

## The export of migrant labor-power: a form of extraction?

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This article explores the possibilities of expanded understandings of the concepts of «extraction» and «extractivism», asking whether these approaches can be brought to bear on the way in which migrant labor-power is utilised in the contemporary world economy, particularly within Latin America and Central America's «Northern Triangle». I propose that in starting from the understanding that migrant workers are bearers of the commodity labor-power, which they move across borders in order to sell, we can draw from these expanded understandings of extractivism to discern comparable logics in the export of migrant-labor power to those governing the export of extractive commodities. I draw on recent scholarship that elaborates these expanded understandings of extractivism, in which the extractive logic operating in the utilization of natural resources under capitalism extends into other spheres of accumulation (Chagnon *et al.*, 2022; Gago and Mezzadra, 2017; McKay *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2020).

My central argument is that the export of labor-power can be considered a form of extractivism when it takes place under certain combined conditions of uneven development, accumulation by dispossession (often

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related to other forms of extractivism) and the externalization of the costs of social reproduction by migrant receiving states. The value of this perspective is that it can explain how labor migration appears to play a positive developmental role while in fact being reproductive of an uneven, hierarchical international system that distributes wealth upwards, reinforcing the relative positions of richer and poorer states alike. The export of migrant labor-power in contemporary global capitalism reflects the subordination of workers' agency and structural power to the demands of the world economy.

By paying attention to class formation across, as well as within, nation-state borders, we can understand the political economy of migrant-sending states and their position within the world economy. The root of this approach must be to position labor in its relation to the structural forces of the world economy while not losing sight of its agency or potential structural power, yet acknowledging the significant constraints placed on this agency and power by the operation of global capitalism (see, for example, Bergquist, 1986). Yet constrained agency does not negate the political importance of labor, including in those forms of labor that experience particularly severe constraints in this regard, notably migrant labor (Choudry and Smith, 2016).

In this article, I will first outline a basis for understanding extraction and extractivism, and then engage with recent scholarship that seeks to develop an expanded conceptualization of extractivism. I will then look at this expanded approach's particular utility to situating various processes of capital accumulation within an uneven world economy, before outlining how we can understand certain utilizations of migrant labor-power as extractive in form, situating the use of this commodity alongside and amidst

the logic governing the appropriation and utilization of a wider array of extractive commodities. I will close by reflecting on some indicative examples from Central America's Northern Triangle where we can see an extractive logic at work in relation to the export of migrant labor-power.

### The persistence of extraction and expanded conceptualizations of extractivism

The production of extractive commodities for export remains a vital part of national economies across the Latin American region, including in the form of neoextractivist national development strategies. While questioning just how «new» neoextractivist policies are, Liisa L. North and Ricardo Grinspun describe them as «a focused intent on using extractive activities —not only mining and petroleum but also new agro-exports for food, feed and energy markets (...) to finance public policies that advance social well-being» (2016:1484). This developmental model traces a lineage back to the «colonial formula for generating wealth (...) which generated the patterns of dependency that the first wave of developmentalist policies were designed to overcome» (North and Grinspun, 2016:1484). The literature on extractivism within this context seeks to understand the political economic realm within which a return to, or retrenchment of, extractive exports has taken place across the region. It is my contention that over the course of the twentieth century and into the present, another export commodity has risen in importance both at the Latin American regional level and for particular states within the region —that of labor-power.

A proxy for this increasing importance is the rise in the proportion of GDP in the region accounted for by migrant remittances. Remittances accounted for just 0.6% of GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1981, but as of 2022 they accounted for 2.5%, the second highest proportion on record, surpassed only by 2021's 2.6% (World Bank, 2024). The figures are significantly higher in certain states. For the Northern Triangle states of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the 2022 proportions of remittances to GDP were 23.7%, 19.2% and 26.8% respectively. These were the highest proportions on record for Guatemala and Honduras, and the second highest after 2021 for El Salvador. By comparison, in 1981, the figures were 2.1%, 0.3% and 0.04% respectively. If we take migrant remittances as being the return on the export of labor-power, this particular commodity emerges as a central pillar of these three economies. Indeed, the rents from extraction when understood solely as fossil and mineral extraction pale in comparison for all three countries in the most recent data —ranging from 0.5-1.9% of GDP in 2021 (World Bank, 2023).

My contention is that we can in part account for and characterize the way in which the export of labor-power unfolds within national economies and flows into the circuits of the world economy through an expanded conceptualization of extractivism. To analyze circuits of migrant labor as being part of an extractive export process, we must first unpack what we mean by extractive. A key contemporary theorist of extractivism is Eduardo Gudynas, who defines it as the «appropriation of natural resources», taking «diverse forms with very different dynamics» (2018:62). It is important to note the distinction between extraction and extractivism. Gudynas sets out a framework for determining when an extractive activity becomes a form of extractivism, defining this as «appropriation

of natural resources in large volume and/or high intensity, where half or more are exported as raw materials» (2018:62). Activities that are extractive but do not meet this definition in full, such as the extraction of material for construction at the national level, food production for national use or lower-intensity agriculture such as organic export production, are not considered extractivist. Activities that are both high intensity in their extraction, and destined for export, such as mineral and hydrocarbon extraction as well as industrial export agriculture, are what constitute forms of extractivism for Gudynas (2018:62). He cautions against extending the concept of extractivism to «other ways of appropriating natural resources that have high social and environmental impacts» but do not meet the conditions of both volume/intensity and export destination (2018:63).

Can the logic of Gudynas' conceptualization of extractivism be maintained while extending its scope to encompass the export of labor-power? Firstly, it is not necessary to assume that positioning the export of labor-power as extractive necessarily makes it a form of extractivism. The analysis can at first proceed by identifying the features of export of labor-power than can be understood in the same, or similar, terms as the extraction of other commodities for export. This involves a degree of abstraction, as we move away from the visceral physical reality of natural resource extraction —be it open-pit mines, vast clearcut forests, labyrinthine petroleum infrastructure or monocrop plantations— to a focus on the exploitation of the human potential to labor. Here, the extraction of labor-power can be usefully understood as a form of extractivism under certain circumstances, precisely because of its potential to meet Gudynas' credentials of intensity and destination and, crucially, because of its linkages to wider processes of extractivism and its centrality to certain national economies.

Expanded understandings of extractivism and their application have proliferated in recent literature (Riofrancos, 2020). This expansive terrain of analysis is well explored by Christopher W. Chagnon *et al.*, who note that «[w]hile natural resource extraction remains an important focus, the processes, and conditions of extractivist practices have been abstracted and applied to entirely new areas» (2022:2). Extractivism thus becomes an «organizing concept» (2022:2), departing from the more restrictive account of extractivism offered by Gudynas. Yet I believe that it is analytically fruitful to pursue this line of thought in order to understand the contemporary political economy of migrant labor. Within this mode of analysis, we can identify and explore common logics that structure both patterns of accumulation and the options available for export structure for subordinated states within the world economy. The approach is particularly useful in terms of agrarian political economy (Chagnon *et al.*, 2022), offering a means of addressing the relationship between agrarian change and labor migration, a dynamic of particular relevance for states of Central America's Northern Triangle.

Another important exploration of the possibilities inherent to expanded conceptualizations of extractivism is Jingzhong Ye *et al.* (2020) elaboration of key features that constitute a system of extractivism. Of particular relevance is the organization of the system into a chain along which extracted commodities are «transported from places of poverty to places of richness, where high prices can be obtained for them» (2020:156). This wealth is accumulated in these places of richness, resulting in extractivism being «constituted by, and through, inequalities» while further creating and deepening them. Part of this wealth may be utilized to support developmental policies, as in neoextractivism (North and

Grinspun, 2016) —not a necessary condition but rather a feature of certain forms of extractivism. The final crucial element here is that extractivism «centres on the use of the already available resources, it does not invest in the material reproduction of these resources» (Ye *et al.*, 2020:157).

Extractivism understood as such departs from the most restrictive definitions, situating the definitive aspect as being «control» rather than the involvement of a particular type of resource (Ye *et al.*, 2020). For example, using mining in a broad, quasi-metaphorical sense, Ye *et al.* (2020) apply the term beyond narrowly-defined natural resources to include the mining of social resources as well. This approach to the commodity is the same with the natural resource as it is with the social resource —control is exerted over it, and it is appropriated, without regard for its reproduction. This element of control is crucial because it is where extractivism takes on its specificity. It differs from the appropriation of surplus value in general terms because it is not rooted in (although can involve) direct ownership and control of the means from which the commodities are produced, but rather the primary feature is control over the flows of extractive commodities (Ye *et al.*, 2020). For extractive commodities that are not labor-power, this is a relatively simple contention. But to establish that labor-power can be an extractive commodity, it is necessary to consider how that commodity is produced and what constitutes the means of production in this particular case. This leads us into the realm of social reproduction and to consider its relationship with labor migration, as well as the way control is exerted over migrant labor and how that relates to its reproduction.

Extraction in these terms becomes a logic that can be discerned beyond the intensive extraction of natural resources for export, sharing key

elements in common with these processes yet not being restricted to specific commodities. In this sense it becomes «a logic of valorization» rather than simply a procedure for exploiting natural resources (Gago, 2021:667). Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra argue that this expansion «can help us more systematically define the fundamental features of the logic of contemporary capitalism's functioning» (2017:577). Expanded extractivism as a concept does not seek to undermine the analysis of extractivisms focused on natural resources, nor to diminish the specific and profound impacts that these processes have had on societies in Latin America and beyond. However, what it does do is open up the possibility that the logic underpinning these processes that have been so successful for capital accumulation through natural resource exploitation might be found elsewhere. Extractivism then transcends a focus on natural resources and turns towards other avenues for value extraction including labor and life itself (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017). In this sense, it is a reiteration of Marx's original logic of primitive accumulation, whereby there is a move from the violent extension of commodification into the non-capitalist world to «the violent reorganization of spaces and societies already subsumed under the logic of capitalist valorization» (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017:585). Here, again, we find both a logic and a process of (re)organization guided by that logic.

Extractivism has an important interrelationship with dispossession, and as such David Harvey's (2003) concept of «accumulation by dispossession» (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017). For the study of labor migration as a form of extraction, this offers insight through Harvey's contention that it is necessary to understand how the original logic of primitive accumulation as described by Marx persists in a variety of forms and that it occurs

inside of capitalism. The extractive logic represents a corollary of accumulation by dispossession as a mode of accumulation that relies on the operation of structural and coercive forces alongside the market relation between capital and labor. Dispossession is a key example of these forces, in that it involves the creation of new markets and new processes of commodification in order to secure grounds for accumulation. Gago and Mezzadra (2017) note that their analysis differs from Harvey's in that they do not see dispossession and exploitation as operating in isolation from one another, but rather the ongoing processes of dispossession open up a question as to how the basis for labor exploitation is secured and reproduced under historically specific circumstances. This conceptualization of the extractive logic, with dispossession as a part, allows an understanding of how labor forces are (re)produced and shaped in particular ways for accumulation.

Dispossession often unfolds in the agrarian context, and as such it is important to consider how agrarian extractivism operates. Ben McKay *et al* account of agrarian extractivism travels beyond more restrictive versions focused on monocultures or raw materials «to the inherent logic and underlying workings of a mode, based on the appropriation of commodified and non-commodified forces of production» (2021:2). Understanding extractivism in this manner draws our attention to the impact of extractivist models of agriculture in social terms, and the relationship that this has with labor. As such, agricultural transformation has «not only resulted in biophysical contradictions and inefficiencies, it has also altered the social relations of production, property, and power in the countryside» (McKay *et al.*, 2021:5). An expanded concept of extractivism allows investigation of how the logic underlying the appropriation of raw materials

then metastasizes across sectors and throughout economies. We can then attend not only to processes of uneven development engendered by these forces, but also the profound and destructive nature of their social consequences (McKay *et al.*, 2021).

Two key dynamics emerge from this perspective. Firstly, the social consequences of extractivism include dispossession and displacement, driving those dispossessed and displaced to migrate in order to survive. Secondly, there is also the extraction of labor-power itself, operating in combination with other forms of extractivism. Labor migration cannot simply be considered as a consequence or side effect of extractivism, but rather in certain cases itself becomes a form of extractivism. In the agrarian context, questions relating to extraction, social reproduction, dispossession and labor migration coalesce within the analysis of extractivism. With regard to labor, extractive agrarian capitalism operates by «(hyper-) exploiting, exhausting or outright displacing [it]» (McKay *et al.*, 2021:16). In fact, it both exploits and exhausts in combination with displacement, with that displacement an important enabling condition for the extraction of migrant labor-power.

Under an extractive logic, beyond dispossession it is necessary to exercise control over the commodities that are then extracted. Here, extractive commodities are analytically distinct in the nature of their appropriation; or, in the case of migrant labor-power, its exploitation followed by the appropriation of the surplus value it generates. Given this, we must focus on processes of control and their drive to avoid contributing to reproduction. One way this manifests is that extraction does not develop the productive forces and instead merely drains value from one area to another without any corresponding progressive role for capital (Ye *et al.*,

2020). Here, we can establish a point of cohesion with more traditional understandings of extractivism focused on natural resources, in that there is a reproduction of a position of (under)development through the logic of extraction. While inequality itself is not the sole condition for expanded extractivism to operate as a mode of accumulation, it is a crucial one. The concept of expanded extractivism, both in general and specifically where it is applied to the extraction of labor power, is most analytically useful when bolstered by a focus on uneven development and unequal exchange. Furthermore, with the extraction of labor-power we can locate a key aspect of this unevenness in processes of social reproduction and their geographical separation from the site of labor.

### **Situating expanded extractivism within the uneven world economy**

To argue that there is a logic of extraction underpinning the operation of the world economy is to advance a particular position on how that economy is structured. Unevenness and inequality are implicit to the existence and operation of a logic of extraction. As described above, extraction is rooted in flows along axes of inequality and the movement of extracted resources from poorer regions to richer regions (Ye *et al.*, 2020). Expanded extractivism is reliant on a structural unevenness in the world economy that is reproduced over time and across geographies through the operation of capitalism on a global scale. This returns us to questions of development as well, crucial to understanding both the abstract logic of capital accumulation as well as the ideological justifications sometimes

given for extractivism as a means of bolstering development. We should seek to determine not just the relationship between particular export orientations and paths of national economic development, but the pivotal role of labor and its agency within these dynamics. This takes inspiration from the approach to labor in extraction pursued by Bergquist (1986), who underlines the political importance of labor in export-production and extraction—a locus in which I will argue we should be situating migrant labor itself. A theory of uneven development can help us become attuned to this, as it necessitates identifying the stratifying features that constitute and reproduce paths of uneven development throughout the world economy. A central stratifying feature here is labor-power, the variegated characteristics of its bearers across borders and the way it is commodified and operationalized.

Fouad Makki describes «development» under capitalism as «a product of the differential but interactive (uneven but combined) processes of capitalist expansion» (2015:485). This approach to understanding the nature of capitalist development centers on the interaction between unevenness and combination rather than the content of these terms individually (Makki, 2015). We can relate this back to expanded conceptualizations of extractivism and accumulation's grounding in the exploitation of social differentiation across borders. In the search for new grounds for commodification and through the cultivation of relations of inequality, it relies on difference and variation. For Makki, «instead of conceptualizing development in terms of ineluctable progress or catastrophic arrest (...) it makes better sense to think of development as a relational global process» that can be both analyzed structurally as well as being understood in relation to «its concrete conditions of existence in particular social

formations» (2015:490). For understanding extractivism in an expanded sense, this means being attentive both to the structural dynamics that underpin extraction and its positioning as a model of development, as well as its operation within differentiated social formations and the particularities that result from this variation.

Understanding development through emphasizing its unevenness and its combination challenges approaches to development that privilege the national context. Methodological nationalism is incompatible with analyses of extractivism on the terms being pursued here. Extractivism is structured by the uneven relationship between national economies. Its nature, both in more restrictive but especially in expansive terms, is found in the interrelation between these national economies and the flows between them, structured by unevenness. This attention to both the world historical and the local allows us to delve deeper than a homogenous understanding of capitalist accumulation on a global scale (Makki, 2015). An approach attentive to unevenness situates «the flow of local events in wider interactive contexts [avoiding the] reductive view that social processes are delimited by discreet territorial boundaries», while giving due weight to overbearing global structures and human agency within them. Theorizing uneven development to retain a focus on human agency means that the impact of an extractive logic can be emphasized while not dehumanizing those who bear the commodity labor-power.

An expanded understanding of extractivism also allows for situating the dynamics of extraction in a world economy defined by imperialism and marked by increasing complexity in a variety of forms. Imperialism in the «complexly stratified world system» of contemporary global capitalism «is characterized by deep structural inequalities among regions

and countries of the world» (Gordon and Webber 2020:119). This is particularly relevant to the extraction of labor-power, due to the centrality of delineated nation states and their borders in how labor-power as a commodity flows throughout the world economy. The patterning of global capitalist dynamics today constitutes «a system in which global interdependence, rather than national independence, becomes a necessary starting point for comprehending the specific trajectories of different societies» (2020:119), of particular relevance for the interrelation between uneven development, extractivism, and migrant labor. This returns us to the need for a theoretical prioritization of the interrelationship between states while recognizing the persistence and importance of states as an organizing unit within the world economy.

Increasing integration of the world economy alongside the maintenance and reproduction of unevenness as an inherent quality of the capitalist system is a seemingly contradictory yet essential feature of contemporary capital accumulation. Given this, Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber note that the maintenance of the «environmental prerequisites for accumulation across the distinct levels of the scalar hierarchy is more important than ever» (2020:113). The indispensable prerequisite for accumulation under capitalism is the commodity labor-power. There are, of course, a multiplicity of forms by which this commodity is made available for use in capital accumulation. One central form in contemporary capitalism is through flows of migrant labor and, under certain conditions, these flows of migrant labor operate through a logic that matches that of the extraction of commodities other than labor-power. The complexity of the contemporary world economy requires an array of approaches to securing labor-power, and within this the extraction of migrant labor-power

occupies an increasingly important role, although not one without historical analogue in previous flows of labor across borders. The character of states and the nature of their economies is defined by their relationship to, position within, and dependence on the world economy, its circuits and its flows (Dale, 1999). A crucial element within this relationship is labor migration, and in the world economy «all varieties of transnational interlinkages, of deprivation and oppression, of aspirations, provide the bases for unprecedented flows of international migration» (Dale, 1999:14).

Migration is central to capitalism's function and the ordering of the world economy. As Adam Hanieh describes, it forms «a movement of people that is relentlessly generated by the movement of capital, and which, in turn, is constitutive of the concrete forms of capitalism itself» (2019:52). It is here that we can apprehend the complexity of labor's agency when that labor is migratory. Bergquist's (1986) analyses of labor in export production highlighted the impact of dispersal and concentration of labor in its capacity to exert structural power, and with migrant labor the process of movement and dispersal takes center stage. While migrant labor is disempowered by the process of movement and attendant marginalization within receiving states, its agency and potential for exerting structural power nevertheless persists amidst overbearing structural constraints. Perspectives that consider migrant labor resistance, such as the history of migrant worker strikes in the USA (De Genova, 2010; Robinson, 2006), those that look at migrant worker organizing to resist the imposition of precarity (Vosko, 2019) and those that categorize migration itself as a form of social movement (De Genova and Mezzadra, 2020) are instructive in this regard.

An extractive understanding of the export of labor-power offers a way of understanding labor migration as a form of accumulation within

the world economy rooted in unevenness, considering its vital importance to the transnational circuits of economic life. It asks: what is the specific role of the extractive logic within the wider operation of capitalism across an uneven, differentiated system? In which specific areas is the presence of the extractive logic most apparent, and in what manner does it unfold across particular sectors? Exploring the interrelation of the extraction of labor-power with other iterations of extractive logics allows us to develop a deeper understanding of the persistence of unevenness.

### Labor migration as the extraction of labor-power

Extractive processes can be understood as taking place through uneven social relations, structured at the level of the world economy and in relations between nation states as well as in specific local conditions. A fundamental feature of this is the creation of the need to migrate in order to survive (North, 2021) due to a deteriorating ability to reproduce oneself or one's family at home. Yet a corresponding feature of this is the social cost of migration in the place of origin. By understanding labor migration as a potentially extractive process, we have a framework for understanding these costs. The focus on the «return» or benefits from labor migration, in particular remittances, must be accompanied by a thorough understanding of the social forces that compel labor migration in the first place, as well as the consequences of labor migration that accompany this «return». One of the primary manifestations of an extractive logic in circuits of labor is the externalization of social reproduction.

Aaron Jaffe describes social reproduction theory (SRT) as shifting «our gaze to concentrate on those agents and forms of work through which abilities to satisfy life's needs are produced, set in motion, and reproduced» (Jaffe, 2020:2). SRT allows the development of an adequate account of the capital-labor relation and capital itself, moving beyond an abstract understanding of value production to account for «the evolving cycles and social circuits that capital moves through as it valorizes» (Jaffe, 2020:20). Furthermore, it allows analysis of the structural forces through which capital accumulation operates «while directing our gaze to research on the specific ways that gender, race, sexuality, immigration status, and other oppressions form the particular social paths through which valorization takes» (Jaffe, 2020:21). To apprehend extractive logics at work in labor migration, this attention to the social forces through which valorization takes place is essential to transcending a mechanistic logic of supply and demand in analyzing circuits of labor migration. SRT attunes us to the historically specific conditions related to the separation of workers from the means of production and how that separation is reproduced over time, «with particular attention to the way our embodied labor powers are made and sustained» (Jaffe, 2020:26). In a similar vein, Susan Ferguson and David McNally contend that theorizing in this regard «requires a multi-dimensional analysis which, while acknowledging the decisive role of waged-work and other monetized practices, situates these within a nexus of practices through which working-class life is produced and reproduced» (Ferguson and McNally, 2015:2). On this account, attention to social reproduction must accompany an exploration of logics of extraction, especially when applying that logic to labor-power.

The production of unevenness in the world economy is channeled in part through processes of social reproduction; as Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill describe it, social reproduction is «variegated and uneven across scales, locations and jurisdictions» yet «increasingly shaped by the power of capital in a global process of accumulation that is, in turn, premised on the commodification of labor, society, and nature» (2019:504). This holistic conceptualization of social reproduction supports an analysis of extractivism on expanded terms because it makes clear the interdependence of various processes of commodification, including for labor-power. It must also be noted that commodification is ongoing and not totalizing, with processes of commodification requiring a noncommodified outside to draw from and expand into (Fraser, 2014). These processes also draw attention to the agency of labor, and in utilizing SRT to analyze the capital-labor relation, we can capture the breadth of terrain for agency and struggle. As Nancy Fraser puts it, «even as these «non-economic» orders make commodity production possible, they are not reducible to that enabling function» (2014:69). Determining the operation of an extractive logic in the export of labor-power means being attentive to the complex of social relations from which that commodified human potential is drawn. Noting the disjuncture between the primary site of social reproduction and the utilization of labor-power with regards to migrant workers, Cindy Katz contended more than twenty years ago that «[v]ariable capital produced in one site and tapped in another is no less a capital transfer than the extraction of raw materials» (Katz, 2001:710; quoted in Hanieh and Ziadah, 2023:54) Recent developments in SRT assist us in deepening our analysis in this spirit, attuning us to the full gamut of extraction as well as the possibilities for resistance and alternatives to it.

In extending the analytical prioritization of labor's agency and politically determinant role in export-structure (Bergquist, 1986), we must investigate the social relations in which labor is enmeshed and through which its agency is exercised. With SRT, we can understand the shaping of workers' agency under the shadow of capital (Jaffe, 2020). SRT attunes us not only to gender but to other processes of differentiation and stratification within the working class, from the local, specific context to the transnational level. A combination of SRT and an expanded understanding of extractivism means being able to comprehend the interplay of these forces across scales. Labor migration, or the export of labor-power, in combination with the extractive logic presents a compelling example of this dynamic unfolding across multiple scales. Migrant labor has a unique vantage point in transnational accumulation and processes of social reproduction. It has taken on a specific role within neoliberal capitalism as a result of an epochal shift in the character and size of the global working class on account of intense dispossession and displacement, unleashing vast new reserves of labor-power (Ferguson and McNally, 2015). It is through this relationship, embedded in unevenness and the potential for drawing from poorer areas to support accumulation in richer areas, that an extractive logic takes hold in circuits of migrant labor.

Migrant workers engage in movement because of the potential to materially improve their economic situation, not because they are inanimate commodities pulled between locations by inexorable structural forces. However, this element of choice and agency is most fruitfully investigated in conjunction with the structural forces ordering the possibilities for labor migration. SRT helps us understand the nature of this integration into the world economy by overcoming the ideological myopia of approaches

positioning labor migration as a «triple win» for migrants, migrant-sending and migrant-receiving states alike. In this perspective, advanced in publications such as the International Organization for Migration's 2008 World Migration Report, the relationship between these three parties is one of mutual benefit, with each having a complementary need met through labor mobility, albeit on highly regulated terms (International Organization for Migration, 2008). Some scholars acknowledge that these benefits are not (yet) fully realized, arguing for policy fixes to unlock the full benefits of «circular migration» (Angenendt, 2014; Rahim *et al.*, 2021). These policies are positioned as a means of addressing the geographical and regulatory barriers that exist between the type of workers needed in receiving countries, and the type of jobs needed in sending countries, as though it were at root a form of transnational commuting. Yet the «triple win» philosophy does not adequately address the full balance sheet of labor migration, assuming a coherence of interests between the three parties that does not adequately account for the structure of the world economy within which labor migration takes place (Castles and Delgado, 2012; Delgado, 2015).

With the approach advanced in this chapter, grounded in SRT, we can make the extractive logic at play visible. This draws our attention to both what is «left behind» in the receiving state when a migrant remits their wages, and the costs of producing that labor-power in the first place, ultimately borne by migrants, their communities and the (typically highly constrained) social expenditure of the sending state (Delgado, 2022a). This relationship is fundamentally rooted in, and reproductive of, patterns of global uneven development. Ferguson and McNally acknowledge the dual form of the capital-labor relation in which while capital exploits

labor, it is also the source of the wages that enable reproduction, a relation that is of course «massively unbalanced and exploitative» (2015:11). This takes on a specific character with regards to migrant labor because «much social reproduction occurs at sites significantly separated from the spaces of capitalist production —and frequently by way of geographic separations that involve cross-border movements» (2015:11). Thus the movement of workers and the return of their wages as remittances benefits capital in each instance, with precarious, low-wage labor flowing one way and remittances flowing to support social reproduction in a poorer, cheaper location to replenish the global labor reserve (2015:11).

Saskia Sassen's (1990) seminal study of the relationship between the internationalization of production and labor migration analyzes the incorporation and positioning of states within the world economy. She contends that the way these processes restructure the economies of both sending and receiving states has crucial implications for the options available to migrant labor. In sending states, this involves the disruption of traditional, agrarian economies and the incorporation of new wage workers into the labor market (Sassen, 1990). Further disruption involves labor force feminization and shifting labor market compositions, as well as the development of ideological and cultural links between sending and receiving states through circuits of capital and corresponding circuits of labor migration. Sassen focuses on how these circuits interact and intersect, reproducing one another, with borders acting not as boundaries but as mechanisms of systemic reproduction (Sassen, 1990). One element underpinning these circuits is that of social reproduction, and its unevenness is central to transnational capital accumulation through the utilization of migrant labor.

The claimed «return» on labor migration central to the idea of the «triple win» is partly found in the idea that remittances both support social reproduction and drive national development (International Organization for Migration, 2008; United Nations Network on Migration, n.d.) . This view, however, is contested, Raúl Delgado Wise, for example, argues that the «costs of social reproduction, education and training» are assumed by both families and, to an extent, the sending state and that «these costs, compared with the accumulation of remittances (...) tend to be much more onerous» (2022b:9). In this sense, remittances are not «a North-South subsidy but rather exactly the opposite: A South-North subsidy». This subsidy is part of the process of externalization and is extractive in its logic. There is an added layer of complexity to this position in that the sending state itself can be seen as being extractive of its migrating citizens, with remittances forming part of national development strategies, making up for shortfalls in public provision and state capacity to meet social needs (Phillips, 2009).

As would be echoed by Ferguson and McNally's (2015) analysis, for Sassen the geographical separation between sites of productive labor and reproduction activities «allow[s] the receiving country to externalize renewal costs» when utilizing migrant labor-power (1990:37). Michael Burawoy also focuses on this externalization, noting that «costs of renewal, normally borne by the employing state and economy, are to a considerable degree borne by another economy or another state or a combination of the two» (1976:1053). This process is supported by the precarity and temporariness of migrant labor in a vast array of contexts. Unlike the extraction of natural resources, the extraction of labor-power through circuits of migration is rooted in the temporariness of the workers in the recei-

ving state. It is defined by the maintenance of transnational relations of dependence between productive labor and reproductive labor (1976). Burawoy also notes that this export of labor-power serves to defuse domestic political tensions, releasing the pressure caused by underdevelopment through securing a wage via labor migration and associated geographical dispersal of members of the working class (1976).

Focusing on social reproduction develops the full picture of the extractive logic at work in the export of labor-power: it is dependent upon renewal in the sending state, and upheld by precarity and temporariness for migrant labor in the receiving state. An example of this relationship is investigated in the Canadian case by Tyler Chartrand and Leah Vosko (2021). They describe the externalization of social reproduction in the case of agricultural workers in Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the reliance on the temporariness that secures this source of vulnerable labor for Canadian capital accumulation. Astutely, they tie this to Canadian capital accumulation overseas with Canada's «robust investment and ownership relations» in Latin America and the Caribbean matching the sending-state of many participant agricultural workers (2021). It is notable that not only is Canadian capital invested in sending states, but a significant degree of this investment is in extractive industries, and that Canadian finance is a global leader «in investment in mining throughout Latin America, which entails the ongoing dispossession of land and livelihoods» (Chartrand and Vosko, 2021:94; Gordon and Webber, 2016). Here we see an interrelation between various extractive activities, with the extraction of natural resources being generative of the conditions for labor migration and thus the extraction of labor-power.

## The Extraction of Labor-Power in the Northern Triangle

In order to analyze the export of labor-power in a manner that is attentive to the potential for corollaries with wider logics of extraction, we must acknowledge, incorporate and reckon with the fact that much migrant labor is defined by compromise and constrained agency, be it in the sending state with the need to migrate and secure the basic conditions of sustainable existence, or in the receiving state under conditions of precarity, temporariness and low wages. Expanded extractivism as a frame of analysis for the export of labor-power can help address the implications of these dynamics, while leaving room for the exercise of agency under conditions of profound disadvantage both at an individual migrant worker level and for sending states in the world economy. Exploring the operation of extractive logics also allows an analysis of agency that acknowledges its constraint by forces of unevenness in the world economy. This is particularly valuable for addressing migration from the Northern Triangle states of Central America, as the extractive logic is clearly present within their wider economies —especially in mining and agriculture.

The underlying dynamics of displacement and migration in the Northern Triangle crystallized with the region's civil wars and continue through to the neoliberal restructuring transforming the economies of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras today (North, 2021). Neoliberal transformation dismantled what redistributive policies existed, leading to the retrenchment and redoubling of land concentration, as well as the favoring of extractive monoculture export agriculture (North, 2021). Because migrant remittances form a substantive part of the GDP in these states, the «expulsion of the poor (...) turned into a principal source of foreign

exchange for the Northern Triangle economies and a substitute for public social programs» (2021:58). The connections between all these factors underpinning «survival migration» from the Northern Triangle is demonstrative of an extractive logic behind the export of labor-power. This export of labor-power is catalyzed by displacement, dispossession and a lack of other options, common features of the neoliberal era in particular for rural populations and agrarian labor (Vergara-Camus and Kay, 2017), resulting in a fundamental constraint of agency.

In Guatemala, the social relations engendered by, and supportive of, extractivism are in need of greater scholarly attention (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021). Agrarian extractivism in the form of monoculture crops generates an enormous «surplus» population with limited job prospects in an extractive sector with minimal labor requirements. National development is also undermined by the peasant dispossession associated with extractivism, given that «[p]easant-farmed crops generate up to 10 times more «local wealth» than corporate sugarcane and oil palm», key agro-extractive crops in Guatemala (Alonso-Fradejas, 2012:517). The deterioration of rural conditions through extractive activities undercuts the conditions for survival at home, laying the basis for «survival migration».

The relationship between labor migration and debt is one key aspect the extractive export of labor-power, an example of the centrality of financialization in expanded understandings of extractivism (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017). We can see this at work in the impact that migration has had on land distribution in rural Guatemala. Debt plays a central role in migration, with the financing of illicit journeys from Guatemala to North America involving leveraging land and homes as collateral (Johnson, 2021). Briefly, this is notable in extractive terms because it demonstrates the use

of remittances to finance not just social reproduction but the costs of migration itself, complicating simplistic narratives about remittances as a productive, developmental return on labor-power's export.

In Honduras, extractive processes and the environmental consequences of natural resource extraction have been linked to labor migration by Garifuna people (Wrathall, 2012). The combination of natural resource extraction, its environmental consequences and disruption to human communities is definitive of the unfolding of expanded extractivism. Honduran migration's root causes are not solely the frequently cited proliferation of violence and more the lack of infrastructure and «human capital» in the form of education (Quijada and Sierra, 2019) —echoing Delgado Wise (2015, 2022b) and Phillips (2009) contention that migration serves to pick up the slack from inadequate social provision. In El Salvador, the economic predominance of remittances has been a means of cementing ruling class control, with dependence on them constraining the agency of the working class and reorientating the economy in favor of the elites (Warnecke-Berger, 2020). Climate change and environmental degradation are also linked to extractive industries as part of the driving force behind migration out of El Salvador (Lakhani, 2019) —again demonstrating the interrelationship between forms of extractivism when conceptualized expansively.

## Conclusion

The analysis of extractivism needs to be accompanied by an analysis of the extractive export of labor-power, a frequent corollary of these processes

definitive of the experience of vast swathes of labor throughout Latin America and, in particular, in the Northern Triangle. However, there is a risk in taking this approach that the experience and agency of migrant labor could be written out of the analysis altogether, or instrumentalized and subordinated in an effort to demonstrate a structural logic. This is a particular problem with regards to workers whose agency is profoundly constrained and compromised while engaged in labor migration on account of precarity, temporariness and geographical dislocation from both one another and communities of origin.

I have argued that an expanded understanding of extractivism can contribute to an analysis of contemporary circuits of labor migration because of a shared logic underpinning accumulation across various commodities, including that of labor-power. To do so apprehends the role of workers engaged in labor migration within a complex, hierarchical world system structured through and along axes of uneven development in a way that narrower focuses on «triple-wins» or the quantity of remittance flows cannot. It roots the locus of this extractive operation in the geographical distancing of social reproduction from the site of productive labor, across nation-state borders and so securing the labor-power of the migrant without the attendant costs of reproducing domestic labor. However, an expanded conceptualization of extractivism is by itself insufficient to fully analyze the export of labor-power, no matter how politically determinant that particular export is within a national economy; it is necessary to situate that export within wider transnational processes of uneven development as well in order to understand how these processes unfold in the reproduction of the commodity labor-power within the sending state itself.

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