

The Journal of Social Encounters

Volume 7
Issue 1 *Extractive Politics, Conflict and
Peacebuilding*

Article 1

2023

Introduction - Volume 7, Issue 1

Selina Gallo-Cruz
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters



Part of the [Economics Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gallo-Cruz, Selina (2023) "Introduction - Volume 7, Issue 1," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, 1-3.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol7/iss1/1

This Featured Essay is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Social Encounters by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

**Introduction: Journal of Social Encounters Special Issue
Extractive Politics, Conflict, and Peacebuilding**

**Selina Gallo-Cruz
Syracuse University**

My conversation with a representative of a well-known Liberian peacebuilding organization surveyed a wide range of challenges that peacebuilders encountered in post-war Liberia. We discussed difficult reconciliation work in a society left in ruins by a long and brutal civil war, entrenched misogyny perpetuating violence against women, and the sweeping retreat of funding following the Ebola crisis. At the end of our discussion, Thomas made a comment on a recent conflict that shifted my attention to the foundational role played by extractive politics in Liberia. His organization, known for its leadership in religious and nonviolent peacebuilding efforts, was called on by a mining company to help resolve violent protests among disgruntled community members. He explained that this was just one poignant example of how nonviolent conflict resolution had become recognized and incorporated into the institutional structure of local post-war politics. But not everyone who relied on his organization's nonviolent conflict resolution work viewed it as a way of supporting the deeper structural transformation necessary to undo the inequities that so often fuel outbreaks of violence in the first place. For peacebuilders with an eye toward long-term stability, this disconnect is particularly problematic.

With this insight in mind, the role of extractive politics in Liberian inequities and conflicts across sectors becomes readily apparent. Initially, peacebuilders were able to create promising opportunities for reconciliation and reconstruction following the war. By the end of 2020, however, women's incremental gains in leadership had dissipated and violence was erupting at the polls. Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee took to social media to plead with her fellow Liberians not to threaten the fragile peace they had worked so hard to achieve. Unemployment was on the rise again and infrastructure that had been damaged during the war still needed to be rebuilt across the country. In Liberian homes, the hardships of job insecurity and poverty intensified during the COVID-19 quarantine, during which women also bore the brunt of increased domestic violence. This spike in assaults brought women to the streets in protest and, in response, President George Weah declared a national rape emergency in September of 2020.

As my coauthor and I dug deeper into the many possible aggravators of post-war violence (Gallo-Cruz & Remsburg, 2021), we found that the greatest contributors to Liberia's post-war economy, which generates nearly all of its foreign exports (EITI 2022), are the very same extractive industries that funded its long civil war and enabled a deep-seated culture of political corruption: forestry and mining. It is therefore difficult to consider improving Liberians' lives without addressing the politics of its foreign-oriented extractive economy. But as a country plagued by the "resource curse," an abundance of highly sought-after natural resources paired with the burden of debt and vulnerability to exploitation by multinational others, it seemed to Liberian leaders that the only reasonable way to rebuild after the war was to grant concession agreements to powerful and profitable foreign industries. My entrée into this problem in Liberia led to compounding concerns as I began to consider the environmental costs of never-ending industrial growth, which disproportionately affects the world's poor. I wanted to understand how peacebuilding programs in other countries dealing with extractive conflicts were faring. Further, I wanted to know how the field of peace studies was prepared to take on the

*Introduction: Journal of Social Encounters Special Issue
Extractive Politics, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*

increasingly wicked problems so intimately tied to the violence and inequities animating our research as peace scholars. Thus, when Coordinating Editor Ron Pagnucco invited me to edit a special edition of the *Journal of Social Encounters*, this issue, “Extractive Politics, Conflict, and Peacebuilding” was born.

I am delighted to present the following collection of excellent essays from scholars working around the world through a prism of peace studies frameworks.

Our lead article by Ruy Llera Blanes, Ana Carolina Rodrigues Vasse, Lisa Akesson, and Euclides Gonçalves explores the plight of those dispossessed by coal mining and liquified natural gas extraction projects in two regions in Mozambique, Tete and Cabo Delgado. Through in-depth historical analysis, contemporary interviews, and field work with civil society advocates, Blanes and colleagues unravel the complexities of disenfranchisement caused by extractive projects with repercussions that began to be felt long before recent conflicts that are often interpreted to be primarily religious in nature.

Adding to this perspective, Afroza Anwary offers us an intimate understanding of how displaced Rohingyas from the Rakhine state of Myanmar witnessed a surreptitious takeover of their homes and lands by extractive interests. Anwary offers an important insight into an ongoing conflict in which scholars have extensively documented the role of religious and ethnic animosities in acts of violence and ethnic cleansing while overlooking the predation of military-economic actors seeking to expand the extractive industry sector.

Christian Cito Cirhigiri’s study of conflicts surrounding extractive industries in Wamuzimu in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo follows, shedding light on the long-lasting effects of unchecked industrial development. While peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts focusing on conflicts of the here and now remain urgent, Cirhigiri questions how organizers might build leverage for community reparations that could offer stability and security to long-suffering communities.

A comparative study by Borislava Manolovic and Espoir Kabanga expands on this perspective, drawing on surveys of activists and community members affected by and standing in resistance to extractive industries. Their study underscores how poverty and social and political precarity have prevented Congolese communities from gaining the leverage needed to stop foreign companies from uprooting their land, livelihoods, and basic human rights.

Our next two studies take a closer look at dialogues surrounding the best strategic and tactical responses to extractive conflicts. Marcela Torres Wong and Elia Méndez García draw on in-depth participant observation in two communities in Mexico, Oaxaca and Yucatán, with divergent histories of Indigenous political mobilization. They closely examine how and under what conditions the process of prior consultation truly benefits and empowers local Indigenous peoples in their relations with extractive industries.

We are grateful to Corrie Grosse for allowing us to reprint an excerpt from her recently published book, *Working Across Lines: Resisting Extreme Energy Extraction*. In this essay, Grosse homes in on the relationship between grassroots and “grasstops” organizers, with the former viewing

substantial systemic transformations as necessary for meeting their goals of climate justice and the latter taking smaller pragmatic steps to work within the existing system. Grosse's analysis demonstrates how solidarity works across ideational lines in environmental movements.

Finally, our special issue concludes with two critical theoretical surveys. Caesar Monteverchio unpacks the Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity, which suggests that social problems should be addressed at the lowest level possible but at the highest level necessary. Monteverchio offers a broad sweep of the literature on subsidiarity and articulates the tenets, debates, and concerns raised within this discourse. He concludes with a practical application to two cases in which subsidiarity has been put into action: in Oro Verde's work with mining communities in the Chocó region of Colombia and through chartered mediation with three mining communities in Kenya.

We conclude our special issue with my own meta-theoretical exploration of how the field of peace studies has developed in relation to the issues of extractive politics, conflict, and peacebuilding. I consider three interdisciplinary bodies of literature that provide focused examinations of extractive conflicts, political ecology, environmental peacebuilding, and ecofeminism. In so doing, I identify clear paradigmatic boundaries that have emerged to devise practical solutions for immediate needs within a global framework of growth-based development. I also present several reorienting questions with which scholars might begin to shift beyond this paradigm to prioritize scientific statements on the global ecological limits to growth.

References

- Gallo-Cruz, Selina & Remsburg, Renée (2021) "Peacebuilding, Liberian Women, and the Invisible Hand of Conflict in the Post-War Era" *The Journal of Social Encounters*. Vol. 5: Iss. 2, 77-105.
- EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative). (2022). *Liberia: 2020-2021 EITI Report*. Accessed 2/17/2022. <https://eiti.org/countries/liberia>.