

Emily Billo  
Department of Geography  
Florida State University

Title: Body as Archive: Women, Storytelling, and Environmental Transformation in Intag, Ecuador

Keywords: body as archive, subterranean, extractivism, feminized labor, Ecuador

A 2023 court decision in Intag, Ecuador upended mining companies' license to operate in the region, producing a victory for residents who have been resisting a proposed copper mining project for nearly 30 years. This paper draws on interviews and participant observation to illustrate historical and geographically specific forms of embodied social difference that construct Intag through and beyond an extractive imperative. Even though the mine has not been constructed, the subterranean is still present in the region's material processes. Since 2013, I have traveled to Intag, living with women and their families in their homes, sharing in household labor. In the evenings, we often linger at the table as the conversation unfolds. Women tell me stories of anticipating and resisting the mining project, rooted in relations of difference, carried through their everyday lives. The possibility of copper, tied to resource nationalism and economic growth in Ecuador, articulates with histories of mestizaje and masculinity associated through economically productive labor. I argue that conceptual and methodological framing of bodies as archives attends to relational and material elements of intergenerational feminized labor. My research shows how women demonstrate that they are more than just workers defined by extractivism—they are also citizens, and their gendered, socially reproductive labor has value beyond an extractive imperative. The body as archive reveals sedimented histories, literally written onto the body through the exhaustion of caring for and maintaining a household, and in the stories that are told at the end of a day of work. Women's embodiment creates space for their histories, shaping the political landscape and possible futures in Intag. Listening to women, and attending to their bodies as archives, compels researchers to ask more of the relationships between social difference and the subterranean.