CHAPTER 3

# Extracting Us: Co-curating Creative Responses to Extractivism Through a Feminist Political Ecology Praxis

## The Extracting Us Curatorial Collective

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## Introduction

Extractivism—the logic that enables large-scale resource extraction and the exploitation of people and nature—has inspired a raft of responses from artists and creatives. Often, these responses take shape through

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aesthetics of the industrial sublime, with vast and person-less landscapes of ruination which provoke an awe-inspired inertia. Such portrayals, while effectively conveying the spectacular scale of resource extraction (Koch, 2022; Traynor, 2021), tend to overlook the everyday violence of extractivism in the lives and life worlds of those living in spaces that colonial logics and extractive capital have constituted as 'extractive zones' (Gómez-Barris, 2017) or who are otherwise entangled in the web of extractivism. Moreover, the agency and ongoing-ness of communities and individuals living despite or in resistance to extractivism is often hidden from view.

This chapter shares the journey of a curatorial collective that takes on the challenges of looking at extractivism through the lens of feminist political ecology (FPE). It tells the story of an initiative called Extracting Us which was born out of a meeting between scholar-activists based in the United Kingdom and Indonesia; of conversations, meetings and the sharing of worlds and experiences. From this encounter came a desire to speak to issues of extractivism very specific to a geographical context (East Kalimantan), but that we knew could cross boundaries, borders and times. Engaging with FPE, we foregrounded the experiences and agency of communities on the frontlines of this extractive zone, paying attention to how power over the environment—which follows the contours of coloniality, race and patriarchy—not only reshapes landscapes but limits the possibilities for thriving, with devastating consequences. With this came a need to shift perspectives of extractivism from the universalising, the spectacular, and extractive aesthetic objectification towards curating creative forms from the frontlines of extractivism. These perspectives instead centre the gaze on the everyday as the time–space where extractivism is both experienced and resisted.

In the three years that our curatorial collective has worked together, 'extractivism' as a theme and 'organising concept' (Chagnon et al., 2022) has become much more prominent in academic, activist and artistic discourse and practice, exceeding its earlier definitions as a political-economic regime of commodity extraction and export (Acosta, 2013) to consider extractivism as a mindset or way of thinking (Willow, 2018).

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Black and Indigenous perspectives on environmental justice highlight colonialism and racial capitalism within extractivist logics (Chagnon et al., 2022; LaDuke & Cowen, 2020; Wynter, 2003). We therefore situate Extracting Us in a wider set of conversations that were evolving and unfolding along a similar path to us (for example, Arts Catalyst, 2019; Tsing et al., 2017; Ureta & Flores, 2022, The Global Extractivisms and Alternatives Initiative (EXALT) at the University of Helsinki). Extracting Us has grown collectively, from 2019 to the time of writing in 2022, through our curation of a series of three exhibitions and accompanying events with artists, activists and researchers engaged in what Gómez-Barris (2021, p. 855) refers to as 'the arts of land and water defence'. The process of collaborative curation, with its emphasis on creative-political enquiry and on thinking and doing 'otherwise', has also led us to think anew (and across our different positionalities) about what we understand as extractivism and how this is informed by the practice of FPE.

We weave together our conversations about the curatorial process, exploring different ways of articulating and responding to extractivism through integrating art, activism and research. In doing so, we speculate about the ways in which these influence each other. Our process for this chapter involves us each reflecting upon the various points of our journey through the curation of Extracting Us at ONCA Gallery in 2019, Extracting Us online in 2020, and Despite Extractivism online in 2021–2022. In recording our reflections, we adopt an FPE practice that coalesces around plural ways of seeing, thinking and learning relationally. The text therefore retains messiness as we shift between collective and individual voices. We seek to avoid flattening out our differences within our collaborative curation: a long process involving three exhibitions, dozens of institutions and hundreds of people across different continents.

We have organised our reflections around four elements of the project: the process of curating and building our collaboration across boundaries, the practice of weaving materials and conversations through the exhibitions, the care-full interventions we have made as we join up art, academia and activism in extractive contexts. and finally, the ways this project has expanded our understanding of extractivism and our practice of feminist political ecology.

## Curating Across Boundaries

It all started with the story around the Mahakam River, the second largest river in Indonesia, located in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Here (there), the largest coal exploitation site in Indonesia is slowly eroding life around the city of Samarinda. One of us, Siti Maimunah (Mai) has embodied experiences working with JATAM (Jaringan Advokasi Tambang/Mining Advocacy Network, Indonesia) and a group of mothers whose children drowned after falling into abandoned mining pits in East Kalimantan a decade ago. From her encounters around the Mahakam River, the story flowed through meetings with Elona Hoover, Becky Elmhirst, Dian Ekowati and Alice Owen in Brighton, and then the idea of the exhibition emerged.

The confluence that brought stories of extractivism from the Mahakam river into conversation with researchers and activists in Brighton, UK, was enabled by the EU-funded Wellbeing, Ecology, Gender and cOmmunity (WEGO) early stage researcher network that brought two of us (Mai and Dian) from Indonesia to the UK to an initial collaboration with Alice and Becky (WEGO early stage researcher and mentor respectively) and post-graduate researcher Elona Hoover in Brighton in the summer of 2019. Brighton is a city on England's south coast, far from East Kalimantan, but linked through the hidden threads of UK corporate investments that profit from mineral exploitation. It is also a place where conversations and actions in search of ecological justice are flourishing, in spaces such as ONCA Gallery and the University of Brighton's Centre for Spatial, Environmental and Cultural Politics (C-SECP).

ONCA Gallery is a Brighton-based arts charity 'that bridges social and environmental justice issues with creativity' (ONCA, 2022) and was also an important locus for young people in Brighton who were engaged in the #FridaysForFuture Youth Strikes for Climate. Conversations that took place between Mai and Elona in ONCA's kitchen and backyard coalesced around the everyday impacts of coal extraction in Kalimantan, and serendipitously led to the first exhibition titled '*Extracting Us. Looking Differently: Feminism, Politics and Coal Extraction*'. The name of 'Extracting Us' emerged from the philosophy of the Mollo indigenous peoples in Indonesia: 'destroying nature is like destroying our human body'.

The planning, discussions and activities that swirled around this exhibition brought the five of us together—Elona, Mai, Alice, Dian and

Becky—as a curatorial collective: we are the 'We' in this chapter, each bringing our own experiences and ideas. Yet, this 'We' also risks conflating individual positionalities and standpoints: different experiences of living and researching in Global North and South contexts, different life/work stages, varying care responsibilities in differing everyday time-spaces, and different postures, skills and knowledges in relation to research, activism and art practice.

This 'We' also falls short of embracing all those that are part of this story. The first exhibition (Brighton, July 2019) involved Mai's activist networks, notably JATAM, who helped with design work and communication for the exhibition, and the London Mining Network. WEGO provided a relational space of feminist political ecology learning and funding for many of our activities, C-SECP provided material and intellectual support for engaged research activities connecting creativity and environmental justice, and the ONCA Gallery directors provided practical and critical input and connections with activists and further artists-researchers.

We began to feel our way… The collective continues to be shaped by the collaborations that grew along the way and that helped us establish our curatorial principles, including challenging North–South narratives on extractivism, foregrounding accessibility, and in bringing in the perspectives of those most affected. These collaborations also enabled us to curate across boundaries—of knowledges, geographies and temporalities.

***Elona***: I feel grateful for the human connections, for the relationships we made through the process. For the way in which it allowed me to express my own and each of our potentials: artistic, academic, activist, and practical. We could use knowledges and capacities that are often boxed into different spheres.

***Becky***: I felt engaged, stretched, challenged and at times, outside my comfort zone. Some aspects, particularly early on, made me feel deeply uneasy—a version of imposter syndrome perhaps, pushing against disciplinary boundaries that I wouldn't normally traverse, and entering into ethical territory that I perhaps had avoided previously.

It felt like we formalised the curatorial collective when we proposed a second iteration of the exhibition for the POLLEN (Political Ecology Network) conference—originally to be hosted in Brighton in June 2020 and moved online due to the pandemic to September 2020. This involved making our curatorial principles more explicit as we invited contributors to join an expanded 'Extracting Us' project that sought to bring together

feminist political ecology perspectives and extractivism. These principles articulated feminist political ecology loosely, inviting contributions that thought about extractivism in terms of materials from (and of) the earth as well as in terms of human and more-than-human experiences and energies. We sought contributions that listened to perspectives from those most affected, and that included narratives of resistance.

***Elona***: I was excited about being able to create and maintain connections through the pandemic, finding ways of adapting the exhibition and modes of collaboration with curators and contributors in troubled times… while giving space to those for whom adapting was not possible or even violent.

The attention and care for contributors also extended to our collective. This became particularly important when we crossed the boundary from physical to virtual, shifting the collaborative Extracting Us exhibition online in the (northern) Spring of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we dispersed to different 'homes' and countries, we held our collective together with regular meetings, working across four time zones (UK, France, Germany and Indonesia) and checking in on each other. Countless hours of discussions, tensions, laughs and tears. Collaborating and trying our best not to extract from each other. Some individuals still work more than others. Some feel regret that they cannot contribute more. Some lost good friends, fell ill, took care of ill loved ones. Yet our growing familiarity with being together online in the strange intimacy of each other's home spaces helped dissolve physical distances, even as our experiences with the pandemic diverged. Slowly and organically, we took time to consider, reflect, and think about how We produced knowledge and work related to our daily lives and in relation with others.

***Dian***: The Extracting Us curatorial collective helped me through the pandemic and the loneliness during our PhD study and its solitude. We had good news when a member of the collective (Elona) was expecting and delivered a beautiful person in 2021.

***Alice***: Moving online actually made for different kinds of connections. In those early days of the pandemic there was a sense of connecting despite and because of our isolation. Catching up with and working with the collective heightened my awareness of the privileges I experienced in my daily life (health, home, job and economic security, loving family and friends) and gave me a stronger awareness of the time involved in care responsibilities and commitments that I did not have. Similarly, the curation process allowed me to recognise material differences between

the context shared in the exhibition and the context through which I have been researching extractivism—oil extraction with relatively minor local impacts in a relatively privileged part of the South of England. This awareness often led to feelings of guilt, and to a kind of paralysis from not knowing what to do with these privileges. It made me feel like I should be doing more for this project, yet at the same time I didn't want to impose and risk losing the horizontality and collectivity.

***Becky***: Although connecting online for meetings and webinars was a balm early on in the pandemic, we quickly became aware of highly differentiated and uneven experiences of COVID-19 pandemic as this overlaid and amplified existing inequalities associated with coloniality and extractivist logics. Farhana Sultana has written powerfully about the pandemic, climate and coloniality as overlapping crises (Sultana, 2021) and clearly each of us was differently positioned in relation to this. When we met with contributors online, personal introductions were punctuated with harrowing stories of bereavement and fear in the face of failing health services or inexplicable political responses in different corners of the world. Reciprocity and care via Zoom became an integral part of our feminist practice.

***Elona***: After we had launched the end of the second iteration, I also had a clear desire to pass things on. I had been leading more at that moment but did not want the process to be tied to one person. I think of this as a feminist practice of attachment and detachment (Ahmed, 2012). It was then my turn to take a step back, and with the third and last iteration I felt overwhelmed when I was not able to contribute any more—trusting that I would not be left out when I found the time again.

Our reflections narrate a messy process, as we worked with the boundaries of each other's realities, tried to learn to relate and sought out ways to reflect that in our work. Donna Haraway's (2016) idea of 'staying with the trouble' describes our process well: it reminds us of the layers of difficulties and emotions faced by those who live in an extractive landscape, and how we continue to care for each other. We also connect with Cindy Katz's description of 'messiness' in trying to constitute 'the field' where this is not something that can be sanitised from the researcher's everyday life and positionality (Katz, 1994). The story of how we sought to curate across boundaries (of experience, geography and coloniality) and the journey of our collaboration amidst the structural pressures of academia, activisms and global pandemic is something akin to a river. Like the flow

of a river, it was shaped by a palimpsest landscape and, encountering unexpected obstructions, was disrupted and diverted without diminishing its essential qualities.

## Weaving Materials and Conversations

Our second set of reflections converges around what we learned as we worked with the creative materials of the exhibitions (the photographs that comprised the first exhibition in 2019, the works submitted by contributors to the online Extracting Us exhibition in 2020 and its later iteration in 2021, Despite Extractivism). The process of curating exhibitions and events involved working with the collected materials to unravel conversations, draw unexpected connections and pursue the lines of inquiry that these inspired.

Our first exhibition, curated with the ONCA Gallery team in Brighton, staged 46 photographs from a larger collection gathered over the years by Mai and her collaborators in Indonesia. Mai and Elona spent hours carefully selecting the photographs, initially trying to create a contrast between visions of destroyed or empty landscapes and photos of everyday lives. In creating juxtapositions, the exhibition aimed to show how families and communities are continually devastated by the impacts of coal mining and abandoned coal pits, which have a colonial legacy linking to the UK where the exhibition was shown.

***Alice***: For me the moment when I really 'got it' was when we all gathered to group the photographs. It was the first time I'd properly seen them, and the stories of the people in the photographs which Mai recounted to us were suddenly so visceral and powerful. In that room of women, mothers and daughters, I sensed the gravity of our responsibility to share and make sense of the stories of the women and children who looked back at us from the photographs. In that session, experimenting with ways of grouping and juxtaposing the images, I began to see the importance of a feminist political ecology lens for extractivism. For me, it's about paying attention to and taking seriously the ways conflicts over nature are experienced through the everyday and through embodied and emotional registers. This applies both 'in the field' as we come to understand the experiences of the communities we research with, and in ourselves as we think and feel our way through our research practices in ways not detached from the rest of our lives or selves.

In the gallery, the photographs were arranged in five clusters. Each centred around a large-scale photograph which showed extractive landscapes with massive physical damage, such as floods surrounding the entire Samarinda city, the loss of farmland, abandoned toxic pits, landslides, and the impacts on villages. These were juxtaposed with smaller photographs of dead children's faces in coal pits, uncovering the predatory character of the mines: extractivisms destroy and deprive social relations, womb relations, knowledge and care. Photographs of resistance actions were included in every photograph cluster, capturing the agency of communities in responding while avoiding pathos and victim narratives.

The emotional and personal connections evoked by the photography and the accompanying invitations to respond were imagined as an embodied experience that could foster response-ability (Haraway, 2016). This goes beyond the typical academic work of exemplifying, adding complexity to, or communicating the impacts of extractivism. Cultivating response-ability involves creating a sense of connection and of agency rather than being struck by the inertia of guilt or the overwhelming scale of global extractivism.

***Elona***: Though I felt like an 'outsider' in terms of feminist political ecology, I felt like I was able to bring a different perspective on how to express some of the theoretical issues in practice: what affective strength different images had together, the importance of the aesthetic, ways of putting images on walls, or designing postcards and imagining together how to involve people affectively in an exhibition. This was striking for me when I created the overlay of the children's faces with the mining pit for the exhibition poster. Twenty faces. A deep pit. The scale of which I start to see as the massive but minuscule mining machine hidden in its bowels came to my attention. Dark earth. Lost lives.

***Alice***: Installing the exhibition at ONCA was a strange experience, enjoying being together in the gallery space and getting excited about the exhibition whilst confronting again the harrowing images. I remember in particular how we positioned the photographs of Rahmawati, a mother who had lost her child, at eye level—it gives me goosebumps even now recalling the intimacy of those face-to-face encounters.

***Dian***: Despite coming from Indonesia, I did not 'get' it before, even when Mai talked deeply about these issues. The stories of Raihan and other lives lost in the mining pits are not something that I read in everyday mainstream media. I remember sitting with the photos and the collective in a small room in our university and how depressed I was by

the lost lives and mothers losing children, and by my own ignorance of this situation (Fig. 3.1).

Maybe it was the quality of the photos, taken with phones, or photos of photos taken in school, or photos of family portraits. There is an intimacy to the non-professional. These images brought home the everyday violence of extractivism in ways images of vast extracted landscapes found in a political ecology textbook cannot.

Moving the second Extracting Us exhibition online was a challenge for the curatorial collective and contributors. We had to move from a predefined exhibition space to an undefined online space, where we wanted to create a feeling of visiting somewhere, of being immersed in the work of different contributors, as well as including human interactions and shared learning in a virtual space.

Fourteen contributors responded to our call for works relating to feminist political ecologies of extractivism for the second Extracting Us exhibition, sharing work from Tajikistan, Ireland, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Eastern Himalayas, Indonesia, Zambia, UK, Ecuador, Senegal, France and India. Several had planned an object or performance-based

**Fig. 3.1** Open cast coal mine, overlain with images of children who drowned in abandoned coal pits (East Kalimantan, Indonesia)

contribution and found it challenging to move towards the digital. Conversations focused on how to work through that without losing an essence of the work and if it was worth it. For instance, Sandro Simon's work (focused on Senegal) was a series of six video loops that were meant to be played on their own and/or simultaneously. Another contributor, Maica Gugolati, whose work focuses on Trinidad, explained how she had to first imagine an overcrowded soundscape in an embodied physical space, and after that, it made sense to watch it online.

Our third exhibition, Despite Extractivism, was also online. In this iteration, we brought together contributions from Indonesia, UK, Ireland, Sweden, Senegal, the Urals in Russia and Spain, this time exploring how communities care, resist and persist despite extractivism. For this, we worked with independent curator Celina Loh, whose professional insights on curation and the online exhibition development encouraged us to consider questions around how we were communicating, with whom and why. She helped us create a more 'tactile' virtual experience.

In both online exhibitions—Extracting Us and Despite Extractivism—we had accompanying events where participants were also asked to engage with physical objects in their surroundings. For example, we held a webinar on creative engagements on the front line presented with exhibition contributors at the POLLEN20 conference in which we invited participants to respond creatively to what they were listening to and seeing (Fig. 3.2).

We noted an affective involvement by asking people to draw and inviting them to be engaged while they listened. We shared the doodles towards the end of the webinar, including participants in the conversation without necessarily sharing words. This active embodied engagement—in the context of the ongoing pandemic and online webinar saturation—became something we wanted to build on as we gained more confidence in working through online spaces. As well as artists' and activists' presentations and discussions, the webinar series accompanying Despite Extractivism invited audiences to engage in a different register by listening to songs, poems, guided reflections and movement.

For example, during Arabel Lebrusan's 'Toxic Waves' contribution to Despite Extractivism at our webinar on embodiment, participants were invited to simultaneously draw waves in time to 270 beats of a metronome, representing the 270 people killed in the collapse of the Minas Gerais iron ore tailings dam in Brazil in 2019. Through this performance, Arabel explored the questions 'Can art making, through

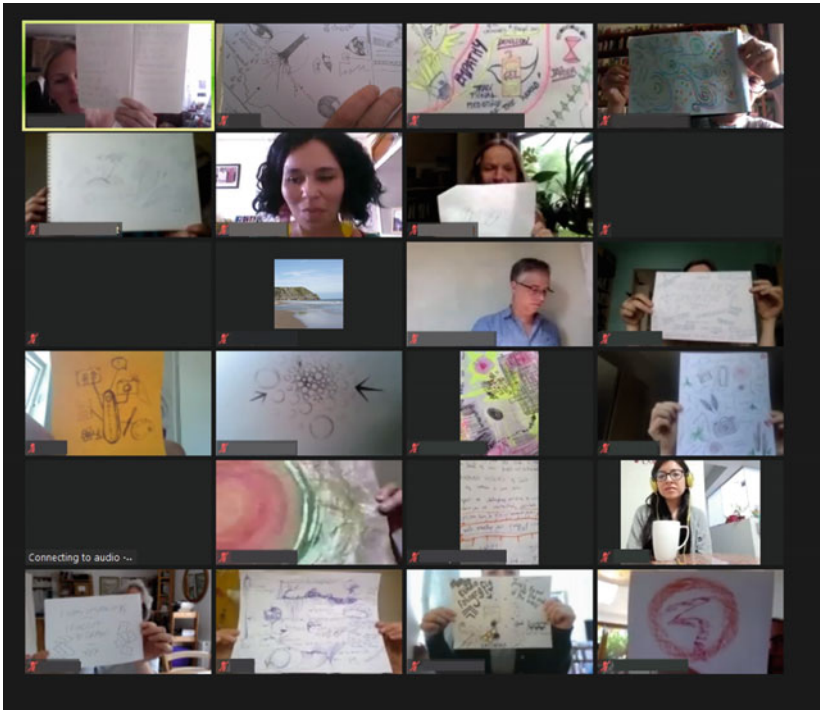


**Fig. 3.2** Sharing creative responses to the Extracting Us webinar at the online POLLEN conference (2020)

embodied thinking, activate our empathy at a deeper and more instinctive level than our rational understanding of events? Can this urge us to act? Can this help us grieve?'

***Dian***: The body movement of making the wave as part of Arabel's participatory performance art made me feel emotional. I felt anger, grief, stress, connection with the community displaced by extractive forces. I felt very tired afterwards (the event was held quite late from where I joined), but when I tried to sleep on my comfortable clean bed and breathing clean air, I remembered those whose lives have been extracted through mining and do not have a clean bed to sleep on (and no clean air to breath in) in the nights after struggling during their days. There were

feelings of solidarity and of guilt for not being able to give more 'real support'.

## Care-Full Interventions

Integrating relational practices such as the work with materials mentioned above was part of our curatorial process. The notion of 'care' emerged as a major tributary to our river through our embodied experiences of a feminist curation process and through the themes of our work together and independently. In this section, we reflect on the ways we worked through a politics of connection and solidarity, aligned with our curatorial principle to develop solidarity actions aligned with the narratives of resistance that were highlighted in the contribution of the three exhibitions.

As part of the first exhibition held at ONCA, we developed a series of postcards that people could write and send to a range of people/actors relevant to the context of coal mining in Indonesia as featured in the exhibition. This included the mothers who had lost their children, local NGOs, and local and national Indonesian politicians. As well as being in the gallery for people to write independently, postcard-writing was integrated into the event series. The exhibition was accompanied by a film screening, talk, and workshop with youth climate protestors involved in #FridaysForFuture. Ibu Rahima's story was featured in the exhibition, and exhibition visitors wrote and sent her solidarity postcards (Fig. 3.3).

Ibu Rahima's 14-year-old son Raihan drowned in one of the abandoned coal pits in East Kalimantan. At the time when Indonesians were celebrating Mother's Day in 2014, Ibu Rahima demanded that the Government close and clean up more than 250 abandoned coal pits in the city of Samarinda. She visited Raihan's former school, spoke to the students about staying away from the pits and collected 10,000 signatures for a petition which she gave to the Indonesian Minister for Environment and Forestry. It was important to us to avoid pathos and a victim narrative in the exhibition: as her story shows, Rahima is not a passive victim, she is a survivor.

One year after the first exhibition, we received a short video from Rahima. She was holding the postcards that had been sent by the exhibition visitors. The exhibition had helped to uncover the connection between Indonesia and the UK; the latter had benefited from the first coal extracted and shipped from East Kalimantan for use in fuelling colonial trade and warships. In her video, Rahima addressed the exhibition

**Fig. 3.3** Solidarity postcards ready to be sent from the UK to Indonesia (2019)

participants: 'Thank you for friends from the UK who have supported me. With the blessings of God Almighty, I will continue the struggle to get justice for the children who drowned in the (abandoned) coal pits'.

***Becky***: At first, many of the contributions in the first exhibition and Extracting Us online exhibition gave me a profound sadness—a hopelessness, or rather, a sense of my own hopelessness in the face of what communities were enduring and responding to. Was visibilising the 'unseenness' of extractivism's violence sufficient? Taking part in the postcard writing activity (and learning about the replies that came back from the community), shifted my perspective as I recognised the possibilities for relating otherwise through co-learning and solidarity across the fault lines of racial capitalism and the coloniality of extractivism.

The process and reflections directed us to further develop curatorial principles based on care-full interventions that: (i) challenge 'north–south' narratives on extractivism, listen to perspectives from those most affected, and develop actions of solidarity and resistance across

countries and continents; (ii) include narratives of resistance where possible/relevant; and thus avoid relying on pathos that might develop an 'us/them' feeling; and (iii) develop solidarity actions during the exhibition, for instance engaging emotionally and physically with the exhibition material.

These principles formed part of our invitation to contributors, and all were invited to consider how opportunities for these kinds of solidarities could be integrated into their contributions. Every contribution included website links to further information and to specific groups they could support, or actions visitors could take. As curators, it is hard for us to know how effective this has been in terms of those on the frontlines of extractivism being or feeling supported. For us, what has been more apparent is the way we have begun to build connections between the contributors, the communities we are all connected to through our work, and our visitors.

We began weaving connections between artists for the online exhibition, asking them for instance to visit the exhibition and join and video call to comment on each other's work. As the curatorial collective, we had already spent some time finding our connections (the themes of the exhibition), but different ideas such as 'time' emerged as potent concepts in these discussions and the conversation flowed in unexpected directions. Many artists found exciting resonances between others' work and their own and others, whether in terms of the content or the artistic modes and practices engaged with. When we took these conversations into the more public space of the POLLEN webinar, other kinds of connections were made between the contributions and those participating.

Building on the richness of these discussions and the engagement we felt from the online participants, for the Despite Extractivism iteration of the exhibition we more deliberately curated the series of online time spaces. Something we pay attention to in feminist political ecology is how systems of power operate and are resisted across scales, and we decided to theme the Despite Extractivism exhibition event series around this idea, starting with the body and embodiment, expanding to community, and finally considering worlding. These events took careful planning, inviting artists, researchers and community groups to connect in advance and prepare presentations or provocations. The stories told through the exhibition and discussion workshops opened up new ways of understanding care as creative expressions which enable us to better recognise

and analyse multiple and often hidden ways of tending to each other and more-than-human natures against or despite extractivism.

For those involved, there were poignant moments of connectivity, despite our physical distance. During one of the Despite Extractivism events, where contributor Dewi Candraningrum (Indonesia) discussed her paintings of the Kartini Kendeng ecological defenders, she was accompanied by the background sound of a cricket chirping the onset of the dry season in Central Java. This reminded us that the gossamer threads of solidarity that connected us across cyberspace involved other species beyond our own.

Our efforts to convene events that would enable us to feel, experience and share together across worlds were not always successful: the material limitations of online connections could let us down. A particularly regretful moment came when the Kartini Kendang were scheduled to share their resistance song, but uneven bandwidths reminded us once more about the ways uneven infrastructures replicated wider global injustices and inequalities, and taught us once more about the importance of accessibility if our feminist response to extractivism activism (or, following Willow, 2018, our extrACTIVISM) was to have any real purchase.

Not all the contributors were able to join our events. In part, this was because of the 'flowing' nature of our work, evolving slowly rather than according to a master plan. We also lacked the capacity to make the events truly inclusive by using alternative text for images or by ensuring accessibility for those with hearing disabilities.

***Becky***: Our feminism aims to be postcolonial and intersectional—I'm not sure I can quite describe it as decolonial. Some of our aspirations in this direction have been difficult to fulfil—moving online meant dealing with various forms of digital exclusion, and we have always struggled with how to address the issues that come from working predominantly in the English language, even as in the later work we sought to include simultaneous translation in some of our events.

## Expanding Orientations

Like the flow of a river, the story and bodily experience of creating and curating the Extracting Us exhibitions has branched in unexpected directions. It doesn't matter whether we have flowed with the main river or along one of its branches. Originally the Extracting Us exhibition was about mining coal and the predatory relationships and violent

logics of extractivism. The story of extractivism along the Mahakam River is connected with extractivism in rivers, mountains, cities, provinces, countries and other continents, and with the people in them. In the exhibitions that followed, rather than following a particular commodity, our course followed the undulations of the landscape as we continued to explore these connections with an expanded group of contributors and collaborators.

As we expanded our orientations, our reflections and inquiries have followed and contributed to the evolving contours of feminist political ecology as a way of thinking through and resisting global socio-ecological injustices. Yet it also feels like the more we have collectively learned, the harder it is to communicate and maintain a space for learning that is open across all backgrounds, capacities, positionalities and ontologies. It can be easy to forget what it was like to not have even heard of 'extractivism' or 'feminist political ecology', and we have become aware that we have developed our own vocabulary between us over the years, which perhaps makes it more difficult to communicate in everyday language or ideas. Reflecting together, we see how the questions and messages of the exhibitions have evolved, but connecting these into something that feels like a stable 'mode of inquiry' can be challenging.

***Alice***: I think we (I) felt somewhat reluctant to offer up our own definitions as we wanted to keep alive the sense of collective inquiry with our contributors, communities and audiences. Yet as curators we have a responsibility to offer up useful explanations and guiding ideas.

The feminist impetus to avoid controlling, channelling and containing the flow of the narrative has always been important, and this means that while some of our learning is collective, it is also embodied and situated, sedimented in various ways among us. Here, we share some learnings from the process of making unexpected connections between the works that feature in the exhibition series.

***Mai***: My own contribution 'Between the frontier spaces' has many resonances with 'Between the rivers' by Daniel Macmillen Voskoboynik, both reflecting on rivers. Daniel describes his family home in Russia, and the kindness of the river, which changes gradually as the landscape is impacted by extractivism. 'We lost our footing to the earth, but we never knew it,' he writes. Daniel describes one of the characteristics of extractivism that makes what was originally meaningful and sacred become cheap and meaningless:

> This vision—also known as extractivism—enforces a misunderstanding. Life, which is sacred, is actually cheap, and valuable only in its service to the economy. What matters and what being means are not ongoing questions, but simple equations.

Similarly, I find a contradiction in my work between a photo of rusty tools left by a logging company in heavily damaged and deforested land now being mined by coal companies, and the continuation of rubber and fruit orchards providing economic, social and ecological benefits. The contradiction I describe in the form of a poem:

> When the forest, no longer with trees,
> Abandoned wreckage machine
> and the logging company left
>
> While the orchard is evergreen,
> Stocking for harvest every season,
> and the rubber dripping sap every day

Like Daniel, I understand that extractivism is not a sectoral project but a perspective and way of operating: with a large-scale, predatory character. The predation of extractivism is short, making the sustainable and the sacred worthless, no longer usable or requiring a long time to heal. Extractivism is in stark contrast to daily activities such as gardening, planting, and performing rituals that become the daily routine of Murung Indigenous people, the face of 'Despite Extractivism'.

***Becky***: I had an academic understanding of extractivism and approached this from a feminist political ecology framing, which emphasised research that was designed around words: texts and conversations, albeit those trying to centre perspectives from communities, and focusing on everyday livelihoods. I had spent much of my FPE life in ethnographic fieldwork, aiming to deploy a feminist sensitivity. Engaging with artists and creatives, I learned the value of seeing the different registers through which communities tell their stories, and through which others tell the stories of communities, through art, creativity, song, performance. What was striking for me was how specific and yet universal some of these practices were: from the connections to poetry, song and place-making in the Sperrin Mountains in the North of Ireland (V'cenza Cirefice) to the ways in which indigenous Waoroni women chanted their histories of connection to their home territories, in the face of, and despite

violent extractivisms in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Margherita Scazza). Extracting Us coincided with an amplification of decolonial and anti-colonial thought and action, and with the centring of 'extractivism' as a concept in political ecology. The Extracting Us collective provided a space in which to explore the connections between coloniality and extractivism.

***Alice***: The exhibitions and events helped me understand the pervasiveness of the violent logics of extractivism, be this through large scale devastation of landscapes and the direct loss of life and livelihoods, or through the onto-logics of extractivism which deny other ways of being in and relating to the world.

Working on the website or the Extracting Us online exhibition required me to spend time with the works in a deep and focused way. This was really influential and inspirational to some of the work I presented, not to mention ongoing thinking about extractivism. I was particularly influenced by V'cenza Cirefice's video overlay showing the submerged perspective of a river flowing through the Sperrin Mountains in the North of Ireland, and the same area represented from the disembodied perspective of a map which abstracts living, flowing connections and, through the 'Extractive Gaze' (Gómez-Barris, 2017) sees the land as a resource.

One idea we discussed while curating the exhibition was how extractivism(s) are not all pervasive. Sometimes defining something can make it seem bigger than it is, but it is also important to explore how there are many alternatives to extractivism already in existence. As we explored in our events and conversations, solidarity and resistance can also occur across multiple, intersecting scales.

***Elona***: Being part of the collective introduced me to the notion of extractivism and allowed me to develop more connections with feminist political ecology scholars and thinking. It allowed me to also see my work on urban commoning in a different way: making a link between the extractive processes of capitalism in relation to urban space and practices of enclosure.

***Dian***: The curation process shifted my understanding from avoiding being extractive, towards being care-full. Extractivism was to be avoided not only in terms of extractive methodologies in our research work, but also in practices. I was convinced not to do fieldwork during the pandemic as the field would be the oil palm community residing in places with little to no access to healthcare.

***Mai***: As a collective that grew up in the FPE space, we have also grown and become more sensitive to understanding extractivism, which

transfers not only material but also the resistance to it. Resistance exists in forms not often recognised as resistance, such as in the unseen work done mostly by women of collecting water, gardening, keeping rituals before the harvest or meeting with mothers affected by the coal mine. This care work is extracted under the operation of mining, logging and other extractive projects. We are starting to learn something new, something about spaces of care as a way to look at and understand resistance in the extractive landscape.

***Becky***: The shift towards Despite Extractivism felt like a point where the collective moved from wielding a hatchet to sowing seeds (to use a political ecology metaphor) or at least, tending what was emerging through the cracks, where I felt our learning moved towards a focus on extraACTIVISMS (Willow, 2018). This has carried over into other areas of my work, principally my political ecology pedagogy where different knowledges and prefigurative politics now feature. Now, I feel an ethical imperative not only to point to what's wrong, but to share and learn where alternatives (not false solutions) are being practised, however small and mundane, and to see everyday creative practice as a valuable methodology.

We have 'looked differently' at extractivism from many angles, in many ways and at different scales, thinking alongside creative interventions of various kinds. This has helped us recognise how extraction/extractivism has uneven impacts, and to appreciate what is at the core of 'extractivism': the coloniality of its logics.

## Moving Forward—Weaving, Thinking, Caring, Acting

From differently positioned researchers with shared interests to a curatorial collective, the *Extracting Us* journey has been at once an experiment in feminist political ecology as praxis, and in 'the exhibition' as an iterative space for co-inquiry and public engagement on the less explored or otherwise unconnected aspects and contexts of extractivism.

We have journeyed together with each other, the many contributors, and the communities and individuals who have shared their experiences along the way, all giving and gleaning differently from this project and coming to pause on different riverbanks rather than simply going with the flow. We have found spaces to stay with our troubles, from the personal to planetary, with Extracting Us providing something of an anchor in

ever-more turbulent times. Our motivations, understandings, and positionalities within structures of power and privilege will always situate us differently in relation to extractivism, but we share a sense that it is a privilege to have had the opportunity and the collective energy to curate these exhibitions.

As our river flows towards the sea, we are confronted with multiple ways in which extractivism in its many registers is re-inscribed, its logics becoming more pervasive. Extractivism intersects with the rising tides of patriarchy, authoritarianism, violence, racism and oppression. How to continue this project of understanding extractivism in a way which weaves connections between contexts, allows for care-full response-abilities towards active solidarity and expands the 'we' in ways that do not flatten difference will certainly be troubles we will have to stay with. Whether through academic, artistic or activist work, or work that continues to erode the boundaries between these, more creativity will be needed.

Creativity, communities and care have orientated our co-curation process, from the ways we work together to the ways we work towards amplifying, connecting and learning with communities impacted by extractivism and the artists, academics and researchers who work with them. Through these experiences and the stories shared in the exhibition contributions, our thoughts converge on the idea that extractivism is a violent and pervasive way of enacting force that dismantles human and more-than-human communities and the relationships of care that exist within them. Yet. Is this the end of the story? How do communities—be these communities of place, communities of practice or communities of solidarity—continue to find different registers through which to question, subvert, resist, persist and care? How best can we continue to create and curate creative and care-full spaces across boundaries?

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