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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By David Roca Basadre

20.03.2023

Interview with Eduardo Gudynas, researcher in Social Ecology

***"Necropolitics is letting die to keep a predatory economy alive"***



**Sources:** CTXT [Image: Eduardo Gudynas. PROVIDED BY THE INTERVIEWEE]

At 63, Eduardo Gudynas (Montevideo, Uruguay, 1960) is the youngest person in the list of the 75 key thinkers of the last 150 years on development issues prepared by the geographer David Simon, of the University of London. There are only eight Latin Americans on the list. As a researcher at the Latin American Center for Social Ecology (CLAES), a discipline in which he has a master's degree, he has been following the problems of development, the environment and social movements in Latin America for more than three decades, and has written multiple books on these topics.

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His most recent publications are an assessment of human rights and nature violations in Bolivian extractivism, and an analysis of the impacts of the war in Ukraine on the political ecology of Latin America. In addition, he collaborates with South American citizen organizations and university institutions.

Despite focusing his studies on his continent Gudynas was the first Latin American to receive the Arne Naess Chair in Environment and Global Justice from the University of Oslo (Norway), is also Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Munich (Germany) and has recently joined the committee for the transformation of the Club of Rome's global economy.

Here we talk to him about conflicts socio-environmental, rights of nature, and politics.

### **Talk Of socio-environmental conflicts, how do they occur?**

They are disputes with social components where ecological or territorial demands are very relevant. Include For example, the protests of local communities against mining ventures or oil tankers. Citizen reactions that incorporate environmental issues and territorial have a long history.

It comes to mind, for example, the first massive indigenous march in Bolivia that had the territory as its slogan and dignity, and that was in 1990. In that mobilization they were present social, environmental and territorial ingredients. Although in stories historical conflicts against mining at the beginning of the twentieth century are already They wielded those components.

### **¿What It is what differentiates the concept of territory for indigenous peoples from How does traditional common sense understand it? How is all this expressed in the practice?**

The territory is a social construction, It is defined by experiences, histories or religiosities, say, of peasant communities or indigenous peoples. What we find listening, Accompanying or participating in some conflicts is the defense of a space geographical that is considered as own. This condition is called territory. Therefore, space or geography are not synonymous with territory, and In the same region there can be multiple territories, even overlapping among them.

### **¿All Are socio-environmental conflicts similar?**

The importance of accompanying and listening to It is evident that there are many types of Conflicts. Among the most visible are those that are a reaction to threats to health, the integrity of the environment or the usurpation of territories considered as their own. There are rooted the protests so common that They exist before the mining or oil companies.

But there are also conflicts where what is in dispute is to get compensation in money or works of infrastructure, such as a local health post or building for a school. There is no closed opposition on arrival, let's say for the case of a mining company, but the fight is to get part of the economic benefit.

At the same time, there are conflicts that operate in the opposite direction. They are the mobilizations that demand the arrival of that type of ventures, arguing that they will bring investment and employment. You get there as well as very complicated situations, where there are disputes between different groups of a community, with some in favor and others against these undertakings.

What happens in many countries is that from the capital Concessions are granted in areas that technicians seem to believe are empty

### **¿What There is, in general, a relationship between socio-environmental conflicts and action national policy?**

Many conflicts are intimate Associations with problems, and especially with the miseries of politics conventional. A good number of them explode as a result of decisions, actions or inactions in public policies taken by States, as they can be the concessions granted to mining or oil companies. In other cases there are an absent State complicit, which lacks the controls and monitoring of the Effects of intensive agriculture.

Many of these disputes are associated with corruption and increasing levels of violence, where politics participates in multiple modes in those evils. The extreme cases are in the murder of human rights or environmental defenders in different countries, with the more serious situations, for example in Brazil and Colombia.

### **¿What Does it happen exactly?**

What happens in many countries is that From the capital city, mining or oil concessions or permits are granted of agricultural expansion, in areas that technicians seem to believe are empty, belonging to no one, or which, while they know them occupied, do not consider relevant to local groups. In this way, the territory of a community Indigenous is suddenly inside an oil polygon, and soon Soldiers, workers and technicians arrive to invade their lands. That makes it inevitable Let a conflict erupt.

In the 60s, a little more than 200 million were exported of tons of natural resources. In the mid-2010s, exported 700 million

### **¿How Do we recognize the colonial heritage in such situations?**

The colonial heritage is present from Many modes. Conventional politics, especially with that repeated bias Latin American towards caudillismo, has a clear colonial heritage. But

At the same time, economic conditions are also immersed in a subordination that has a lot of colonial. This is very evident in the extractivism, since they are massive extractions of natural resources that are export to global markets, repeating an international insertion based on raw materials that has centuries. At present it explains good Part of the most acute environmental conflicts on the continent that are associated with the appropriation of natural resources to be exported. It's like if the colonial link were maintained, but dressed in other clothes, that, Instead of being led by kings and viceroys, it is now decided on the stock exchanges. of commerce.

**¿And what, seen this way, is the relationship between globalization and conflict? Environmental?**

Globalization determines a relationship in which the Latin American region has a subordinate role. The prices of the Natural assets are determined in financial centers, as is the case with the listing minerals in London or agri-food in Chicago. If it rises The value of copper or soybeans, then all countries start looking for copper or planting soybeans. Global conditions have such a strong power that determine national development strategies.

**¿And what is the level or intensity of those resource export flows Natural?**

The volume of resource extraction Natural is brutal. I think the level that has gone unnoticed is going unnoticed. reached that depredation of nature. In the 1960s, they were exported a little more than 200 million tons of natural resources, such as minerals, hydrocarbons and agricultural products, forestry, etc. In the middle of the 2010s, they were exported in the order of 700 million tons. Or It more than tripled, and that makes every corner of the continent is facing problems with these extractivisms.

The rhythm, intensity and volume of Appropriation of nature is dizzying. It is not surprising, therefore, that conflicts and resistance to this advance multiply. From this mode, the global conditions determining trade and prices, They end up influencing those outbursts.

China absorbs more than three times as much resources as it does export to the European Union

**¿And how we can identify/recognize the pressure of those foreign interests in the development of socio-environmental conflicts?**

In some sectors the interests Foreigners are decisive, as we know for example by the performance of the large mining corporations, or by the investment funds of capitalism global that make their money fall into all kinds of projects in our continent.

But it must be clear that the situation A lot has changed. In the 1960s, the main destinations of export of Latin American raw materials were United States, Canada and Western European countries. In recent years the destination is above all China and other Asian nations. What's more, those flows to North America, and China absorbs more than three times as many resources as are exported to the European Union. In many cases, the pressure on our territories and resources increasingly depend on Party decisions Chinese Communist, in Beijing.

### **¿What Role do national economic actors play there?**

What the experience shows Latin American, and that is becoming quite clear in the continent, but Not so much in other regions, it is that the ownership of natural resources or The companies that extract and market them, do not condition or ensure that They will fulfill mandates of social and ecological justice.

In addition to foreign interests, National actors operate in the same way. We have the cases of acquaintances Mining companies with national capital, mining cooperatives Bolivians who even present themselves as revolutionaries, and tens of thousands of farmers thrown into intensive agriculture based on agrochemicals. All of them are behind many socio-environmental conflicts. And we can't disguise the case of the state oil companies, which also fall into social and environmental impacts of all kinds.

### **¿Can Linking recent social conflicts and popular mobilization in Chile, Colombia, Peru, and other Latin American countries, with conflicts Environmental?**

We are facing disputes that have some Common aspects but they are very different from each other. Each case allows warn that national situations are different, and although they appear Factors that are repeated, there are also peculiarities of each country.

In the case of Chile, a widespread citizen outburst, which multiplied in several cities, expressing weariness with politics and the institutional regime in that country.

In contrast, in Ecuador they occurred uprisings led by indigenous organizations, fueled by Mobilizations from rural communities and support from some popular sectors Urban. Claims against mining, for example, were present, but That issue did not lead these mobilizations.

### **¿No Were socio-environmental conflicts perceived?**

Yes, of course, they are present. They are followed multiplying reactions in defense of territories and in demand to secure the quality of life and the conservation of Nature everywhere. The number of conflicts continues to increase, and in several cases they

manage to stop some very harmful ventures, and that in turn becomes an example for another community, in another region or another country, which also decides to mobilize.

In Peru, a presidency and a congress are held in a succession of deaths and repressions

**¿To the form that States assume such conflicts is what you are referring to. When you talk about necropolitics?**

In my view we are entering Times of necropolitics. I borrow that term from the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, to sustain a reflection that shows that it is accepting death. People are tolerated to die, or languish in a Eternal condition of living dead plunged into poverty and exclusion, is They tolerate criminal gangs and hitmen, and the cutting down of forests and polluting waters. That acceptance explains that characters repulsive people like Jair Bolsonaro could win a government. It is the same as It happens now in Peru, where a presidency and a congress are held in a succession of deaths and repressions. That letting die was consolidated during the Long crisis due to the pandemic. Necropolitics is letting die, but for Keep a predatory kind of economy alive.

Conflicts erupting in resistance Extractivism is one of the fronts of opposition to this indifference with Death, and at the same time, are what feed the flames of alternatives Dedicated to life.

**In A more political sense, how should we propose alternatives both local and regional and, finally, global, threats against nature?**

Incredible innovations have emerged, especially from South America. Recognition of the rights of the Nature is a substantial advance, and especially under the formulation achieved in Ecuador. This framework allows us to take the traditions of indigenous peoples, as well as the critical positions of Western knowledge, and articulate them to Recognize non-humans with their own values.

The same happened with the platform of the Buen Vivir in its original meanings, since it is a critical construction In the face of conventional development, but which launches alternatives that are post-capitalist and post-socialist at the same time.

These and other positions reached a Extraordinary vigor, and that is why they were even formalized in the Constitution Ecuatorian. That demand is very powerful in Latin America.

If communities were informed and consulted local, most extractivist projects would not be approved

**¿How Did that translate into public policy?**

Many of these ideas were used to Propose new public policies. It is understood that the rights of the Nature meant that new oil exploitation could not be approved in the Amazon given its impacts on biodiversity, soils and water, Challenges for public policies are immediately generated. The question Immediate is how to design a post-oil transition that allows us to leave behind hydrocarbons.

From such concerns They designed the so-called post-extractivist transitions. They could be described such as action plans, with measures ranging from new regulations to changes in taxes, which would apply if we were in charge of a government that intends to move towards Good Living. The experience South American, with all its achievements, but also with its defeats, allows Build real plans of government and action, very sophisticated in several Fronts.

### **¿Which one is the balance? What is the horizon of these alternatives?**

The current pace and intensity in the Appropriation of natural resources can only be maintained with increasing levels of violence and under conditions of poverty. If there are adequate social and environmental assessments, if the local communities, then most projects would not be approved current extractivists.

But conflicts multiply local, and meanwhile the majorities, who are in the cities, would seem to have Naturalized that nature is destroyed, it is brought closer to the peoples indigenous and peasants are marginalized. What I mean is that there are many reactions and protests, but they are still insufficient because governments and Politics persist in the same strategies, and they do so because they have Important citizen support bases.

For certain sensitivities and postures it is understood that In life that is not human there are also subjects

### **In That framework, what do we mean by rights of nature?**

Human beings are assumed as subjects, and under that condition they are recognized rights. There is the condition determinant of the rights of people in their contemporary uses.

For certain sensitivities and postures He understands that in life that is not human there are also subjects. Once understand that condition, then they must automatically be recognized. rights.

That's what was discussed in the process. constituent of Ecuador, and that ended with the recognition of the rights of Nature. The new Constitution thus recognizes them, and places them as subjects to the collectives where life is based, such as a species. This is also important because it serves to remember that the rights of Nature They are not equal to the

so-called rights of animals, nor to the fact that they impose a Untouched environment where nothing can be grown or extracted. These rights allow the use of Nature as long as its Survival.

In parallel to the rights of Nature Human rights are maintained, including those involving Ensure health and environmental quality.

*Eduardo Gudynas is one of the main references of environmental thought in Latin America. Researcher at the Latin American Center for Social Ecology (CLAES) and author of multiple books on environmental and development issues; his texts on extractivism and on the rights of Nature have had many editions.*

Source: <https://ctxt.es/es/20230301/Politica/42354/David-Roca-Eduardo-Gudynas-ecologismo-entrevista-desarrollo.htm>

Rebellion 18.03.2023