the body, to the community of bodies, and the bodies of non-human entities to analyze how mining activities and violence are refused in Oaxaca, Mexico. By centering Indigenous women’s refusal to the violence of resource extraction, I move away from the body as a site of conquest and contamination to center the ontological relations between land and body and the Indigenous political practices that refuse the hierarchization of life. As a political practice, refusal is generative, it creates possibilities for the future. Refusal is a stance, a principle, a subject, a historical political project (McGranahan, 2016; Simpson, 2014).

This article begins first with a brief overview of my methodology and sets the context in which I place my study. Then I map out how empire and necropower operate politically and geographically to expand globally. I consider how new forms of dispossession are concealed and the ways different forms of life and entities become entangled with violence. The following section analyzes how necropower intersects with women’s bodies. I show that by connecting the expansion of resource extraction, colonialism, and body land, the agency of Indigenous women can be historicized beyond a human corporeality that can be stripped bare. The final section lays out how the violence of resource extraction...
unfolds in the Zapotec (people of the Sapote place, also known as Binizáà) community of San José del Progreso, Oaxaca, Mexico. I demonstrate that mining destroys Indigenous bodies, bodies of land, bodies of water, non-humans, and other entities, all of which constitute the web of relationships of Indigenous life.

**Methods and context**

This study uses an Indigenous feminist lens that centers Indigenous relations to land and is attentive to how the violence of natural resource extraction moves between the global, the home and community through bodies. To make sense of how violence on the land and bodies is experienced and justified, I followed a narrative methodology (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) that interfaced place-based stories with document analysis. First, information about mining was gathered via existing studies, government sources, policies, reports, and changes to legislations. Second, I analyzed narrated videos with Indigenous women produced by Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil (Services for an Alternative Education Civil Association), a non-governmental organization that is part of the Oaxacan Collective for the Defense of Territory. I also examined news and reports and conducted interviews with Indigenous activists between April 2018 and February 2019 at different forums and gatherings. I sought to understand Indigenous people, specially women’s relations to land and place, their experiences of the conflict, and motivations to resist mining. While paying attention to location, I do not conceive of community as an homogeneous group of people but rather a place where “different stories meet, ignore, or pass each other” (Deyhle, 2009, p. xvii). Ethics approval was granted by the Research Ethics Board 1 from the University of Alberta in September 2017.

San José del Progreso is both a Zapotec town and a municipality located in the Central Valleys region of the state of Oaxaca, about 45 kilometers from Oaxaca City. The municipality includes 12 communities including San José del Progreso, which was constituted as an ejido in 1927 and extended in 1934 by a presidential decree (Macias, 2014). This community’s history is shaped by colonial institutions such as the hacienda system or large landed estates and the social relations formed out of the indentured peonage (Chasson, 1990). As it will become apparent throughout this article, territorial conflicts cannot be separated from the functions of colonialism and capitalism, which work to disjoint people from their lands and their relationships.

**Empire, necropolitics, and Indigenous life**

In the *Transit of Empire*, Chickasaw theorist Jodi Byrd argues that ideas about Indianess allows empire to move politically and geographically to expand across the globe. Empire classifies people and countries into those who can be enslaved or displaced and those who can be killed in the name of progress and capitalism. Such classifications depend “upon the transit of Indianness” (Byrd, 2011, p. xxiii). From Byrd’s (2011) perspective, making Others, either countries or peoples, of the Global South into “Indians” enables the administration of foreign countries and Indigenous nations alike through time, property, and subjectivities (p. xxiii). First World states founded on settler colonial formations are actively implicated in current processes of global governance and resource extraction. While stressing their democratic liberalism, their civility, and understandings of consultation, these countries fuel capitalist expansion and use a constellation of strategies that conceal new forms of violent dispossession. Byrd (2011) explains that in its transit throughout different geographies, empire maps itself on top of Indigenous peoples creating different dynamics that affect people as they are made to move within empire. One cannot acknowledge imperialism without considering its internal colonialism. Similarly, I argue, one cannot fully consider the impact of the movement of empire without acknowledging how it locates itself on top of the colonial legacies of the Global South. The knowledge, narratives, and practices that sustain economic globalization continue to rely on colonial constructions of indigeneity and fictions of uneven human capabilities. Achilles Mbembe writes that the colony is the instance where these technologies of unequal human capabilities make imperial expansion possible. Colonial occupation includes the control over a specific territory, the classification of people, and the reconfiguration of a spatial order. In the colony, life is already determined by the power of death (Mbembe, 2003). Because Indigenous and African nations were historically located on the other side of the divide, land theft, violence, domination, slavery, and genocide were all considered legitimate practices in imperial expansions (Atiles-Osoria & Whyte, 2018). Through such practices, territories have visibly contracted, expanded, and been sustained by the active relegation of the colonized to an undetermined zone between subjecthood and objecthood. Mbembe (2001) observes that while in the past these colonial territorial transformations went hand in hand with the constitution of the modern state, since the 1980s the opposite has occurred. Mbembe (2001) writes that the state is no longer the only arbiter; it coexists with other forms of “private indirect government” (p. 80). This form of indirect government implies that functions supposed to be public and obligations flowing from the state are now performed by private actors for private ends (Mbembe, 2001).

Now, the technologies of death and violence have widened and deepened in the Global South. Dispossession occurs through a panoply of old and new logics including the superimposition of juridical frameworks and policies that deprive Indigenous communities of their livelihoods. In Mexico, the structural adjustment policies implemented in the early 1990s not only imposed different property logics on Indigenous territories but also contributed to fragment state power. The state not only redirects once communal and public patrimonies into the hands of foreign corporations but its authority coexists with different actors including corporations, old oligarchies, paramilitary groups, and organized crime, which mobilize their power to deconstruct existing Indigenous territorialities for their own benefit. For example, transnational corporations condition investment
upon changes aimed at facilitating their activities in natural resource enclaves. While mining companies expect the state to use violence to protect their interests, they resort to fraud, coercion, deceit, and intimidation to obtain access to Indigenous land (Montemayor, 2008; Tetreault, 2016). Indigenous communities are cornered to abandon their communal character and to disintegrate as collective entities. Acts of gratuitous violence and cruelty are intended to eliminate, intimidate, displace, and dominate bodies in natural resource-rich enclaves (Estévez, 2018). Human beings who cannot produce value according to the logics of capital are not only let to die but, in cases in which the vitality of the market seems to be jeopardized by opposition to megaprojects, “strangled” (Povinelli, 2011, p. 22). Amnesty International (2018) reports that between 2015 and 2017, 437 activists were murdered; 75 percent of these cases occurred in Latin America and all of them were connected to extractive activities. In Mexico, people who have been displaced from their lands are mainly Indigenous and peasants from communities with self-sustaining economies (Valladares de la Cruz, 2018). A brief analysis of Mexican newspapers confirms that those most affected by this violence are women, environmental and human rights activists, small land holders, and journalists. For resource extraction to operate, bodies, and subjectivities must be violently controlled (Machado Aráoz, 2014).

Violence, however, extends beyond human bodies. Although necropolitics is useful to explore the technologies of death that support dispossession, it is limited in its ability to account for how the earth itself, including water, mountains, land, animals, plants and the interdependent relationships among these different forms of life, become entangled with violence. Pugliese (2013) argues that colonial and imperialistic discourses enable narratives of possessions and conquest of uncivilized Indigenous inhabitants by capturing the inhuman, as the “quintessential ‘unsavable life’” (p. 97). Such a hierarchization of life creates an anthropocentric and species politics that correlates with a model of the human, based on a racist, gender, sexist, and ableist bias, in which man stands for colonized, racialized, and gendered people are governed through death. She argues that structural gendered violence, whether it manifests in the household, on the streets, or as a result of non-state violence, is an expression of the attempts made to recover the territorial sovereignty lost through colonialism. In this context, Segato argues, the state competes with parasate institutions for the control of territory and bodies. Thus, gendered violence cannot be reduced to the woman question without depoliticizing the impact of colonial modernity and the way in which bodies are subjugated (Segato, 2016).

The importance of Segato’s decolonial critique cannot be underestimated. It connects recent feminist movements against gendered violence, including the Women’s Strike on March 9, 2020 in Mexico City, where thousands of women took the streets to protest femicide; or the so-called glitter revolution in August 2019, called in response to a rape of a girl by police officers as well as the movement #Ni Una Menos (Not One Less). Segato’s work sheds light on how these feminists’ articulations politicize women’s deaths bodies as catalysts of resistance against the coloniality of power (de Sousa, 2019). However, while these analyses have significantly contributed to the visibility of “feminicidal violence” (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2006, p. 22), such efforts have overlooked the experiences of Indigenous women. Representatives of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (National Coalition of Indigenous Women) and the Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas (Continental Liaison of Indigenous Women) note that despite efforts, Indigenous women are still invisible in the numbers of reported femicide and gender violence. They argue that gender violence against Indigenous women cannot be separated from colonialism and other historical conditions (Del Jurado Mendoza & Don Juan Pérez, 2019).

Possessing a woman, trans, or non-conforming Indigenous body heightens the risk that one’s body will not be accounted for. Colonial violence has and continues to structure the conditions under which Indigenous women’ life and death occur. Universal accounts of gender violence and embodiment neglect “the situated realities of historical...
and spatial sedimentations of power” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 36). Such narratives erase how the expansion of resource extraction targets Indigenous women most persistently yet differently. Indigenous women have been subjected to disproportionate public aggression, sexual assault, and the devaluation of their reproductive capabilities through eugenic practices. When Indigenous women’s bodies and reproductive capabilities are targeted, it is not individuals that are made vulnerable to elimination but entire Indigenous communities. Moreover, failing to account for Indigenous survival and social transformation undermines Indigenous women’s agency. I argue that by connecting the expansion of resource extraction, colonialism, and body land, the agency of Indigenous women can be historicized, avoiding the reduction of their bodies to a human corporeality that can be stripped bare.

I have argued elsewhere that body land can be understood as an ontological relation, a continuum that does not separate human beings from territory and other beings. As such, this concept helps us move beyond framing land as the only entity that enables Indigenous existence. Body land is not only useful to evoke the impacts of resource extraction on the bodies of human and non-human entities but also the potential that emerges when these bodies come together to refuse colonial power (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2020). In this way, Indigenous women’s refusal of colonial and capitalist gendered violence is not mere self-preservation but the exercise of practices of relationality and freedom that center Indigenous life. Goeman (2016), for example, sees bodies and land as conduits of connection (p. 101). Putting forward a framework of relationality, Yazzie and Baldy (2018) argue that water is not a resource to be weaponized for the interests of capital but a part of the self, a relative. In the idea of Indigenous life and relationships, multiple strands of materiality, corporeality, kinship, and affect come into being to dream of other futures.

Refusing the violence of resource extraction in Oaxaca

In the following, I lay out the violence of resource extraction by focusing on two layers of destruction—dispossession of Indigenous lands and Indigenous life—which are activated through necropolitical extraction of mining and water contamination. It is my contention that mining destroys Indigenous bodies, bodies of land, bodies of water, non-humans, and other entities, all of which constitute Indigenous life. By turning to the lens of violence to different forms of life, I show the reach of necropower and demonstrate how the micropolitics of everyday life intersects with the defense of territory and non-human beings in Oaxaca.

As an Indigenous Binizaá (people of the cloud, also known as Zapotecs) woman from Oaxaca, I travel south to my home territory regularly. In January 2020, I traveled to Oaxaca City, which is known for its smoky mezcal, intense art scene, and culturally diverse Indigenous peoples. I arrived in the tiny airport and was greeted by a gigantic banner from mining company Minera Cuzcatlán, which featured a green, bright, well preserved landscape. The banner read: “Bienvenidos a Oaxaca donde el progreso coexiste con la naturaleza” (Welcome to Oaxaca, where progress and nature coexists). A subsidiary of Fortuna Silver Mines, a Vancouver-based company, Minera Cuzcatlán operates a gold and silver mine just an hour south of the airport. The governor of Oaxaca, Alejandro Murat, says this state produces some of the biggest quantities of gold and silver in Mexico and has one of the largest iron reserves in Latin America (Matías, 2018).

Although the company has invested considerable resources to represent itself as a caring contributor to the economy of the impoverished region, Zapotec residents claim otherwise. They accuse the company of inciting violence, which has already killed several activists, divided the community of San José del Progreso, and contaminated the Coyote Creek. Since the arrival of the company in 2006, life in this community has drastically changed. According to community members, it is divided into two halves, with two churches, two markets, and two separate taxi services used by those working at the mine and those opposed to its existence. According to the Coordinadora de Pueblos Unidos del Valle de Ocotlán (Coalition of the United Peoples of Ocotlán Valley), the tension is felt as soon as one passes the welcoming arch, where a heavily armed policeman monitors who comes in and goes out of the community. The community’s social fabric has been broken (Hernández, 2019).

San José del Progreso is a subsistence farming community located in the Oaxaca’s Central Valley. It was constituted as an ejido in 1927 and extended twice in 1934 and 1986 to a total of 5,040 hectares (Macías, 2014). In 1999, the federal government Programa Nacional de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales (PROCEDE) (Program of Certification of Ejidal Rights and Titling) was accepted by this community in an attempt to solve long-standing territorial disputes with neighboring communities of this municipality.

However, the program also made it possible to privatize communally held land creating the conditions for Minera Cuzcatlán to sign usufruct contracts with individual land holders. In the Civilian Observation Mission Report (2013), interviewed community members confirmed that after PROCEDE concluded, ejido lands adjacent to the mine were bought by Minerales de Oaxaca to make mining activities easier. Changes to Article 27 to liberalize Indigenous control over communal and ejido lands in 1992 created the conditions for foreign corporations to come and grab land and natural resources. At the same time, these changes were separated from environmental legislations under the assumption that the market would play a role in preventing environmental harms (Tetreault et al., 2010). In practical terms, these changes left communities and municipalities alone in facing the consequences of mining activities. The CEO of Aucanita Corporation, another Canadian mining company noted that, given the foreign investment mining brings to Mexico, “a politician would have to be crazy to do anything to the mining industry” (Wilton, 2012, para 9).
The conflict erupted when the mining company started negotiating with individual land holders and obtained permission from the municipal authority to explore for minerals at an abandoned subterranean silver and gold mine it had acquired. With the transformation of the mine into an open pit operation, minerals are extracted and depleted at a much faster pace than they were in past subterranean mines. Soon the community experienced the explosions that destroyed the old mine’s tunnels along with a sudden water shortage as this vital liquid was diverted to the mine. The region is already dry, and so Zapotec women were very concerned about the mine’s overuse of water. Despite free, prior, and informed consent being considered a right, the community had no idea that the municipal, state, and federal governments had colluded to grant a 50-year mining concession to Minera Cuzcatlán for 701.61 hectares of its land. Between 2006 and 2013, Fortuna Silver Mines Inc. acquired 32 additional mining concessions in the state of Oaxaca. These “concessions cover 51,776 hectares” and extend to the east, south and north to the Ocotlán, Tláviche and Ejutla districts and their numerous Indigenous communities (Chapman & Kelly, 2013, pp. 21–22).

Community members demanded the immediate suspension of mining activities, claiming that the concession was illegal because the lands were communal and thus any land use change required the consent of the collective assembly. Minera Cuzcatlán claimed that it had already gained authorization from the community via two public assemblies held in 2006 and 2007 respectively. However, those who oppose mining argued that mining was never discussed at those meetings. They also accused the company of manufacturing consultation through corrupt practices that divided the community. For example, they noted that instead of addressing the communal assembly, the company representatives met with individual land holders (Civilian Observation Mission Report, 2013). The Civilian Observation Mission, a coalition of Indigenous organizations and Mexican and international non-governmental organizations, reported that community members interviewed spoke of the illegal involvement of the mining company in the political life of San José del Progreso. This included supporting municipal authorities that were and are pro-mining and distributing resources and handouts only to community members that were favorable to mining (Civilian Observation Mission Report, 2013).

In 2007, Zapotec residents of San José del Progreso and affected neighboring communities created the organization Coalition of the United Peoples of Ocotlán Valley with the active participation of women. It initiated a legal process insisting that the company had violated these communities’ right to free, prior, and informed consent. Later, in 2009, community members, mostly women, blocked the entrance of the mine and demanded an environmental assessment. Women had no option but to be at the frontline, maintaining the blockade day and night because their spouses had to go to work. Three months later, state and federal police were deployed to evict protesters. A woman described that when the policemen and their dogs arrived, a police man ordered her to drop the stick she had in her hand. She refused, arguing that she wanted her grandchildren to know that their grandmother did fight (Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil, 2018).

In a display of force, 1,500 officers were mobilized to evict protesters. Helicopters and dogs were used to remove 100 people. Speaking to the Civilian Observation Mission, a community member noted that the government looked bad and that it used tactics that were completely disproportionate (Civilian Observation Mission Report, 2013). Twenty-three people were arrested. Intimidation and violence at the hands of armed private security guards protecting the company’s interests increased. When community members gathered to protest that water from the community reservoir continued to be diverted to the mine, they were shot at by the municipal police and one protester was killed (La Jornada, 2012). The Coalition of the United Peoples of Ocotlán Valley denounced in several occasions that the mining company had hired armed security personnel, who routinely intimidated opponents to the mine (Ruiz Guadalajara, 2013).

Zapotec women have been the most impacted by the mining company operating in this community. Because their husbands and sons have to go to work, the women are the ones involved in resistance activities. An Indigenous activist said that women did not have a choice but to learn how to fight. They found the courage to grab sticks, rocks and machetes (Villanueva, 2018). When their partners are killed, the women assume the double responsibility of sustaining the family and continuing to resist. It is women who live in constant fear for the safety and wellbeing of their families. It is usually women who suffer when they see their water sources contaminated and they still need to perform household’s chores. Ironically, the same issues that kept women at home have brought them outside the home to defend their territory. As one activist stated in the documentary Land Defenders from San José del Progreso, Oaxaca, Mexico, A doctor told me in relation to our struggle against the mine, that we women could get uterine cancer because of the contamination. That information gave us more reasons to fight (Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil, 2018).

Women are often criminalized for defending their territory and denied the right to access public resources, including the health center services. A woman activist observed, Some people say that we women are fools because we are against the mine and do not benefit from it, I am not. Hunger can throw me but my pride will lift me up. I am not selling out (Villanueva, 2018). Women and children do not feel safe with the presence of the police or private security personnel in the community. Women maintain that violence started with the arrival of the mine and insist that the solution is not the police, whose presence only exacerbates people’s sense of insecurity (Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil, 2018).

Minera Cuzcatlán, like other Canadian mining companies operating abroad, casts itself as blameless and represents violence as endemic to the places where they perform their activities (Butler, 2015). However, their
method of operating includes the illegal appropriation of land, co-optation of state and local authorities, overexploitation of resources, ecological disasters produced by open pit mines, and intimidation of Indigenous women (Montemayor, 2008). Paula Butler’s (2015) study in Africa shows that Canadian mining operations disrupts Canada’s image as a humane, liberal, global actor. Butler argues that “mining is a storied” endeavor, with narratives used to conceal and rationalize the violence inflicted (p. 4). I would add that such narratives also gloss over the connection between colonialism in Canada and abroad.

In San José del Progreso, violence against those who oppose mining is inflicted with the eye toward fragmenting the social fabric of this Zapotec community and preventing the possibility for it to exist in the future through communal actions. The violent logic of capitalist dispossession endures through the expropriation of collective subjectivities. Although the labor of those who work at and support the mine is a form of agency, it is shaped by their unequal position in the power relations they participate in. Women working at the mine are not only paid less but are also “degraded” and perceived as “sex workers” simply for working in a densely masculine environment (Civilian Observation Mission Report, 2013, p. 31). While working at one of the tenth richest mines in silver production in the world, workers can barely make their ends meet (Hernández, 2019). Besides not being able to fully support their families, people’s bodies are experiencing changes such as hair loss and skin rashes that they link to the mine (Hernández, 2019). The necropower shaping their lives simultaneously reveals the agency they claim and the dispossession they experience. Although we cannot ignore Indigenous peoples’ aspirations for economic development, such desires are limited by the colonial global economic scheme in which mining operates.

The linkage between bodies, subjectivities and global capital constitutes a chain of values in the inflicted gendered violence at the community level. Women activists face specific risks because through their struggle they simultaneously refuse both the violence of extraction and the community’s gendered norms. In a roundtable organized by the Civilian Observation Mission with women of San José del Progreso regarding the conflict, participants noted some of positive consequences of the struggle. They pointed out that on a personal level, women have found the voice they did not have before. Women observed that men used to be the ones making decisions in the general assembly and that is no longer the case. The fight against mining has opened the space for women to both have a voice and the power to vote. They noted that now women participate even more than men (Civilian Observation Mission Report, 2013).

Indigenous women are not only at the front of land defense struggles but they also insist in the need to rethink the place from which they fight. If their lives are embedded in relationships that create community, they also want to reimagine forms of communal social organization that divides responsibilities evenly between men and women and that that does not cost women their health, bodies and dignity.

Violence, however, is not only inflicted on human bodies and community of bodies but also on the body of the earth itself, including the air and water. In Indigenous life worlds, air, soil, and water, are animated entities. Water is a part of oneself. Water runs through our human veins and connects us to everything (Yazzie & Baldy, 2018). Ancestral spirits were themselves transformed into trees, mountains, wind, clouds and rain. By its own nature, extraction involves a massive transformation and destruction of the earth. The smoke and dust from the mine’s mills affect the air that the community breathes and damages people’s clothes. The dust causes the crops to dry up, producing a foul smell. It also settles on the grass that the livestock consume, eventually extending into the food system.

As an example of the concerns people have about the effect of mining occurred in October 2018 when heavy rains caused the overflow of a tailing dam operated by the mining company. Members of the community of Magdalena Ocotlán, located less than 5 kilometers away from San José del Progreso, watched with horror as a white, fetid stream of mud entered the Coyote Creek, which flows into the Atoyac River, the most significant tributary in Oaxaca City. The authorities of Magdalena Ocotlán insisted that the source of contamination was the mine. The mining company once again denied any wrongdoing.

The warfare by which dispossession is accomplished engulfs different forms of life, entities and relationships, whether we are capable of seeing them or not. Robert Nichols (2018) suggests that Indigenous dispossession can be understood as “desecration,” which is concerned with the degradation of an entity “whose moral worth cannot be measured in purely anthropocentric terms... . . . Desecration implies that the earth itself is the injured party” (p. 12). Building on this understanding, I would argue that dispossession desecrates Indigenous life and erases any possibility of relating to the non-human world in ways that are affective, reciprocal and responsible. The Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (2017) (Feminist Collective Critical Views of Territory) writes that the relationship Indigenous people have with the cosmos, be it to survive, sustain their families, grow food, or regenerate community life, is also taken away from them. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that territory is the network of relationships produced by different forms of life.

While the violence of mining is felt by the community of bodies, Indigenous women’s bodies become a territory from where Indigenous collective death is refused. Indigenous women argue that they are not fighting just for themselves, that it goes beyond their physical being and community. When asked about what land defense meant, an Indigenous woman activist noted, It is the defense of everything. It’s the defense of wind, sun, earth, water, minerals, flora and fauna, and all of the people who inhabit a place (personal communication, April 6, 2018). Another research participant put it this way, It’s a struggle for our children, so they can continue to live as Indigenous people (personal communication, January 4, 2019).

In June, 2019 Indigenous communities from the Central Valley celebrated the first guelaguetza (ancient gathering
aimed at reaffirming reciprocal relationships among humans and between humans and the non-human world) against Mining. Women, men and children began with a ritual of gratitude to the earth. They noted that they were recovering the ancient essence of the guelaguetza, which has been transformed into a touristic festival by the Oaxacan government. In the words of an Indigenous male activist, it is these relationships that can sustain us as Indigenous communities (personal communication, January 4, 2019). While Cartesian separations of mind and body, land and body, and life and non-life, enable possessions and conquest, Indigenous women refuse the death of the web of relationships that constitutes Indigenous life. Women’s bodies coming together are central to protect Indigenous dignity through the protection of other beings and entities.

On March 8, 2020, women across Oaxaca came together to create a dialogue among women who live in territories threatened by resource extraction. They began and ended with rituals to honor the earth and those women activists killed in their efforts to protect their lands, the water, and the environment. They also honored those who have been victims of gendered violence. They reflected on the idea that women’s bodies are the territory where violence is first felt but also where immense strength comes from. While natural resource extraction separates different forms of life and bodies, Indigenous women insist on bringing body, land, and non-human beings together.

Conclusion

By turning the lens of violence to different forms of life and entities, this paper has showed the reach of necropolitics and the ways in which different bodies become implicated. Concentrating on the violence of resource extraction challenges the notion of progress and reminds us that dispossession involves more than the materiality of land. It impacts those whose lands are taken away, it affects the bodies of women and communities of bodies who are dispossessed of their relationships to territory and the non-human world. Dispossession involves the devastation of Indigenous life, whose worth extends beyond anthropocentric understandings of political formations. Indigenous ontologies exemplify the vibrant agency of non-human entities, what is just rocks and minerals for capitalists is of significant importance for the social and cultural reproduction of Indigenous life. By focusing on the non-human world, I move away from framing land as the only entity that enables Indigenous life. Indigenous women’s refusal of violence brings the micropolitics of everyday life with the defense of territory and non-human beings. What is novel about these struggles is that they transform the right to possess something into the human obligation to protect non-human entities, the dignity of Indigenous women, and the communal relationships Indigenous peoples have with territory.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

ORCID iD

Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6817-2632

Glossary

**Nahuatl**
Zapotec people of the Sapote place; name given to the Binizáá by the Mexica or Aztec people

**Dixhazá (Zapotec language)**
Binizáá people of the clouds; one of the largest Indigenous peoples in Mexico which inhabit the Oaxaca valleys, highlands and Isthmus of Tehuantepec; also, known as Zapotees
guelaguetza ancient practice through which Indigenous communities in Oaxaca affirm their reciprocal relationships with each other and with the non-human world.

**Spanish**
Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo Feminist Collective Critical Views of Territory
Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas National Coalition of Indigenous Women
Coordinadora de Pueblos Unidos del Valle de Ocotlán Coalition of the United Peoples of Ocotlán Valley
ejido a plot of land granted by the government to individual landholders who enjoy usufruct rights; and which cannot be sold or bought; also, a larger area of communally held land that is used for agricultural activities
Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas Continental Liaison of Indigenous Women
hacienda a colonial system of economic organization that depended upon the concentration of land or large estates and indenture labor
#Ni Una Menos Not One Less; a grassroots feminist movement fighting against gender violence; started in Argentina and spread throughout Latin America
Programa Nacional de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales (PROCEDE) Program of Certification of Ejidal Rights and Titling
Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil NGO located in Oaxaca City. It provides education to and supports Indigenous communities struggling to defend their land rights
territorio cuerpo-tierra body-earth territory; a political statement that evokes the conscious practice of recovering our bodies as an emancipatory political act
Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Women’s Earth Alliance. (2016). Violence on the land, violence on our bodies. Building an Indigenous response to environmental violence. http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBReport Toolkit2016.pdf

Nichols, R. (2018). Theft is property. The recursive logic of dispossession. Political Theory, 46(1), 3–28.

Paredes, J. (2011). Hilando fino desde el feminismo comunitario [Fine spinning communitarian feminism]. Mujeres Creando Comunidad.

Povinelli, E. (2011). Economies of abandonment: Social belonging and endurance in late liberalism. Duke University Press.

Pugliese, J. (2013). State violence and the execution of law: Biopolitical caesurae of torture, black sites, drones. Routledge.

Quinan, Q., & Thiele, K. (2020). Biopolitics, necropolitics, cosmopolitics—Feminist and queer interventions: An introduction. Journal of Gender Studies, 29(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1693173

Ruiz Guadalajara, J. C. (2013, April 24). “Nueva” ley minera: la farsa que viene [“New” mining law: The coming farce]. La Jornada. https://www.jornada.com.mx/2013/04/24/opinion/026a2pol

Segato, R. (2014). Las nuevas formas de la guerra y el cuerpo de las mujeres [The new forms of war and women’s bodies]. Revista Sociedade e Estado, 29(2), 314–371. http://www.scielo.br/pdf/sev29n2/03.pdf

Segato, R. (2016). Patriarchy from margin to center: Discipline, territoriality, and cruelty in the apocalyptic phase of capital. The South Atlantic Quarterly, 115(3), 615–624.

Servicios para una Educación Alternativa Asociación Civil. (2018). Land defenders: San José del Progreso, Oaxaca, Mexico [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRF6x0WTrOs

Simpson, A. (2014). Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states. University of Minnesota Press.

Tetreault, D. (2016). Free market mining in Mexico. Critical Sociology, 42(4-5), 643–659.

Tetreault, D., McCulligh, C., & Flores, R. (2010). La exigibilidad de los derechos ambientales en México: el caso del Río Santiago [The enforceability of environmental rights in Mexico: The case of the Santiago River]. In E. Valencia Lomeli (Ed.), Perspectivas del universalismo en México [Perspectives on Universalism in Mexico] (pp. 121–132). ITESO-Fundación Konrad Adenauer.

Threadcraft, S. (2017). North American necropolitics and gender: On #BlackLivesMatter and Black femicide. The South Atlantic Quarterly, 116(3), 553–559. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3961483

Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2015). Place in research: Theory, methodology and methods. Routledge.

Valladares de la Cruz, L. R. (2018). El asedio de las autonomías indígenas por el modelo minero extractivo en México [The siege of Indigenous autonomy and the extractive mining model in Mexico]. Iztapalapa. Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 85(39), 103–131. http://dx.doi.org/10.28928/revistaiztapalapa/852018/ate5/valladaresdelacruz

Villanueva, P. (2018, May 10). La mina que dividió a un pueblo [The mine that divided a town]. Oxfam Mexico. https://www.oxfammexico.org/historias/la-mina-que-dividi%C3%B3-un-pueblo

Wilton, J. (2012, November 13). The high cost of silver and gold: Deadly consequences in Mexican mines. Latino Rebels. https://www.latinorebels.com/2012/11/13/the-high-cost-of-silver-and-gold-deadly-consequences-in-mexican-mines/

Wright, M. (2011). Necropolitics, narcopolitics, and feminicide: Gendered violence on the Mexico-U.S. border. Signs, 33(3), 707–731.

Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation: An argument. CR: The New Centennial Review, 3, 257–337.

Yazzie, M., & Baldy, C. R. (2018). Introduction: The politics of water. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 17(1), 1–18.