

The Orinoco Mining Arch: Venezuela's revolutionary extractive imperative

The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has been for years a banner of hope for progressive circles around the world. Infused with an inclusive discourse, a strong, charismatic and anti-imperialist leader, and a windfall of oil rents, Venezuela was well positioned to overcome the many challenges posed to its political process. In recent years, however, the country's economy has gone through a deep crisis. In turn, its leaders have chosen to drastically deepen the country's dependence in subsoil rents through a project to massively expand the extractive frontier with the help of foreign investors. The governmental elite lauds the Orinoco Mining Arch (OMA) as an initiative that seeks to transcend rentier capitalism. Nevertheless, it shows signs of the contrary. The OMA represents a profound commitment to rentierism, the enclosure of marginalized populations' lands and the spread of state and paramilitary violence. In this article, I will discuss initial findings from my post-doctoral research on the social struggles in and around the OMA project and how environmental and Indigenous movements have articulated demands for land demarcations, environmental protection and a more inclusive democracy. Against the backdrop of multidisciplinary interventions on new extractivism, the paper will demonstrate that unlike the initial hopes and expectations of progressive intellectuals in the global north, the Bolivarian Revolution represents a prime example of the establishment of an "extractive imperative" in South America.

Key words: Bolivarian Revolution, Orinoco Mining Arch, New Extractivism, Rentierism.