

Tzawata: an ancestral Kichwa community in resistance to mining in their territory



Capitalism has been imposed on the world through mechanisms of excessive exploitation of natural resources, where the human being adopts an egocentric vision, separating himself from his relationship with nature. These concepts are responsible for the current environmental crisis, deepened by the incessant search for economic growth.

Capitalist production does not consider the finite resources of the planet and the vulnerability of the human being. This economic system applies various strategies to appropriate the territories, such as megaprojects, which generate drastic changes in food sovereignty, quality of life and the health of communities.

Faced with this reality, José Aparecido and Antonio Thomaz, in their text *Development Projects and Territorial Disputes in Latin America*, argue that the sale of land to foreign companies, the expansion of agribusiness and the creation by the State of an entire infrastructure to provide adequate conditions for the territorialization of capital. Consequently, the conflicts in Latin America are reflected, mainly, in the displacement of traditional communities and peoples, who develop a rooted relationship with nature that does not respond to capitalist activities. This is the case of the mining projects that are imposed on the communities without taking into account what they think and feel.

In Ecuador, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have long followed the philosophy of Good Living or *Sumak Kawsay* (said in Kichwa) in their territories. In the Constitution of Ecuador (2008) the Ecuadorian State is recognized as plurinational and intercultural, the recognition of the territorial and natural diversity of the country and the historical identities that have coexisted for centuries in said territories is proposed. Despite this declaration, there is still work pending from the indigenous peoples and Ecuadorian society to ensure these constitutional statements.

And although the stereotype of savages is maintained against indigenous peoples, there are currently community leaders who carry out actions to defend their territory. This occurs in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where the ancestral Kichwa community of Tzawata is located, located in El Capricho, Carlos Julio Arosemena Tola canton, Napo province (east of Ecuador). The Tzawata community has waged nonviolent resistance against mining companies that threaten access to land and water.

This community claims the ancestral lands that were stolen 50 years ago following a landlord model. According to Ramiro Aguinda, president of this community, "patron Carlos Sevilla deceived our grandparents from his territory in exchange for a bag of salt, machetes, a pair of boots or simply making them compadres." The documentary *Yaku warmikuna* (2021) explains the arrival of the "whites" in the jungle, with the purpose of taking over the ancestral lands. The natives were threatened with weapons, beaten with sticks and punished with ropes. At that time, the natives did not know firearms, so they could not defend themselves and decided to flee to other communities.

For these painful and historical reasons, they have decided to resist the evictions initiated by the public force, in the present. The Tzawata community has undertaken nonviolent actions to recover their ancestral lands, which has become a legal dispute between the community and the Ecuadorian State. Since the community decided to return to the territory there have been several attempts to evict them by the police and military. A first attempt occurred in May 2010. Another attempt was made on August 2, 2021, but this time by the company Terra Earth Resource S.A. who hired 200 people with the aim of evicting and violating the community.

In the face of these acts of violence, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie), the peoples, organizations and representatives of parish Decentralized Autonomous Governments formed the Resistance Front for Water and Life of Northern Ecuador. They have organized meetings for an Ecuador Free of Metal Mining, with the purpose of strengthening the fight against the impacts of mining companies in the territories.

During August, October, November and December 2021, four national meetings have been held with communities in resistance to mining activity: Shiña belonging to the Nabón canton, in the province of Azuay; Cuellaje, Cotacachi canton of the province of Imbabura; Palo Quemado, in the Sigchos canton, Cotopaxi province; and the last meeting took place in Tzawata, which has managed to recover its ancestral territory and is peacefully resisting mining activities. From this community, a nonviolent strategy was promoted that consisted of a peaceful march. This took place on December 11 in the canton of Carlos Julio Arosemena Tola (province of Napo). The delegates of the Conaie and Confeniae (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) led this march, touring the streets of the canton.

Because the march took place on a Saturday, it was not possible to make a visit to the mayor's office or exert pressure on other government authorities. At the end of the march, the delegations went to the community of Tzawata to hold an assembly with the residents and invited leaders. The objective was to articulate the different actions at the national level against the violence, division and displacement of communities due to mining activities, as well as to strengthen the anti-mining agenda for the coming year.

It should be noted that this fourth National Meeting for an Ecuador Free of Mining was organized with the intention of consolidating the collective work of the Tzawata community. The event had food supplies facilitated by Confeniae and the self-management of the community itself, which also provided food such as cassava and greens to offer to the attendees during the meeting.

According to Luis Jacobo Corral, who was the facilitator of the meeting at the Tzawata Territorial Defense Table, if the mining activities do not cease, the same thing will happen that happens in the province of Esmeraldas (Ecuadorian coast), specifically in the cantons of San Lorenzo and Eloy. Alfaro. These territories are really affected by mining with severe environmental impacts in the Santiago and Cayapas Rivers (Esmeraldas). This is the case of Wimbí, a black community criminalized and stigmatized as thieves and invaders of their own territory.

In conclusion, mining has taken over the ancestral territories, becoming a serious problem for the indigenous and Afro-descendant communities of Ecuador, which should keep the Ecuadorian State and citizens on alert due to the high level of vulnerability and violence in which they find themselves. communities that oppose mining concessions within their lands.

In a pandemic context, in which "economic reactivation" is proposed through the exploitation of natural resources, nonviolent action is of crucial importance for the defense of territories. This allows communities to exercise their power through organization and planning strategies to undertake the struggle and defense of nature against authoritarian regimes and extractive industries.

BIOGRAPHY

Diana Ante is a marketing engineer, specializing in climate change. In 2020 he was a participant in the regional program for the study and practice of strategic nonviolent action in the Americas in Quito. She is the creator of Dialogues for climate action, a space where relevant environmental news in Ecuador is shared. Currently, she is a Master's student in Contemporary Integration of Latin America at the Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (Unila, Brazil) and is developing the food sovereignty research project, from the perspective of food and nutritional security in the face of the post-pandemic in the areas urban Ecuador.