

The transnational politics of community: Intervention, solidarity and resistance¹

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Abstract.

This article explores the transnational politics of community, challenging the conventional view of community as a territorially bound social entity. It highlights its political essence in responding to perceived existential threats amidst the impact of contemporary global crises upon local ways of life. Through case analyses of community development and resistance to mining in Ecuador, the article explores community as a symbolic construct emerging from social conflicts, capable of embodying meanings and sentiments expressed in broader political struggles. To facilitate a more nuanced political analysis, the essay employs Jacques Rancière's concept of community as an emergent political subjectification that disrupts established norms. The final section exemplifies and extends these ideas, investigating how the post-extractivist solidarity movement in Ecuador defines a transnational 'community of communities' to confront dominant orders of extractive capitalism.

Keywords.

Transnational politics; Community development; Post-extractivism; Solidarity movements; Political aesthetics

Resumen.

Este artículo explora la política transnacional de la comunidad, desafiando la visión convencional de la comunidad como una entidad social territorialmente vinculada. Destaca su esencia política al responder a amenazas existenciales percibidas en medio del impacto de las crisis globales contemporáneas en las formas de vida locales. A través del análisis de casos de desarrollo comunitario y resistencia a la minería en Ecuador, el artículo explora la comunidad como un constructo simbólico que surge de conflictos sociales, capaz de encarnar significados y sentimientos expresados en luchas políticas más amplias. Para facilitar un análisis político más matizado, el ensayo emplea el concepto de comunidad de Jacques Rancière como una subjetivación política emergente que perturba las normas establecidas. La sección final ejemplifica y amplía estas ideas, investigando cómo el movimiento de solidaridad post-extractivista en Ecuador define una 'comunidad de comunidades' transnacional para enfrentar órdenes dominantes del capitalismo extractivo.

Palabras clave.

Política transnacional; Desarrollo comunitario; Post-extractivismo; Movimientos de solidaridad; Estética política

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In March 2010, I co-organized an event at Trent University, bringing residents from Intag, a remote Andean region in northwestern Ecuador, to speak about their struggle. They were in Toronto to pursue legal action against the Toronto Stock Exchange and Copper Mesa Mining Corporation. Their goals were to address the failure to reduce harm to Intag farmers and leaders, who faced violence for opposing a large copper mine in their cloud forests, and advocate for legal reforms controlling Canadian-financed projects abroad. The event drew 40 to 50 students and Peterborough residents, and led to the formation of a Trent student solidarity group. Following the event, this group organized further events, connecting with an Ecuador solidarity network in Toronto. Deliberations on subsequent actions were framed around the pivotal concept of ‘community’ — portrayed both as the victim of mining exploitation and the central force resisting it. This contradicted the narratives put forth by the mining firm, which asserted that its community development initiatives would benefit the same ‘community’ (see Zorrillo, 2018). Thus, the discourse surrounding transnational intervention, resistance, and solidarity became entwined with the contested notion of ‘community’.

This immediately presents a problem of scale, for ‘community’ is commonly thought of as something local. Johannes Kniffki’s argument (2013) from ten years ago in this journal offers a salient point of departure. For Kniffki, the very thinking of ‘community’ typically involves placing it within territory within a national container. The consequences of such deep-seated methodological nationalism are that:

No sólo hay que describir detalladamente el contenido del contenedor, sino también toda variación de las reglas y de las normas que rigen en el seno de dicho contenedor. Este tipo de datos nos ofrecen un cuadro de soluciones, puesto que todas las relaciones que puedan revestir alguna relevancia, incluidas aquellas que sean problemáticas, coexisten con el concepto de territorio estatal (Kniffki, 2013:27).

Such ‘community’ is conceived as disconnected from the reality of everyday life constituted through trans-national relationships. Kniffki is concerned with the implications for international social work, for which he argues it poses a basic methodological problem: “Podemos pensar globalmente, pero para actuar, investigar empíricamente, practicar in situ, caemos en la trampa del nacionalismo o, en el caso del tema de la comunidad, en un territorialismo metodológico” (Ibid, 37).

The present essay contends that the methodological challenge under consideration is intertwined with the inherently political nature of community. While actions in the name of community are often framed on a national stage, this perspective overlooks the transnational political forces influencing modern communities. Communities are not only increasingly impacted by global problems; they are often taken as the way to solve those problems. The essay explores this tension, probing the political significance of community in an era where local ways of life face unprecedented threats.



The essay explores three general perspectives on community and draws on case analyses from Ecuador to illustrate the political implications of each. The first section considers diverging understandings of community in two contrasting visions of community development in Ecuador – one associated with mining-related initiatives and the other rooted in resistance to mining. This exploration prompts a theoretical reflection based in the fundamental dichotomy between describing community as an objective geographical and social entity –an affected local population subjected to intervention– and defining it as a symbolic construct emerging in the context of social conflict. I contend that the latter perspective exposes the concept of community to broader political discourse, but that the development of further conceptual tools are needed to comprehend this dynamic. The essay then builds upon the political aesthetics of community proposed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. This framework serves as a conceptual foundation for analyzing community as the fundamental building block of broader endeavors aimed at collectively enacting a more just world, exemplified by the post-extractivist solidarity movement in Ecuador.

By focusing on secondary literature involving case analysis, I examine the performative aspect of community-making, both in terms of situated processes of community formation and in scholarly and activist accounts of these. Thus we see diverse actors shape the narratives and identities, offering the possibility of interpreting such practices in relation to political discourses across different public arenas. The political significance of ‘community’ emerges not only from acts of resistance but also from its capacity to transcend established boundaries, in the process reshaping the essence of ‘community’ and fostering a transnational community of practice.

Community development as intervention and resistance

To begin to illustrate how divergent approaches to community play out in practice, and their possible political implications, I consider two articles from the *Journal of Community Development* that take up the cause of community in contrasting ways in the context of mining in Ecuador.

Deanna Kemp (2010) argues for a constructive role of community development projects aimed at improving economic, social and environmental outcomes for populations near mining operations. She discusses how mining companies institutionalize corporate responsibility and community development through commitments, policies, standards, and professional community practitioners formally represented within organizations and formal qualifications. Kemp observes that mining companies usually define ‘community’ as homogeneous geographical entities that “encompass people in the immediate impact zone ... [and] can also include landowners not living in the area and people affected by backward and forward linkages along mining production and supply chains.” (Kemp, 2010:202). Indeed, she notes that even when communities are portrayed as complex, evolving, political and heterogeneous in nature, management responses do not reflect this understanding.

However, Kemp ends up streamlining these nuances to underscore a pragmatic, practice-based approach to mining and community development at the local level. For example, she calls for a more development-oriented approach, and better “outcome and impact evaluation so that companies, governments and communities are clearer about how local level CD practice in mining might contribute to poverty reduction and human



development”. (Ibid: 14) While she recognizes the oversight of power dynamics in mining industry discourse, her focus on specialized interventions tends to narrow the broader political relevance of communities, reducing them to rationalizations for practice.

Community development assumes a different political orientation when endorsing resistance against mining, thus relying on an overtly value-laden interpretation of ‘community’. A study by Kuecker et al (2010), published in the same journal and year as Kemp, explores community development in Ecuador, Malaysia, and Australia. The study underscores the crucial role communities play in fostering a profound sense of belonging. While the primary focus of the article is to illustrate the potency of community resilience, there is a secondary argument. The authors contend that successful community formation, exemplified by the highland village of Junín in Intag, Ecuador, with which we began this article, should serve as a model for cultivating an inclusive sense of belonging amid the uncertainties of the present era, including in the global north.

Kuecker et. al. argue that Junín’s strength in resisting and ultimately preventing mining of its lands lays in its fusion of a series of community forms. First, as a historically marginalized community, Junín was *grounded* in an autonomous culture tied to their land. Secondly, by transforming their historical agrarian struggle for land into an environmental struggle, residents *projected* a sense of community outward into the global arena. Thirdly, their peasant *way-of-life*, combined with mutual dependence and reciprocity, formed strong familial and communal bonds. The small size of the community of some 40 families is seen as enhancing its unity. As the authors emphasize, external support significantly contributed to the community struggle,

providing justification for community development. However, they argue that Junín’s victory was ultimately rooted in their unified sense of purpose and “because they all knew each other so well –in their human strengths and weaknesses– and had strong bonds of mutual dependence and reciprocity” (Kuecker et. al., 2010: 260). Thus “the community had strong traditions to call on in resisting disruptive ‘development’” (Ibid: 261).

This ‘structural’ account of community is contextualized against the backdrop of accelerating globalization, with its compressed spatial and temporal boundaries, posing challenges for individuals, particularly those in the global North, to feel connected with local communities in the modern world. Here we see a more reflective account bringing to bear wider normative commitments. Kuecker et. al. draw on Delanty (2003), who suggests that community becomes a sanctuary in an increasingly crisis-ridden and uncertain world, a sentiment that neither the state nor society can fully offer. They predict that as environmental, social, economic, and political crises intensify, “the creation of inclusive communities will become more a necessity than a luxury in the global north” where people “have much to learn from people living in the global south about building and maintaining resilient communities” (Ibid: 261-2).

Keucker et. al.’s narrative exhibits a strong aspiration for community, finding an antidote to anomie and dislocation in one part of the world in a perceived unity and ethic of solidarity in a local community in another part of the world. Thus we see how a wider quest is projected in a political agenda for community development rooted in a local territorialism. The two come together as a rationale for transnational solidarity as a defense of land against intrusion by mining corporations from the North. Note that this narrative prioritizes an account of the internal cohesion and



coherence of community, despite acknowledging internal conflicts, and seeks to demonstrate a successful partnership. This risks being a version of what Brown and Purcell (2005) call the “local trap”, namely, celebrating the positive qualities of local resistance without acknowledging that political economy, culture, and ecology operate simultaneously at various scales. The account does not consider the conjunctural factors that enabled a successful outcome in this case as opposed to other unsuccessful cases of resistance.

The narrative of ‘community’ as resistance to mining is also essential to the post-extractivist movement, which we explore at the end of this paper. Before coming to this topic, we develop tools for a more nuanced analysis of the political uses of community than the externally defined and internally constructed notions of community we have covered allow.

Conceptualizing community

Distilling a concise and coherent analysis of the concept of ‘community’ proves challenging due to its multifaceted nature. In everyday language, it typically refers to a complex set of associations, consisting of at least three overarching components: ‘group of people, a quality of relationship (usually with a positive normative value), and a place/location’ (Creed, 2006:4). In community development, the term takes on a more technical connotation. Here, it refers to a human settlement of manageable size, often demarcated administratively, where specific developmental efforts are undertaken to address the needs of marginalized social groups. However, these definitions are inherently normative, and often embody ideals of homogeneity reminiscent of *gemeinsschaft* in their defense of the local against the encroachment by external forces.

Paradoxically, social workers and community development workers are usually outsiders who participate in ‘community’ while not being bound by its locality or tradition. On the other hand, those targeted as beneficiaries navigate complex power dynamics, relying on external agents for assistance while striving to assert their autonomy and self-determination. Talk of ‘community’ can enable fundamental power relations to be elided in the service of a narrative of collaboration. Participatory approaches attempt to mitigate these tensions but may not fundamentally alter the underlying power dynamic. Thus, participatory approaches have been criticized for reifying ‘community’, and taking ‘the poor’ as homogeneous subjects waiting to be ‘empowered’. In doing so, their effect is in fact to secure institutional compliance, especially in large projects/programs (Clever, 2001).

In short, objective definitions of community as a space of practice invariably carry normative connotations that take form in the juxtaposition of global, national and local frames of reference. Rather than attempt to adhere to an ‘objective’ sociological and geographical definition of community, it may be more useful to try to understand its meaning in particular contexts. In the classic text, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony Cohen argued (1985: 12) that the meaning of the term ‘community’ is not merely lexical; ‘community’ is meaningful in a more consequential way that is implicit in its use in social conflict. Community is thus seen as primarily a symbolic construct: The reality of community in people’s experience thus inheres in the attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols”. The question for investigation, then, is how people use symbols to draw boundaries with others, and thereby assert their identity.

In shifting to a subjective register, however, the meanings of community multiply, and the



resulting relativism implied subsequently led Cohen to bemoan the ongoing popularity of the term. He lamented that “‘Community’ is used so variously, even inconsistently, and so loosely that, paradigm considerations apart, it has ceased to be of any obvious analytical use as a category in social science” (Cohen, 2002:167). Cohen thus argued that because “‘Community’ now seems to have become a normative rather than a descriptive term ... it is futile to try to theorize community other than in its *particular* uses (2002:169)”.

Frustration with the vagueness of the term may be justified, but is misguided to the extent that it originates in historical ambitions for a general science of community. The concept of ‘community’ continues to be of critical importance precisely *because* of its evidently varied usage and widespread popular resonance. Indeed, as Cohen demonstrates, the imprecise nature of symbols is what makes them useful for expressing varied ideas and dispositions in condensed form. Moreover, the symbol is salient because of its inescapably normative character. Cohen’s perspective is still worth revisiting because it reframes community as essentially ideational.

Zygmunt Bauman’s *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001) helps to bring this discussion into a more contemporary frame, in a way that extends some of the ideas raised by Kuecker et. al.’s overall argument about the contemporary significance of community. Bauman argues that ‘community’ has salience in a precarious and insecure world in which solidarity would seem to have been eroded by dislocation and alienation. Community offers a dream of safety and identification with others who are well disposed towards oneself. And while such dreams are bound to lead to disappointment, they nevertheless offer the hope that the good values of the past can serve to light the way for the future (Bauman, 2001).

Bauman suggests a broader theme: despite the diverse symbolic meanings of ‘community,’ its central subjective characteristic is to respond to a perceived threat to a familiar way of life by positing a fundamental solidarity or unity as an antidote. In this context, community appears most potent when it takes something emergent and contingent and turns it into something ordinary and destined -- ascribing to it a timeless essence (cf. Creed, 2006).

Thus we see the concept of community as symbolic construct opening to meanings and sentiments expressed in broader political struggles. However, we still lack an intrinsic means of addressing the political dimension of community.

Rancière’s political aesthetics

Shifting our perspective from what community is to what community does leads us to Jacques Rancière’s concept of the political, where community becomes a contestation with the dominant order. Here community is theorized as a battleground against the established order. In Rancière’s conceptual framework, the notion of ‘exclusion’ transcends mere social exclusion, a concept he associates with what he terms “the police.” This is not limited to the actions of “the petty police,” focused on the routine regulation of bodies, but rather involves a governing principle that dictates their visibility, a structuring of occupations, and the defining properties of the spaces allocated for these occupations. (Rancière, 1999:29). Exclusion is political, and this is not confined to any ‘space’; rather, it pertains to the appearance of subjects previously excluded or overlooked in the existing order disrupting its established order. It involves new “modes of subjectification” (1999:35), where subjectification means creating a new identity and the ability to express a subject – not just an



individual, but a class or community – in ways not recognized before.

Thus, we have a starkly different concept of community than discussed in the first part of the paper. Rather than being a determinate entity, it emerges in the course of questioning established norms and exploring new ways of addressing issues. Politics depends on demonstrating the capacity for articulate speech. Political speech disrupts the order of domination by establishing the political subject –of community in its very plurality– as an alternative to the image of ‘the people’ as a mass that either consents or revolts, and as only capable of expressions of pleasure or pain. What is instead revealed are differentiated subjects with names, who express themselves as capable of engaging in a dialogue with the rich and the powerful. That this dialogue does not presently exist is precisely the point, for those mobilizing in the name of the silenced act as *if* it does, thereby bringing it into existence. In doing so, they reveal the arbitrariness of the exclusionary order, demonstrating their capacity for dialogue and reflective engagement (Rancière, 1999; 2007).

It is important, however, to point out some weaknesses of Rancière’s argument relevant to our analysis. First, the process of subjectification, where marginalized or silenced groups demand recognition and equality, is not inherently emancipatory. Consider current segments of the disenfranchised working class adopting xenophobic notions of ‘community,’ while seemingly progressive groups subscribe to conspiracy theories and reactionary identity politics. Even as they seek to challenge the dominant order, there is in both cases an assumption of a naturalized, apolitical community rooted in territory, tradition, or ethnic or other form of exclusionary identity. These perspectives operate within a Manichean worldview, driven by intuition,

emotion, spiritualism, prejudice, or resentment, dismissing any viewpoint beyond mutual reaffirmation as the enemy.

Furthermore, while Rancière challenges the traditional understanding of politics as consensus and dissensus between established parties or interest groups, he arguably overextends his argument. Contentious interactions alone do not define political actions undertaken in the name of a collective. Rancière’s idea that the common world only exists through political argument overlooks the context of action within the social world. Political actions are deeply rooted in their social milieu, requiring a nuanced understanding of the social environment in which these acts unfold.

Despite these limitations, among others, I argue that Rancière offers a fruitful way of conceiving of the political character of transnational usages of community.

Community as post-extractivism

Expanding our inquiry beyond the purview of community development, we explore the political aesthetics of the post-extractivist solidarity movement in Ecuador. Riofrancos traces its genesis to the period of Rafael Correa’s administration, which came to power in 2007. It was initially in concert with the national and regional Indigenous associations that helped to bring it into power, and which advocated ‘radical resource nationalism’ involving territorial sovereignty and democratic control over minerals and oil. Such alignment produced the 2008 constitution emphasizing nature’s rights and “Sumak Kawsay” (Buen Vivir). However, the government soon abandoned its partners and pursued large-scale mining, seeking to de-politicize resource extraction in the name of equitable economic development.



This led to anti-mining protests in 2009 and the emergence of the post-extractivism movement, which was consolidated at a massive gathering in Quito in August 2011, known as “Encuentro de los movimientos sociales del Ecuador por la democracia y la vida” (Riofrancos, 2020). Instead of attempting to address this movement comprehensively, I narrow my focus to two documents. My approach allows me to explore the varied interpretations of ‘community’ and to illustrate the intricate political terrain that the term symbolizes.

First, consider a pamphlet of a meeting in Azuay province that took place in the lead-up to the 2011 meeting of social movements discussed above. The particular event is the “Encuentro Continental de los Pueblos de la Abya Yala por el Agua y la Pachamama”, organized by a coalition including major indigenous organizations like CONAIE and ECUARUNARI, academic researchers, churches, NGOs such as Acción Ecológica, and the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network in Toronto. This event took place from June 21-24, 2011, in Cuenca de Guapondélig (the ancestral name of Cuenca) during the Inti Raymi celebrations. Its purpose was to address the impacts of mining and petroleum exploitation, particularly on the quality of water, and to devise strategies of resistance against extractivism. Additionally, it advocated for:

La visión del Sumak Kawsay: Exploración de la espiritualidad, conocimientos y acciones de los colectivos urbanos y comunitarios: movilidad alternativa, expresiones artísticas, agroecología, turismo ecológico-comunitario, usos y consumos respetuosos y responsables, alternativas energéticas al modelo extractivista, entre otros.

Utopías alcanzadas por la resistencia y luchas sociales: Celebración de logros como alianzas, el Mandato Minero, derechos de la naturaleza en la Constitución, derecho a la

Resistencia, consultas, protección de glaciares y páramos andinos, entre otras iniciativas.

On the pamphlet’s back cover, a vibrant image featuring a waving Wiphala flag, symbolizing indigenous unity and resistance, accompanies the following poem:

la brisa del agua que avisa: pies descalzos caminan dibujando surcos de tierra en minka de Alaska a Patagonia; despiertan los Andes con colores, sabores, fiambres, sapiencias; convidan vida, confían RESISTENCIA, la brisa del agua, que avisa.

Now consider a more recent document that builds upon the post-extractivist imaginary, a jointly-authored working document by the People’s Health Movement (PHM) in Canada and Ecuador and the Ecosystems and Health Thematic Circle, which provides a current example for studying the uses of ‘community’. Entitled “Beyond an Extractivist World: Why Imagining and Acting Upon Alternative Modes of Living are Crucial to Saving the Planet from Capitalism” (2023), it advances a far-reaching analysis in the register of a ‘manifesto’. The document begins by outlining the extractivist world order, linking capitalism, resource exploitation, ill health, and premature death. It sheds light on Canada’s pivotal role in global extractivism, detailing how Canadian mining companies have operated both domestically and overseas, often taking advantage of unstable political contexts and weak regulations in host countries. The document reveals the harmful actions of these companies, concealed behind corporate social responsibility policies.

“Beyond an Extractivist World” underscores the intertwined nature of health and the global capitalist-extractive order, emphasizing the vital need for resistance and radical alternatives to move



beyond capitalism. The document focuses particularly on the struggle over the Yasuní National Park in Amazonian Ecuador as emblematic of the challenges faced by communities in resisting extractive projects. Initiated by the Correa government in 2007, the Yasuní ITT initiative initially sought international support to keep oil underground, but after failed pledges, Correa terminated the initiative and aggressively promoted large-scale mining and fossil fuel extraction in the park. This sparked significant resistance from environmental activists and local communities, and the formation of the Yasunidxs activist group –partner of the PHM and contributor to “Beyond an Extractivist World”– which called for a referendum on oil extraction. Despite these efforts, extractive activities persisted, resulting in profound health impacts, particularly on Indigenous populations.

The authors of the document attribute four general meanings to the term ‘community’. Initially, ‘community’ signifies populations in areas impacted by extractive industries, marked by health crises and environmental degradation. Indigenous communities, in particular, are highlighted as disproportionately affected by mining and oil, and as the primary subjects struggling against corporations, states, and other nefarious actors. From this perspective, a second layer of meaning emerges: indigenous communities are viewed as offering concrete alternative models for conviviality and environmental responsibility. In this context, the image of community is similar to Kuecker et. al.’s portrayal: a close-knit collective bound by a common culture that prioritizes shared well-being, reciprocal relationships, social accountability, consensus building, and profound respect for the land. However, “Beyond an Extractivist World” extends this perspective beyond a model for community development and an alternative to generalized anomie and crises. Now, community is articulated

as the foundational element for solidarity within a new post-extractivist political framework.

‘Community’ thus undergoes a further transformation when it becomes the rallying point for groups of people actively opposing extractive practices. On the positive side, ‘community’ signifies the solidarity among activists and grassroots movements, participants in a collective struggle for land rights, sustainable alternatives, and Indigenous sovereignty. On the flipside, ‘community’ also signifies a united front against a common adversary of extractivism and its exploitative practices, addressing both the immediate harms and the underlying structural inequalities perpetuated by extractive industries. One might say that in the present case, the concept of solidarity is a scaling up of the idiom of community – it yields a ‘community of communities’.

“Beyond an Extractivist World” exemplifies this through its recognition of the Yasunidxs. Apart from their persistent resistance against petroleum-related activities, they have also mobilized against the promotion of mega-mining in other parts of the country, working in solidarity with the PHM. Notably, several years after the aforementioned event in Cuenca, the local Yasunidxs Guapondelig collaborated with the Water Council to initiate a popular consultation against mining around water sources in the Cuenca Cantón. An alliance comprising PHM-Canada, PHM-Ecuador, and Yasunidxs Cuenca submitted an *amicus curiae* brief to Ecuador’s Constitutional Court in 2019, spotlighting the health consequences of mining in Quimsacocha. While the initial petition for a popular consultation was denied, a revised proposal was approved, resulting in an 80% vote by Cuenca’s citizens to prohibit mining in critical watersheds. Despite this outcome, the ruling government of President Lasso transferred the mine to Dundee Precious Metals, a Canadian company. According



to the “Beyond an Extractivist World”, though, the PHM-Canada/PHM-Ecuador alliance continues to raise awareness about sustained resistance to Canadian mining in Ecuador, while local groups Yasunidxs Guapondelig and Cabildo por el Agua persist in 2022 through advocacy for the referendum’s recognition (PHM, 2023:14).

In a final iteration of the term ‘community’ in “Beyond an Extractivist World”, it represents the societies envisaged by Indigenous worldviews such as Sumak Kawsay, which “sees nature as a living being that is both a subject of care and holder of rights”, in stark contrast to “the instrumentalization of nature (and peoples traditionally considered to be part of it) by capitalism” (PHM, 2023:18). Moreover,

The Sumak Kawsay approach is based on communal and family property, satisfying needs and re-establishing alliances to guarantee access to resources and collective rights. It prioritizes people and their relationships to the community and the sacred connection with territory or land (the commons). (Ibid)

This entails a holistic vision for an alternative world, ranging from resisting commercialized diets through food sovereignty to challenging neoliberal models of development, writ large. The authors draw parallels with Canada’s Land Back movement, emphasizing the return of land stewardship to Indigenous peoples for a more sustainable and just future.

That such movements are both transnational and rooted in local communities is by now a well-argued point in political economy. My interest is in how this informs the movement’s normative dimension. In the face of an oppressive state, ‘community’ represents the alternative political ontology of local populations, and thereby serves

to rationalize the circumvention of the state, historical oppressor that persists in subservience to transnational capital. On the other hand, the broader focus of the post-extractivist movement on local indigenous communities imbues the movement with a connection to something that predates both the nation-state and the extractivist order. Central to this perspective is the belief in community as an originating force, with the concurrent understanding that the nation-state was historically imposed upon it, serving as a tool for domination and capital accumulation. The very survival of community challenges any notion of the nation-state as inherent or natural. The perspective surpasses inter-national relations by recognizing that communities across borders share common values and possess agency on the global stage, independent of state mediation. Indeed, it goes further to assert that these communities are already advancing an alternative global project, opposed to the narratives propagated by states and corporations.

While I cannot do justice to the specific context of all of the elements discussed in relation to these two documents (but see Riofrancos, 2020; Moore and Velasquez, 2013), I hope to convey something of the imaginative scope they encapsulate. The representations of ‘community’ covered here are part of a broader political aesthetic. They respond to crises not only within the immediate region, but also far afield, and by adopting an explicitly transnational framework, activists draw parallels between resulting struggles, emphasizing solidarity across borders. The central political and indeed existential challenge is defined as how to enlarge the kinds of relationships –with people and nature– existing in local community.

In essence, ‘community’ goes beyond a mere group or location; it represents the momentary fixing in discourse of an emergent collective



subject where the dominant order is fundamentally contested. To be sure, the usages of the community construct are vulnerable to charges of essentialism, as they tend to level the plurality of viewpoints brought to bear. Understood as ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1988), this can perhaps be understood as a legitimate political tactic in mobilizing common interest. It is also important to note that such reification can come about as much by force of repetition as deliberate representation. Many activists involved in drafting a document such as “Beyond an Extractivist World” are well versed in participatory learning and action theory and familiar with the criticism of romanticized ideals of community. Their use of the term ‘community’ serves as a shorthand for locating the context or significance of statements describing the harmful effects of mining and solidarity in resisting these, or for alternative health practices. Over time, such pragmatic usage combined with more intentional applications coalesces into a reified construct laden with inherent value. Indeed, to invoke Cohen’s point again, the very utility of the term ‘community’ is due to its resulting fuzziness of meaning.

While acknowledging the critique of essentialism, my reading, as based on Rancière’s analysis, leads in a different direction. What remains crucial for my argument is the trajectory of disruption against the dominant extractivist paradigm, and the alternative it envisions. Thus, the working document positions the PHM as a collective subject fundamentally at odds with the mainstream interpretation of the basic term ‘health’ as propagated in dominant discourses. By drawing upon the indigenous worldview of Sumak Kawsay, it establishes that the alternative –an entirely new post-extractivist order– already exists as an emergent critical consciousness rooted in communal realities. The community emerges both as the victim of prevailing injustices and as the

wellspring of an alternative vision propelling the movement forward. Importantly, this disruption not only interrogates current power structures but also redefines the very essence of community, accentuating its capacity for self-determination and autonomous political expression.

This leads us to a question arising from Kuecker et. al.’s work: What role could ‘community development’, envisioned beyond traditional frameworks of localized interventions, play in a broader transformative process that amplifies the voices of marginalized communities within an emerging critical consciousness across multiple domains?

Navigating community’s political terrain

In a context where global crises reshape localities, it is analytically necessary to move beyond descriptive definitions of community as social formations corresponding to localized sub-units of national territories. Relatedly, it also becomes harder to justify a neutral and purely technical understanding of community as a space of intervention. Our exploration has revealed the transnational dimensions of usages of the term ‘community’ as well as its permeability to evolving political sensitivities and broader ideological debates.

The article began with a critique of the purportedly objective analysis of community development’s constructive role under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility in mining contexts as masking the normative agendas and interests of specific actors. Treating ‘community’ as a symbolic construct emerging in social conflicts makes normative investments explicit in basic assumptions about the nature of community. It also opens the concept to wider political sensibilities in the



context of perceived existential threats, as seen in the analysis of community development in the context of resistance to mining in highland Ecuador.

Recognizing the entanglement of politics in representing and attributing to community, the article shifted to Jacques Rancière's political aesthetics for a nuanced analysis. This approach frames community as an emergent phenomenon disrupting established norms, and offers a more malleable and reflexive notion of community in a transnational context. The final section focused on two activist documents from the post-extractivist solidarity movement in Ecuador, which highlight the trajectories of 'community' at a transnational scale. These documents, centered on resistance, environmental responsibility, and solidarity, serve as examples of how 'community' transcends mere geographical or local affiliations.

Community thus emerges as a dynamic construct, momentarily solidified in discourse, embodying a collective subject that challenges prevailing orders. This process unfolds simultaneously across various scales—local, national, and transnational. Although narratives of 'community' often reduce the plurality of voices encompassed by this term, the crucial aspect is the political emergence facilitated by such articulation. Our understanding of its politics hinges not solely on the fact of resistance but on its trajectory of transgression, shaping the very essence of 'community' through the breach of multiple dominant orders.

Radical solidarity practice is enriched by its responsiveness to the evolving nature of local communities amidst global challenges and its ability to establish itself as a dynamic transnational 'community of practice'. The stakes for the post-extractivism movement are high. Alongside the Ecuadorian presidential elections of August 20, 2023, a referendum was held on leaving the oil in Yasuni underground, as well as on halting mining in the Chocó Andino de Pichincha. A substantial majority of citizens supported both measures. Nonetheless, the persistence of government delays in halting oil production in Yasuní National Park, as ordered by the Constitutional Court, and President Daniel Noboa's contemplation of a moratorium on the referendum, underscores the ongoing need to defend these gains.

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