

Encuadre, discurso y dinámicas de poder en la narrativa del ecosocialismo venezolano: La insoportable carga sobre las comunidades vulnerables.

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Resumen:

Este artículo examina críticamente la disonancia entre las proclamadas políticas ecosocialistas de Venezuela y las duras realidades socioambientales a las que se enfrentan sus comunidades más vulnerables. A través de un análisis comparativo de tres estudios de caso -Laguna de Píritu, Parque Nacional Morrocoy y Parque Nacional Canaima- se cuestiona cómo la alianza del régimen venezolano con las industrias extractivas globales exacerba la degradación ambiental, desplaza a las poblaciones indígenas y marginadas e intensifica las desigualdades sociales. Basándose en los marcos de la justicia medioambiental, la ecología política y el construccionismo social, el estudio pone de relieve cómo el régimen coopta los discursos progresistas sobre los movimientos indígenas y feministas para enmascarar sus prácticas neoliberales. La investigación revela el «complejo industrial contaminante» en el centro de las estrategias de extracción de recursos de Venezuela, haciendo hincapié en las cargas desproporcionadas que soportan las comunidades indígenas y afrodescendientes. Al integrar la justicia ambiental crítica y los enfoques interseccionales, el artículo subraya la urgente necesidad de soluciones equitativas y sostenibles que den prioridad a la integridad ecológica y la equidad social. Pide que se desmantelen los sistemas de opresión arraigados y que se reformule la política medioambiental para abordar la intersección de raza, clase, género y daños medioambientales en el contexto venezolano.

Palabras clave: Políticas ecosocialistas, Socioambiental, medio ambiente, industrias extractivas, integridad ecológica, equidad social, comunidades vulnerables.

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Framing, Discourse, and Power Dynamics in the Venezuelan Ecosocialism Narrative: The Unbearable Burden on Vulnerable Communities.

Abstract

This article critically examines the dissonance between Venezuela's proclaimed ecosocialist policies and the harsh socio-environmental realities faced by its most vulnerable communities. Through a comparative analysis of three case studies—Laguna de Píritu, Morrocoy National Park, and Canaima National Park—it interrogates how the Venezuelan regime's alliance with global extractive industries exacerbates environmental degradation, displaces indigenous and marginalized populations, and intensifies social inequalities. Grounded in frameworks of environmental justice, political ecology, and social constructionism, the study highlights how the regime co-opts progressive discourses on indigenous and feminist movements to mask its neoliberal practices. The research reveals the "Polluter-Industrial Complex" at the heart of Venezuela's resource extraction strategies, emphasizing the disproportionate burdens borne by indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. By integrating critical environmental justice and intersectional approaches, the article underscores the urgent need for equitable and sustainable solutions that prioritize ecological integrity and social equity. It calls for dismantling entrenched systems of oppression and reframing environmental policy to address the intersection of race, class, gender, and environmental harm in the Venezuelan context.

Key Words: Ecosocialist policies, Socio-environmental, environmental, extractive industries, ecological integrity, social equity, Vulnerable Communities.

Cadragé, discours et dynamique du pouvoir dans le récit de l'écosocialisme vénézuélien : Le fardeau insupportable des communautés vulnérables.

Résumé

Cet article examine de manière critique la dissonance entre les politiques écosociales proclamées par le Venezuela et les dures réalités socio-environnementales auxquelles sont confrontées ses communautés les plus vulnérables. Grâce à une analyse comparative de trois études de cas - Laguna de Píritu, le parc national de Morrocoy et le parc national de Canaima - il examine comment l'alliance du régime vénézuélien avec les industries extractives mondiales exacerbe la dégradation de l'environnement, déplace les populations indigènes et marginalisées et intensifie les inégalités sociales. Fondée sur les cadres de la justice environnementale, de l'écologie politique et du constructionnisme social, l'étude met en évidence la façon dont le régime coopte les discours progressistes sur les mouvements indigènes et féministes pour masquer ses pratiques néolibérales. La recherche révèle le « complexe pollueur-industriel » au cœur des stratégies d'extraction des ressources du Venezuela, en mettant l'accent sur les charges disproportionnées supportées par les communautés indigènes et afro-descendantes. En intégrant la justice environnementale critique et les approches intersectionnelles, l'article souligne le besoin urgent de solutions équitables et durables qui donnent la priorité à l'intégrité écologique et à l'équité sociale. Il appelle à démanteler les systèmes d'oppression enracinés et à recadrer la politique environnementale pour tenir compte de l'intersection de la race, de la classe, du genre et des dommages environnementaux dans le contexte vénézuélien.

Mots-clés : Politiques écosociales, socio-environnement, environnement, industries extractives, intégrité écologique, équité sociale, communautés vulnérables.

Enquadramento, discurso e dinâmica de poder na narrativa do ecossocialismo venezuelano: O fardo insuportável para as comunidades vulneráveis.

Resumo:

Este artigo examina criticamente a dissonância entre as proclamadas políticas ecossocialistas da Venezuela e as duras realidades socioambientais enfrentadas pelas suas comunidades mais vulneráveis. Por meio de uma análise comparativa de três estudos de caso - Laguna de Píritu, Parque Nacional Morrocoy e Parque Nacional Canaima -, questiona-se como a aliança do regime venezuelano com as indústrias extrativas globais exacerba a degradação ambiental, desloca populações indígenas e marginalizadas e intensifica as desigualdades sociais. Baseado em estruturas de justiça ambiental, ecologia política e construcionismo social, o estudo destaca como o regime coopta discursos progressistas sobre movimentos indígenas e feministas para mascarar suas práticas neoliberais. A pesquisa revela o “Complexo Poluidor-Industrial” no centro das estratégias de extração de recursos da Venezuela, enfatizando os encargos desproporcionados suportados pelas comunidades indígenas e afro-descendentes. Ao integrar abordagens críticas de justiça ambiental e interseccionais, o artigo sublinha a necessidade urgente de soluções equitativas e sustentáveis que dêem prioridade à integridade ecológica e à equidade social. Apela ao desmantelamento de sistemas de opressão enraizados e à reformulação da política ambiental para abordar a intersecção de raça, classe, género e danos ambientais no contexto venezuelano.

Palavras-chave: Políticas ecossocialistas, socioambiental, ambiental, indústrias extractivas, integridade ecológica, equidade social, comunidades vulneráveis

Introduction

Ecosocialism in Venezuela, framed within the "Bolivarian Revolution," claims to advocate for environmental and social justice since the approval of a new constitution in 1999. However, at present, in 2024, the Venezuelan regime's policies and practices starkly contradict this rhetoric, revealing the tangible socio-environmental impacts on marginalized communities. This paper examines the dissonance between the regime's professed commitment to ecosocialism and the actual environmental and social conditions experienced by the most vulnerable populations.

Through a comparative analysis of three case studies—Laguna de Píritu, Morrocoy National Park, and Canaima National Park—this study challenges the regime's ecosocialist narrative in 2024. The analysis is grounded in theoretical frameworks of environmental justice, political ecology, and social constructionism, drawing particularly from Hannigan's (2022) work on framing, discourse, and power dynamics. Hannigan's work highlights the significance of examining the social construction of environmental issues through the lenses of framing and discourse, illustrating how these elements intersect with power structures to influence environmental policy and action.

Hannigan's emphasis on the social construction of environmental problems resonates strongly in the Venezuelan context, where the regime's discourse shapes public understanding and policy responses. The Ministry of Popular Power for Ecosocialism, previously known as the Ministry of the Environment, is part of the executive cabinet of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Its mission is to protect, conserve, and recover the environment by establishing a new ecosocialist model based on a harmonious relationship between humans and nature (<http://www.minec.gob.ve/mision-vision/>).

This paper aims to demonstrate how policies and practices in Venezuela disproportionately intensify the suffering experienced by communities defined by race, class, gender, and other identities, despite the Ministry of Popular Power for Ecosocialism (Taylor 2000; Pellow 2018).

The regime has crafted a misleading narrative, portraying itself as a champion of indigenous, Afro-descendant women and other vulnerable communities. In reality, it has consolidated power through a complex alliance with global extractive oil and mining industries, creating a formidable "Polluter-Industrial Complex" (Faber, 2008; Pellow, 2007). Rather than protecting the environment and uplifting marginalized groups, this alliance has exacerbated the ecological crisis and intensified social inequalities. Initially, the Bolivarian Revolution argued that they would use money from oil and mining for socially vulnerable communities and the ecosystem, however, they did not use the money that way.

This dissonance is particularly evident in regions like the Orinoco Mining Arc (OMA), where the regime has granted extensive mining concessions to foreign corporations, primarily from China and Russia. Often secured through corrupt means, these concessions have led to rampant deforestation, mercury pollution of vital waterways, and the displacement of indigenous communities. This situation reflects the "transnational environmental inequality" described by Pellow (2007) in "Resisting Global Toxics", where marginalized communities in the Global South disproportionately bear the consequences of resource extraction to meet global consumption demands.

By co-opting the discourses of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and feminist movements, the regime has constructed a facade of progressive governance while simultaneously consolidating control over the nation's resources. This paper examines how this process unfolds, focusing on the government's acquisition of power within the oil, shrimp farming, ecotourism, and mining sectors, and its subsequent impact on vulnerable populations.

Theoretical Frameworks for Analysis

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice emphasizes fairness and equitable treatment for all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status, concerning environmental laws and policies. Scholars like Dorceta Taylor highlight that the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities is a central principle of environmental justice (Taylor 2000). Using an intersectional lens, Pellow advocates for a critical environmental

justice approach that considers the intersecting dynamics of race, class, gender, and other social identities (Pellow 2018).

Pellow identifies environmental justice struggles in contexts of conflict and collaboration that are not typically classified as “environmental” (Pellow 2018). A significant aspect of environmental injustice is the problem of racism. Pellow argues that throughout European history, literature, and modern politics in the global North, there is a prevalent association between non-European peoples and negative symbols related to nature, such as danger, disease, filth, and notions of being primitive or savage. This applies to various groups, including Africans, African Americans, indigenous populations, Asians, Latin Americans, and the Roma in Europe. Similar ideologies can be found in non-European societies as well, where marginalized communities, such as indigenous peoples in Mexico and Dalits in India, are often perceived as sources of contamination. This reflects a widespread racial construction that exists globally (Pellow 2018).

Pellow's contribution to Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) emphasizes the necessity of intersectionality in developing a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of environmental justice issues. By illustrating the connections between various forms of oppression and environmental harm, CEJ perspectives, as articulated by Pellow (2018) and Sultana (2022), advocate for dismantling the interconnected systems of oppression that weave vulnerability and injustice into the fabric of society.

Pellow describes Critical Environmental Justice as a concept that builds on earlier foundations of environmental justice scholarship, aiming to address new developments in Environmental Justice Studies that question previous assumptions and gaps. He adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on critical race theory, political ecology, ecofeminist theory, and anarchist theory to theorize the relationship between race and the environment.

Pellow invites rethinking environmental justice (EJ) by addressing its current limitations and proposing a new framework called Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ). Pellow critiques traditional EJ studies for their over-reliance on state power, narrow focus on social inequalities, and limited scale of analysis. He suggests that EJ should be intersectional,

multi-scalar, anti-authoritarian, and recognize the indispensability of all human and non-human actors.

Pellow introduces a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing environmental justice issues through the four pillars of Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ). These pillars are:

Intersectionality of Inequalities: CEJ emphasizes recognizing multiple categories of inequality, such as race, class, gender, and species, and how they intersect to create environmental injustices. This approach aims to provide a holistic understanding of these issues.

Role of Scale: CEJ advocates for a multi-scalar approach, considering spatial and temporal dimensions of environmental justice. This means analyzing how environmental issues affect communities at different levels, from local to global, and over various periods.

State Power and Structural Inequalities: This pillar critiques the role of state power in reinforcing racial and species-based inequalities. CEJ calls for systemic changes to dismantle these entrenched forms of discrimination.

Inclusion of Non-Human Beings: CEJ expands the scope of environmental justice to include non-human beings, recognizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological health.

Pellow illustrates these pillars through case studies, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the U.S. prison system, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and Indigenous struggles. These examples demonstrate the necessity of a multifaceted approach that considers intersectionality, scale, state power, and the inclusion of non-human beings in addressing environmental justice issues.

Sultana's article, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality" (2022), highlights the profound impact of climate change on various communities and how colonial legacies intersect with global racial capitalism, dispossession, and climate debts. It emphasizes that climate change affects people differently based on their location and circumstances, creating disparities in vulnerability and coping strategies.

Sultana's (2022) concept of the "coloniality of climate" resonates powerfully within the Venezuelan context. The exploitation of resources, particularly in the mineral-rich Orinoco Mining Arc region, reflects a long history of dispossession. Indigenous communities, already marginalized, bear the brunt of environmental damage while receiving few benefits. This uneven distribution of environmental burdens aligns with the principles of environmental justice, reminding us that not everyone faces ecological challenges equally.

Environmental justice, as explored by Faber in "Capitalizing on Environmental Injustice: Polluter-Industrial Complex in the Age of Globalization" (2008), examines how vulnerable communities unequally endure the consequences of pollution. In Venezuela, the weakening of environmental protection laws, akin to the ecosocialist's "Polluter-Industrial Complex" that Faber critiques, has emboldened destructive practices by the oil industry and illegal mining operations. A report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2021) paints a grim picture of Venezuela's oil sector, characterized by decrepit infrastructure, routine gas flaring, and oil spills, echoing the environmental injustices marginalized communities worldwide face (Berg 2021).

Faber (2008) discusses ecosocialism as a critical framework for understanding and addressing environmental injustices. He emphasizes the necessity of a transformative approach that combines ecological sustainability with social justice, arguing that traditional capitalist structures often exacerbate environmental degradation and inequality. Faber advocates for a reevaluation of environmental justice that incorporates ecosocialist principles, aiming to dismantle oppressive systems and promote cooperative, community-based solutions to environmental issues.

This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of ecological health and social equity. However, Faber's genuine insights on environmental injustices have been co-opted by the Bolivarian regime to appeal to international social movements and socialist governments. This paper demonstrates that contrary to its espoused ecosocialist practices, the Venezuelan regime operates in a manner that is far more neoliberal than what it critiques.

Political Ecology and Power Dynamics

Political ecology analyzes how political and economic factors shape environmental outcomes, focusing on government alliances and resource exploitation strategies. Venezuela's crisis is not solely ecological; it is profoundly social and political. As a field of study, political ecology encourages examination of the interconnectedness between environmental issues, social structures, and political power. The Venezuelan regime's mismanagement has been extensively documented in news reports and has exacerbated the socio-environmental crisis. This mismanagement creates a vicious cycle: environmental degradation leads to food insecurity, poverty, and social unrest, which in turn further cripples the regime's ability to address the underlying causes of the crisis.

Through the lens of political ecology, it is possible to understand the complex interplay of power dynamics that fuel Venezuela's humanitarian crisis. The Venezuelan regime prioritizes short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability, fostering an environment ripe for exploitation. This critique aligns with the work of scholars like Bryant (1992) and Scott (1998), who highlight how political agendas can undermine environmental well-being.

In his book "Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice" (2007), David Pellow argues that the "treadmill of production" necessitates increasing extraction of materials and energy from natural systems. He explains that when resources are limited, this treadmill seeks alternative sources rather than conserving or restructuring production.

Pellow describes the state's role in the capitalist market as facilitating capital growth while providing for social welfare and environmental protection. However, he contends that ecological systems cannot simultaneously meet the demands of economic profit and societal needs. The economic system prioritizes profit generation from ecosystems, even though these ecosystems provide essential resources and services for all classes of people (Pellow, 2007). By focusing on the role of state power, Pellow demonstrates how entrenched political and social structures perpetuate environmental injustices (Pellow 2018).

In Venezuela, the erosion of environmental regulations, akin to the “Polluter-Industrial Complex” critiqued by Faber (2008), has emboldened destructive practices by the oil industry and illegal mining operations. Faber discusses the colonization of the state by powerful polluting industries, whose influence undermines environmental justice policies.

Social Constructionism

John Hannigan's (2022) work on social constructionism provides a framework for understanding how societal perceptions shape the interpretation of environmental problems. Hannigan emphasizes that our understanding of the environment is influenced by social and cultural norms. The Venezuelan regime often portrays the socio-environmental crisis as an inevitable consequence of international economic sanctions, cleverly masking its role in the ongoing destruction.

Furthermore, social constructionism, as explored by Berger and Luckmann (1966), posits that our understanding of the environment is not static but shaped by social and cultural contexts. Faber's (2008) concept of the "Polluter-Industrial Complex" is particularly relevant here, as it discusses the interconnections between industrial pollution, corporate interests, and public health, highlighting how these elements work together to perpetuate environmental injustices. The Venezuelan regime co-opts ecosocialist discourse as a smokescreen to disguise its aggressive exploitation of natural resources, while the true costs are borne by indigenous communities, people of African descent, women, and impoverished populations.

Hannigan's model emphasizes that emerging environmental issues must be identified, researched, promoted, and articulated as claims. He integrates this with environmental justice, focusing on inequality and threats to local communities (Hannigan, 2022). His key concepts of framing, discourse, and power dynamics are fundamental to this paper's analysis.

According to Hannigan, framing involves constructing and defining environmental problems by selecting specific aspects to shape public opinion and mobilize action. Discourse, for Hannigan, is a system of language, ideas, and practices that constructs and maintains social reality, influencing how environmental issues are perceived and addressed. Power

dynamics refer to the varying degrees of power that different social groups possess to shape environmental discourses and policies, with dominant groups often exerting greater influence. In the Venezuelan context, indigenous and impoverished communities—the primary victims of environmental degradation—are systematically silenced and ignored. Venezuelan environmental activists face persecution, further eroding hope for environmental justice.

The term "green gentrification," coined by Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis in their 2018 article "Green Gentrification and Disaster Capitalism in Barbuda," describes the process by which environmental sustainability initiatives are used as a pretext to displace low-income residents and transform neighborhoods into more affluent, environmentally friendly spaces.

In their research on Barbuda, Gould, and Lewis argue that the island, known for its resistance to large-scale tourism, is at risk of becoming a victim of green gentrification following the devastating hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. The reconstruction efforts, framed as pathways toward sustainability and resilience, led to the displacement of long-time residents and the transformation of Barbuda's social and economic fabric.

The Venezuelan Context

The "Bolivarian Revolution" in Venezuela has transformed from a populist movement into a liberal capitalist narco-military dictatorship, forming alliances with Russia, China, Cuba, and Iran. Initially appealing to disenfranchised populations, the regime has ultimately betrayed these constituents by enriching a corrupt elite at their expense (Corrales & Penfold 2011). The Venezuelan government's focus on short-term economic gains over environmental sustainability reflects the prioritization of profit by corrupt corporate interests, often in collaboration with foreign governments (Faber 2008). The following case studies examine the power dynamics, framing, and discourse that underpin Venezuela's socio-environmental crisis through the lens of political ecology, drawing on critiques from scholars such as Bryant (1992), Scott (1998), and Hannigan (2022).

The Venezuelan regime has emerged as a leading perpetrator of environmental injustice, undermining the principles of ecosocialism as outlined by Peet and Watts (2004) in *Liberation Ecologies*. Instead of safeguarding its most vulnerable citizens, the regime actively exploits them, contradicting the principles of environmental justice advocated by Taylor (2000). Climate change exacerbates these issues, with extreme weather events posing significant threats to food security, livelihoods, and ecosystems (Levin, Boehm, and Carter 2022).

The 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report emphasizes the urgency of climate action, highlighting the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and their severe threat to food security, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Levin, Boehm, and Carter (2022) further highlight the disproportionate burden climate change places on marginalized communities and resource-poor nations, necessitating effective adaptation measures. In Venezuela, water scarcity and poor water quality have become daily struggles, impacting public health and disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2019).

The uneven distribution of environmental risk in Venezuela underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to environmental justice that addresses both rural and marginalized urban populations. Alkon and Guthman's "The New Food Activism" offers a framework for understanding Venezuela's current food crisis, emphasizing the need for collective action toward food justice, which is largely lacking in the existing system (Alkon & Guthman 2017). The regime's policies often exacerbate inequalities, further undermining genuine food security (Human Rights Watch 2014).

The case study "Laguna de Píritu: Shrimp Farming, Livelihood, and Health Risks to Ancestral Communities" illustrates the challenges faced by coastal sustainable fishing communities, paralleling the experiences of the Karuk tribe documented by Norgaard et al. (2018). Environmental degradation erodes traditional social structures and cultural practices, highlighting the complex nature of this crisis.

Venezuela's oil-dependent economy, as illustrated by me in the case study "Morrocoy National Park: A Case Study of Environmental Injustice and Neoliberal Exploitation," has

resulted in severe environmental crises characterized by widespread pollution, habitat destruction, and the erosion of local communities' livelihoods. Despite the regime's assertions of ecosocialism, conditions have deteriorated, as noted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2019; Berg 2021). Peet and Watts (2004) critique conventional development concepts in the Global South, advocating for a broader understanding of nature's potential.

Smith and Belgrave (1995) provide insights into the profound impacts of natural disasters on daily life, paralleling the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Chronic health conditions and waterborne illnesses have become daily battles for many, highlighting the lived consequences of environmental degradation and social inequities (CSIS 2019; Berg 2021).

Venezuela's energy crisis starkly contrasts with ecosocialist ideals. The Venezuelan regime prioritizes electricity exports to Brazil over domestic needs, undermining environmental sustainability (Al Jazeera 2019). The destruction of biodiversity in Canaima National Park and the negative impact on Indigenous communities due to power line construction by the regime exemplify this disregard for regional needs and sustainable practices, as detailed in the case study "The Environmental and Social Impact of Resource Extraction and Ecotourism in Canaima National Park."

The decline in environmental standards and the rise of illegal gold mining within the "Orinoco Mining Arc" (OMA) illustrate the government's disregard for environmental accountability, highlighting the complex interplay of corruption, policy failure, and criminal activities. Sultana (2022) explores the intersection of climate change and colonial legacies, emphasizing disparities in vulnerability and coping strategies. This notion of "coloniality of climate" is particularly relevant in the Venezuelan context, where resource exploitation in regions like the OMA disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities.

Laguna de Píritu, Shrimp Farming, Livelihood and Health Risks to Ancestral Communities

Laguna de Píritu, a vital wetland ecosystem on Venezuela's northeastern Caribbean coast, is experiencing severe environmental degradation. This case study examines the multifaceted impacts of this crisis, focusing on the role of shrimp farming and government inaction. By drawing parallels with Page's (2007) framework of environmental injustice, this analysis highlights the disproportionate burden borne by local fishing communities.

The lagoon's ecological health has significantly deteriorated in recent years, negatively affecting both the environment and local livelihoods. Local fishermen identify the Aguamarina de la Costa shrimp farm as the primary culprit, as it has obstructed freshwater inlets, leading to mass die-offs of aquatic fauna (Camargo 2022). The company's operations, protected by government authorities, have exacerbated the lagoon's decline through the mismanagement of sediments and waste (Camargo 2022).

Fishermen report that the Aguamarina de la Costa shrimp farm enjoys protection from military authorities and the national government, resulting in inadequate regulatory oversight. Evaluations by the Ministry of Popular Power for Ecosocialism have revealed the company's failures in sediment management and waste disposal (Camargo 2022). Digital media reports also highlight the detrimental effects of oxygen depletion and sedimentation on the lagoon's fish populations (La Patilla 2021).

Multiple factors contribute to the lagoon's degradation, including garbage accumulation, sedimentation, deforestation, and insufficient dredging. Government negligence exacerbates these issues, as local authorities ignore fishermen's requests for intervention (Camargo 2022). Additionally, the shrimp farming industry's diversion of the Unare River has accelerated the lagoon's drying process and introduced invasive shrimp species, further disrupting the ecosystem (FAO 2022).

Drawing on Page's (2007) analysis of salmon farming in Canada reveals three key dimensions of environmental injustice: distribution, participation, and recognition. Coastal First Nations communities face disproportionate health risks from salmon farms, are excluded from decision-making processes, and often have their worldviews and ways of life ignored. These dimensions resonate profoundly with the situation in Laguna de Píritu. Similar to the First Nations' experience, the local fishing community in Laguna de Píritu

bears disproportionate environmental burdens from shrimp farming. The mismanagement of sediments and waste by shrimp farms has polluted the lagoon's waters, posing significant health risks to this community (Page 2007; Camargo 2022).

Like the First Nations, the fishing community in Laguna de Píritu is largely excluded from decision-making processes related to shrimp farming. This exclusion exacerbates environmental injustice, as the community's concerns and traditional knowledge are often disregarded (Page 2007). The profit-driven operations of the shrimp farming industry threaten the cultural identity and traditional ways of life of the fishing community, reflecting Page's (2007) critique of salmon farming. These actions undermine the community's role as stewards of the lagoon and disrupt their livelihoods (Camargo 2022).

To address environmental injustice in Laguna de Píritu, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This should include equitable distribution of environmental burdens, meaningful community participation, and respect for the cultural and ecological values of the region. By learning from the experiences of other affected communities, such as the First Nations in Canada, strategies can be developed to protect the lagoon and ensure a sustainable future for its inhabitants.

Morrocoy National Park: A Case Study of Environmental Injustice and Neoliberal Exploitation

Morrocoy National Park, located on Venezuela's northwest coast, is a renowned eco-tourism destination celebrated for its stunning beaches, diverse marine life, and unique ecosystems, including mangroves and coral reefs. However, this natural paradise faces significant environmental justice challenges that threaten its ecological integrity, the livelihoods of local Afro-descendant communities, and overall biodiversity.

The situation in Morrocoy National Park starkly contrasts with the ecosocialist ideals promoted by the Venezuelan regime. This case study serves as a foundation for comparative analysis with other global instances where environmental politics are manipulated to serve political agendas rather than genuine environmental justice. The instrumentalization of environmental discourse by authoritarian regimes is a common strategy to maintain power

and control, often at the expense of both the environment and the most vulnerable communities.

The case of Barbuda following Hurricane Irma provides a comparative framework for understanding the situation in Morrocoy National Park. Both regions face threats from neoliberal agendas that prioritize development over communal and environmental well-being (Gould and Lewis, 2018). In Morrocoy, the construction of luxury marinas has led to the destruction of coral reefs and mangrove forests, alongside oil pollution—direct consequences of policies favoring wealthy government supporters over local communities and environmental needs.

Developments catering to the regime's elite have emerged within the park, reflecting a blatant disregard for its fragile ecosystem and the environmental justice concerns raised by Hannigan (2022). Local Afro-descendant fishermen, whose livelihoods depend on a healthy marine environment, bear the brunt of this environmental injustice, yet their voices remain absent from the government's narrative.

Faber's "Capitalizing on Environmental Injustice" offers insights that resonate profoundly with this case study. He warns of the weakening of environmental protections under globalization, a trend mirrored in Venezuela (Faber 2008). Once a pristine haven, the country has transformed into a playground for the wealthy elite, displacing local Afro-descendant fishermen and inflicting irreparable damage on the ecosystem.

The environmental challenges faced by minority communities dependent on the region's marine biodiversity are not merely ecological crises; they are deeply intertwined with social injustices and political manipulation. Frequent oil spills in the park from a nearby oil refinery have devastated the marine ecosystem and undermined the livelihoods of the local communities, particularly Afro-descendant fishermen (Bello, 2020). The regime's inadequate response to these spills underscores a disregard for the environmental and social welfare of its citizens.

Morrocoy National Park has been severely impacted by multiple oil spills over the years, causing extensive damage to its fragile ecosystems, including mangroves and coral

reefs. Initial leaks affected an area of 68 square kilometers and extended over 55 kilometers of coastline (Bello 2020). From 2010 to 2018, Venezuela experienced a staggering 46,820 oil spills (Bello 2020).

These spills have immediate and devastating effects on marine life, as many mollusks and other organisms die upon contact with oil. Additionally, the spills threaten the livelihoods of Afro-descendant fishermen (Bello 2020). Oiled beaches adversely impact local flora and fauna, leading to long-term ecological damage. The Cuare Wildlife Refuge, a Ramsar Site recognized for its wetland importance, is particularly affected by these environmental crises (Bello 2020).

Scholars such as Harcourt and Nelson (2015) emphasize the significance of understanding the gendered impacts of environmental issues. In Venezuela, women—especially those from marginalized communities—bear a disproportionate burden. They are often responsible for securing water, food, and fuel, tasks that become increasingly challenging due to environmental degradation. Moreover, their voices are frequently excluded from national discussions on environmental protection. In Morrocoy National Park, local Afro-descendant women are compelled to abandon their ancestral sustainable lifestyles to work in cleaning and servicing the mansions and luxury hotels of the wealthy elite.

The situation in Morrocoy National Park serves as a stark reminder of the unequal impacts of climate change. The 2016 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report, "What Climate Change Means for Florida," highlights rising sea levels and intensifying storms that threaten coastal communities. This reality resonates with Venezuela's Caribbean coast, where rising sea levels, compounded by a sinking coastline, jeopardize the mangroves that protect shorelines and function as essential carbon sinks. Unfortunately, these vital ecosystems are under threat from wealthy elites, reflecting the "green gentrification" concerns raised by Gould and Lewis (2018) in Barbuda.

The Environmental and Social Impact of Resource Extraction and Ecotourism in Canaima National Park

This third case study offers a comparative analysis of the environmental and social impacts of resource extraction and ecotourism in Canaima National Park and the “Orinoco Mining Arc” (OMA), located in the Amazon basin south of the Orinoco River in Bolívar State, Venezuela. In this region, numerous indigenous communities face forced removal, toxic water pollution, and exploitation associated with mineral extraction and ecotourism. The dissonance of the regime’s ecosocialism is starkly evident in this area, where the regime has granted extensive mining concessions to foreign corporations, primarily from China and Russia (Corrales & Penfold 2011).

These concessions, often secured through corrupt practices, have led to widespread deforestation, mercury pollution of vital waterways, and the displacement of indigenous communities. This situation exemplifies the “transnational environmental inequality” discussed by Pellow in “Resisting Global Toxics,” where marginalized communities in the Global South disproportionately suffer from resource extraction that fuels global consumption (Pellow 2007).

Analyzing this context through the lens of environmental justice, as articulated by Dorceta Taylor in “The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm,” enhances our understanding of the unequal distribution of environmental burdens and the challenges faced by Indigenous communities in Venezuela. Taylor advocates for a paradigm shift in environmental thought, emphasizing the need to prioritize environmental justice over a narrow focus on the environment itself (Taylor, 2000). This perspective is particularly relevant in Venezuela, where the dominant environmental discourse often overlooks the social inequalities embedded in environmental issues. Communities living near mining zones in the OMA endure significant environmental degradation while receiving few if any, economic benefits.

The Venezuelan regime's focus on resource extraction—specifically oil, gold, and coltan—stands in stark contrast to the core principles of ecosocialism. In Addition, the regime’s prioritization of tourist-facing areas while neglecting the environmental damage caused by the construction of a power line to sell electricity to Brazil is particularly evident in Canaima National Park. This situation resonates with Carr and Milstein’s study, “See Nothing

but Beauty,” which critiques the invisibility of anthropogenic destruction, especially when it threatens tourist attractions (Carr and Milstein 2021). Although the construction of the power line, sourced from hydroelectric renewable energy, may benefit Venezuela’s economy and strengthen its alliance with the socialist government of Brazil, it has come at a significant cost to the Pemón indigenous communities. This disruption threatens their way of life and jeopardizes their ancestral lands.

Canaima National Park spans 3 million hectares in southeastern Venezuela, within Bolívar State, where the country borders Brazil and Guyana. This park serves as a luxury tourist destination, renowned for the beauty of its numerous tepuis—massive flat-topped mountains that rise above the grassy savanna, often shrouded in mist. Among its natural wonders is Angel Falls, which cascades 979 meters from Auyantepui into a steep canyon enveloped by tropical forest. The park is also home to indigenous Pemon communities, who are part of the Carib linguistic group. The Pemon maintain a deep connection with the tepuis, believing them to be the dwelling places of the 'Marwari' spirits.

Both the Florida Manatee Viewing Center and Canaima National Park illustrate how societal structures and individual actions contribute to the normalization of environmental destruction, even in the face of awareness regarding its consequences. These examples underscore the complex interplay between economic development, tourism, and indigenous rights, revealing a broader pattern of environmental invisibility (Carr and Milstein, 2021).

The impact of Venezuela’s environmental crisis is unevenly distributed. While the country grapples with rolling blackouts, reports indicate the continued export of electricity to neighboring Brazil. This scenario parallels the findings of Bidwell et al., who examined public attitudes toward renewable energy in the U.S. Northeast, revealing that regional identities can significantly influence support for renewable energy projects, especially when local benefits are not perceived (Bidwell et al. 2022). In Venezuela, the Pemón communities endure the majority of the environmental damage caused by power line construction, yet they do not benefit from the electricity generated.

The construction of the power line between Venezuela and Brazil, initiated in 1998, has generated ongoing controversy due to its harmful effects on the environment and indigenous

communities (World Rainforest Movement, 2001). Indigenous groups in southern Bolívar State, particularly the Pemón people, strongly opposed the project from the beginning, arguing that it would disrupt their way of life by destroying their primary sources of subsistence, including crops and gardens (World Rainforest Movement 2001). Despite their resistance, a "gentleman's agreement" with the government in 2000 permitted the project to move forward, with assurances made to respect indigenous rights (World Rainforest Movement 2001). Unfortunately, these promises have not been fulfilled. Today, mining activities encroach on Pemón territories, further threatening their livelihoods and cultural heritage.

The construction process has led to widespread deforestation, erosion, and habitat loss within Canaima National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site celebrated for its biodiversity and water resources (World Rainforest Movement 2001). This project exemplifies the concept of "developmentalism," a model often criticized for aggressively imposing large-scale infrastructure projects while neglecting the local environment and communities (Coalition Against the Power Line, cited in World Rainforest Movement 2001).

Moreover, the service infrastructure established around the power line attracts harmful economic activities. Both legal and illegal mining, logging operations, and increased tourism threaten the ecological and cultural stability of the region. The construction of access roads for the power line has led to soil erosion and allowed vehicles to penetrate deeper into previously untouched areas of the national park (World Rainforest Movement, 2001). Additionally, water resources are under increasing pressure due to the heightened demand for electricity production.

The project has also fractured the unity of indigenous communities. While some have accepted government agreements, others remain steadfast in defending their sacred lands and resources. This division has led to repression and intimidation tactics against those who resist, including blackmail, psychological pressure, and even threats of violence (Sociedad de Amigos de la Gran Sabana, AMIGRANSA, cited in World Rainforest Movement, 2001).

The situation in Canaima National Park resonates with Phil Brown's work on "Popular Epidemiology and Toxic Waste Contamination." The Pemón ancestral lands have been

ravaged by illegal mining, compromising their health due to mercury contamination. Despite their invaluable knowledge of the environment, their voices are often dismissed by authorities (Brown 2002). The Pemón communities, like many others worldwide, have developed their own understanding of the health risks associated with environmental contamination—a form of "popular epidemiology" that deserves recognition and integration into environmental decision-making. These communities, similar to those documented by Faber facing corporate polluters, lack a voice and power, leaving them to bear the burden of environmental destruction.

The path to healing Venezuela's fractured landscape requires collective action, as emphasized by Alkon and Guthman in *The New Food Activism*. Local communities, such as the Pemón people, possess invaluable knowledge and a deep connection to the land, and their voices must be heard and integrated into effective solutions (Alkon and Guthman, 2017).

Their traditional knowledge and understanding of the natural world, often dismissed by authorities, provide valuable insights into sustainable practices. This aligns with Brown's work on "Popular Epidemiology and Toxic Waste Contamination," which underscores the importance of recognizing and incorporating community knowledge into environmental decision-making (Brown 2002).

Heavily armed criminal groups, frequently operating with the tacit approval of corrupt officials, have taken control of illegal mining operations. The consequences of this takeover are devastating, including widespread deforestation, water contamination, the prostitution of indigenous women, and the forced displacement of local communities. This situation underscores Bebbington's emphasis on how power relations shape environmental outcomes (Bebbington 2013).

Drawing on Pellow's works, "Resisting Global Toxics" (2007) and "What Is Critical Environmental Justice?" (2018), it is possible to understand the human and ecological costs associated with fueling the digital world. Pellow's exploration of "global toxics" resonates in the context of Venezuela. The OMA, rich in minerals essential for electronics, such as coltan and bauxite, is rapidly becoming a zone of environmental sacrifice. This situation exemplifies the "transnational environmental inequality" that Pellow describes, where the burden of

resource extraction disproportionately affects marginalized communities in the Global South (Pellow 2007).

The insatiable demand for smartphones, laptops, and other electronic devices drives the need for these minerals. The irony is stark: the very devices that connect us globally contribute to environmental degradation in distant lands. Pellow highlights critical minerals for electronics, such as quartz, cassiterite, and wolframite, all found in the OMA. The pursuit of a connected world comes at a heavy price for Venezuelan ecosystems and communities (Pellow 2007).

Pellow's call for a broader conception of environmental justice is particularly pertinent in the Venezuelan context. The environmental crisis in the OMA extends beyond pollution and deforestation; it also includes the social injustices faced by Indigenous communities, such as the loss of ancestral lands, cultural disruption, and health issues stemming from environmental contamination. This perspective aligns with the "Principles of Environmental Justice" outlined by Pellow, which advocates for social transformations that address issues beyond traditional environmental concerns (Pellow, 2018).

Conclusions

Venezuela's ecosocialist rhetoric stands in stark contrast to its environmental practices. Although the regime has positioned itself as a champion of environmental and social justice, the reality is characterized by rampant resource extraction, environmental degradation, and the disproportionate burden placed on marginalized communities. This paper reveals a pattern of government-sanctioned exploitation, where economic interests overshadow ecological preservation and human well-being.

The case studies presented here illustrate the devastating consequences of this approach. Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other vulnerable populations have borne the brunt of these environmental injustices, facing displacement, health risks, and the erosion of their cultural heritage. These findings reflect broader global patterns of environmental inequality, as highlighted by scholars like Pellow (2007), which show that marginalized

communities in the Global South disproportionately suffer the impacts of resource extraction and consumption driven by the Global North.

To address the complex challenges posed by Venezuela's socio-environmental crisis, it is essential to critically examine power dynamics, intersectionality, and the social construction of environmental issues. By understanding how environmental problems are framed and whose interests are prioritized, we can develop more effective and equitable solutions.

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