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Contested extractivism: actors and strategies in conflicts over mining

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Abstract

This article focuses on the question of how the worldwide emergence of conflicts over mining, and particularly in Latin America, can be explained. It aims at systematizing contemporary conflicts over mining. Based on existing case studies and our own research in Colombia, it investigates the issues at stake in conflicts over large-scale mining, the strategies which local actors apply, and the factors influencing their actions. The analysis combines theoretical concepts from the study of contentious politics with concepts from spatial theory. The empirical examples demonstrate that conflicts over mining are embedded in overriding processes of transformation in which global processes (the resource boom) come together with national politics and the symbolic and material meaning of specific locations. Political opportunity structures – political programs, institutions, laws, regulations, changes in government and regimes – are pivotal for local conflicts. Protest actors search for allies, responsibilities and solutions on the local, national, or transnational scale. An important characteristic of conflicts over mining is the particular meaning of specific places. This is shaped by the physical-material existence of resource deposits and at the same time by various cultural attributions. In this article, it is demonstrated that both these dimensions of place are relevant to the demands and strategies of collective actors.

Zusammenfassung

Konflikte um Bergbau nehmen weltweit zu. Es gilt in der Forschung diese Konflikte zu systematisieren sowie länderübergreifende Aussagen hinsichtlich der Frage zu treffen, wie sich der globale Rohstoffboom in konkretes Konflikthandeln übersetzt. Dieser Artikel leistet hierzu einen Beitrag. Aufbauend auf eigenen Forschungen in Kolumbien gehen wir der Frage nach, worum in Konflikten um die Ausweitung des industriellen Bergbaus gestritten wird, welche Strategien lokale Akteure dabei einsetzen und welche Faktoren ihr Konflikthandeln beeinflussen. Theoretisch greifen wir auf Konzepte der *contentious politics*-Forschung, insbesondere die Konzepte Protestrepertoires und politische Gelegenheitsstrukturen zurück, die wir um raumtheoretische Einsichten zu *place* und *scale* ergänzen. Die empirischen Beispiele belegen, dass Bergbaukonflikte in übergeordnete Transformationsprozesse eingebettet sind, bei denen globale politisch-ökonomische Veränderungen (Rohstoffboom) mit nationalen politischen und lokalen, kulturell symbolischen Bedeutung spezifischer Orte interagieren. Politische Gelegenheitsstrukturen – politische Programme, Institutionen, Gesetze, Regime- oder Regierungswechsel – sind entscheidend für lokale Konflikte. Protestakteure suchen auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen (lokal bis transnational) nach Allianzen, Verantwortung und Lösungen. In Bergbaukonflikten nehmen die Orte der Ausbeutung

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in einem zweidimensionalen Sinne Bedeutung ein: physisch-materiell aufgrund der Vorkommen von Rohstoffen und symbolisch aufgrund unterschiedlicher kultureller Zuschreibungen. Beide Dimensionen von *place* sind für die Wahl der Handlungsstrategien und die Formulierungen politischer Forderungen zentral.

Keywords Extractivism, resource boom, mining, conflict, Colombia

1. Introduction

In the period 2000-2012, high prices on the world market and increasing demands for raw materials from new and old centers of industrial production (China, Europe), accompanied by insecurities on the financial markets, triggered a global resource boom, which is reflected particularly in the mining sector. Increases in investments and production resulted in a historically unique growth of this sector (ICMM 2014: 10). Most investments went to the Global South. Between 2009 and 2012, the region with the highest share (around one third) of all global investments in mining was Latin America (Ericsson and Larsson 2013). Through the global resource boom a resource dependent development model, which since the late 2000s has been known as 'extractivism' or 'neoextractivism' (Svampa 2015), became a truly promising strategy for growth for many governments in the Global South. Extractivism is generally defined as a national, growth-oriented development pathway based on the extraction and export of raw materials. With regard to post-neoliberal political regimes in Latin America (e.g. Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela), scholars have coined the term neoextractivism, placing emphasis on state policies that include a stronger control and appropriation of resource rents by the state, and the partial reinvestment of this revenue into social and poverty reduction programs. In many countries, the growing economic importance of the resource sector has led to a substantial growth in revenues from resource rents in national budgets; to a rise in the share of the primary sector in the national GDP, and in some countries to a reduction of poverty rates and income inequalities. But it has also led to an increase in the production of gold, carbon and other ores and minerals, and here-with related to an unprecedented spatial expansion of mining into areas hitherto sparsely exposed to capital forces (Svampa 2012: 14). This expansion is linked to deep socio-spatial transformation processes: where industrial mines are or shall be established, the existing land uses, land regimes, and property relations of lands are changed, access to water and land are transformed, new material infrastructures such as paved roads and harbors are built, socio-economic expecta-

tions are created, social relations (such as labor, gender, and class relations) and political power relations are restructured (Peluso and Lund 2011: 668). Against this background, since the 2000s the expansion of the mining sector has triggered diverse social conflicts involving an increasing number of different state, non-state, and private sector actors.

Numerous studies investigate single cases of conflicts over mining in Latin America. They focus, for instance, on Guatemala, Peru, Chile, and Ecuador (Bebbington 2012; Bebbington and Bury 2013; Dueholm Rasch 2012; Damonte 2016). However, until now, only few attempts have been undertaken to systematize contemporary conflicts over mining and to gain insights across national states on how the global resource boom leads to local conflicts. This article addresses this question. Based on existing case studies from the literature and our own research in Colombia (Dietz 2016)¹, we examine the issues at stake in conflicts over large-scale mining; the strategies which local actors apply, and the factors influencing their actions.

Javier Arrellano-Yanguas (2012) distinguishes three typical conflict issues based on empirical research on conflicts over mining in Peru: (1) negative impacts that local actors expect industrial mining to have on their livelihoods: loss of settlements, agricultural land and pasture, and territorial autonomy rights; (2) compensation, employment guarantees, and funding of local development projects by the mining companies; and (3) how state rents are distributed and used.

Conflicts occur between scales of administration and government within a state (local vs. central government), or between social sectors at one scale (Arrellano-Yanguas 2012). Furthermore, rights of democratic participation in decision-making on land use and resource policies, as well as working conditions, are contested in conflicts over mining. We can observe a wide range of strategies and repertoires of contention, including lobbying and public relations, referenda and petitions, demonstrations and strikes, as well as confrontational tactics such as blockades and sabotage. Issues and strategies vary depending

on political context conditions, power positions, and previous land use and actor constellations. These factors are not independent, but mutually influence one another. They are neither historically nor spatially determined, but contingent.

In order to analytically grasp the influence of political contexts, actor constellations, and strategies, this article refers to theoretical concepts from the study of contentious politics, namely political opportunity structures and repertoires of contention, and critical space theory. The article is structured as follows: In the two sections that follow, the concepts of political opportunity structures, repertoires of contention, and the categories of place and scale are introduced. Next, conflict issues, actor constellations, and strategies in conflicts over the current expansion of large-scale mining in Latin America are analyzed. We illustrate our analytical approach by two examples from our own research on mining conflicts in Colombia. In the conclusion, we sum up how political opportunity structures and spatial references influence conflicts over mining and discuss the analytical merits of the theoretical perspective we develop throughout the article.

2. Repertoires of contention and political opportunity structures

In contentious politics research, protest is understood as a constitutive characteristic of social movements, differentiating these from other collective political actors such as parties or interest groups (*Snow et al. 2004: 6*). Protest refers to non-institutional collective action designed to enforce political demands, influence public opinion and put pressure on the authorities. It can include numerous, wide-ranging activities: cultural forms of expression such as music, films, literature and art; more conventional strategies such as lobbying or petitioning; more confrontational tactics such as strikes and demonstrations; the intended or unintended use of physical violence against persons or objects (*Taylor and van Dyke 2004*). The concept “repertoires of contention” refers to a set (“toolkit”) of activity tactics used by collective actors in a specific protest cycle or in a certain campaign (*Tilly 2006*). Repertoires can further be conceptualized as “interactive episodes that link social movement actors to each other as well as to opponents and authorities for the intended purpose of challenging or resisting change in groups, organizations, or societies” (*Taylor*

and *van Dyke 2004: 266*). They are deeply embedded in a broader historical, social and cultural context, and are inscribed into the political culture as a means of collective action. Societies each have their own traditions, rites and routines of action in collective political claim-making (*Tarrow 1998: 20*).

The political opportunity structures approach argues that political protest cannot be explained by focusing exclusively on the actors themselves and on internal factors such as the resources they have at their disposal. Rather, the context in which collective actors come into existence is pivotal to explaining their emergence, impact, and so on. The strategies, aims, and forms of protest are not chosen in a vacuum but are influenced by a variety of structural conditions such as the openness of political institutions, the existence of political allies, disunited elites and the government’s repressive capacity (*Meyer 2004; Tarrow 1996*). This is not to say that agency is not central to explaining the emergence and processes of collective action and in particular of political protest, but that agency can best be understood related to its specific context. Political opportunity structures are “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (*Tarrow 1998: 19-20*). Political opportunity factors can be temporary, and are typically events that open up a ‘window of opportunity’ for mobilization and protest. The core of the political opportunity structure argument is that people engage in social movements and protest when patterns of enabling and hindering structures shift; and that they strategically deploy a certain ‘repertoire of collective action’, thereby creating new opportunities for contentious collective action.

3. Place and scale

Place as a category from spatial theory is particularly helpful for analyzing the relationship of physical material and its social and cultural meaning (*Dietz and Engels 2016; Escobar 2008; Massey 2005*). It focuses on how social actors culturally make sense of a specific locality. For the analysis of conflicts over mining, place is enlightening as most of these conflicts are place-based; they are locally interpreted as struggles over culture, locality and territory. Places are important sources of culture and identity: ethnic, in-

indigenous, autochthonous, and national identities are almost always constructed referring to localities and territories. Related to this, globalization does not lead to a decline in the relevance of 'local' places – social processes are not zero-sum games, where one phenomenon gains importance at the expense of another.

Conflicts over mining are characterized by actors at various scales: multinational companies, transnational activist networks and NGOs, national governments, local actors such as civil society organizations, women, youth or indigenous groups. The strategies these actors apply are multi-scalar, too. The concept of scale aims at overcoming the hierarchically connoted dualism that locates causal factors on the global scale and social agency on the local one (*Massey 2005*). It thus fundamentally questions equating 'the local' with the everyday and locality while imagining 'the global' as an abstract space in opposition to it (*Escobar 2001: 155*). With respect to social conflicts, this denies that power is located in an abstract, untouchable space, and that resistance is limited to concrete places 'on the ground'. Rather, global power structures are produced, reproduced, experienced and contested in everyday local life, while activism operates in multiple arenas and networks as well (*Cumbers and Routledge 2004; Routledge 2003*). Neither power nor resistance should therefore be located in definite, bounded spaces. For the study of social conflicts and mobilization, scale indeed turns out to be a fruitful analytical concept (*Hoefle 2006*) – as long as scales are assumed to be social constructions, produced and productive at the same time (*Delaney and Leitner 1997*). Social actors do not jump between, or shift, scales that are already given. Rather, through their discourses and activities, protesters and their adversaries produce, reproduce, and contest scales. George Towers provides a helpful distinction for analyzing these processes of scale construction by actors in contentious politics: he differentiates conceptually between 'scales of regulation' and 'scales of meaning' (*Towers 2000: 26*). While the former is the institutional scale of political regulation, the latter refers to a product of social interpretation. Both concepts focus on how scales are socially constructed, negotiated and changed, thus emphasizing the actors' scalar practices rather than 'scale itself' (*Neumann 2009: 399*).

4. Issues at stake and actors involved

Anthony Bebbington et al. (2008: 901ff) state that mining conflicts in the 2000s were primarily characterized by labor struggles and conflicts between trade unions on the one hand and governments and mining companies on the other. The current territorial expansion of industrial mining (e.g. into indigenous territories and areas with small-scale agriculture and livestock farming) has resulted in both a shift and an expansion of actor constellations in conflicts over mining and widened the range of subjects of the conflicts: conflicts over working conditions and the development of new mining areas. Linked to these dynamics are conflicts over territorial control and access to water and land, the effects on local livelihoods, gender relations and ecosystems, and conflicts over government regulations concerning the conditions for mining activities and the distribution of the profits and tax revenues (cf. *Bebbington 2012; Bebbington and Bury 2013*). Conflicts over the expansion of industrial mining occur when local actors perceive it as a threat to their livelihoods (e.g. farming or artisanal mining), their territorial, cultural, or political rights (*Dueholm Rasch 2012*). Hence, a wide range of actors from different political fractions and social classes is involved in these conflicts: companies, state actors, local governments, ethnic and peasant organizations and movements, artisanal miners, national and international NGOs and agro-industrial actors whose farming activities are likewise concurrent with mining. These actors, depending on their positions in a social field structured by power relations, have varying opportunities and means at their disposal to voice their demands and interests.

The conflict constellations depend on previous forms of land use, and of property relations, and land right regimes in the respective mining areas. Large-scale mining does not expand into 'unused' land or 'empty spaces'. In contrast, the various existing forms of land use – agriculture and forestry, agro-industrial production, herding, settlements, artisanal mining, cultural, spiritual and many other purposes – and the cultural, spiritual and social meanings and relations linked to them, structure the conflicts that can occur when a company is granted a concession to explore or extract resources. Furthermore, conflict constellations are influenced by the historical meaning of artisanal and/or industrial mining in a specific social-spatial context.

In many cases in which large-scale mining has already existed for a long time, strong mining unions exist and are central actors in conflicts over the organizing of workers and working conditions. Examples can be found in Mexico (*Bocking* 2013), where conflicts between trade unions and state actors arise related to labor organizing, and in Colombia, where there are conflicts about the ecological and health impacts of coal mining, as well as the working conditions (*Coronado Delgado et al.* 2014).

Beyond capital vs. labor, contestation between artisanal and industrial mining as well as between artisanal miners and the state represents a central line of conflict related to the expansion of industrial mining in many contexts worldwide (*Bush* 2009; *Vélez-Torres* 2014; *Damonte* 2016). Industrial mining comprises formalized mining projects by companies that, in addition to a high input of capital and technology, formally employ a large number of people. Semi-industrial or small-scale mining comprises small mines that are equipped with a minimum of permanently installed conveyor technology, the production of which does not exceed a fixed amount laid down in the respective mining laws. Artisanal mining is poor in terms of capital and technology, is largely informal, and is based on the employment of only a few people, often family members. Small-scale and artisanal mining (ASM) is frequently done without any formal (state) licence (*Tubb* 2015). This can be observed particularly in the gold mining sector, which is characterized by relatively high, stable world market prices.

In many cases, mining companies arbitrarily apply for exploration concessions for areas where artisanal mining takes place, as its existence indicates potential resource deposits (*Luning* 2014). Artisanal mining thus sometimes involuntarily provides initial exploration for the companies free of charge. As ASM is mainly conducted informally, artisanal miners in many cases do not have access to compensation and consultation. Empirical studies have demonstrated that access to land for artisanal miners is restricted by state policies in favor of large-scale industrial mining, by criminalization, and by unclear land tenure regulations (*Carstens and Hilson* 2009; *Soto and Urán* 2013; *de Theije et al.* 2014; *Mosquera et al.* 2009; *Damonte et al.* 2013). The lack of legal guarantees for artisanal miners and other land users favors forced relocation and insufficient compensation (*Lange* 2008). In many cases, this results in conflicts.

5. Strategies and repertoires of contention

The strategies and repertoires of contention of social actors in conflicts over mining encompass legal strategies, petitions, demonstrations, strikes, occupations and sabotage, among others (*Anyidoho and Crawford* 2014). Which repertoires are applied in which conflict situations, is not at all arbitrary: actors do not choose their strategies of action in a vacuum but depending on social, cultural and political contexts, whereby not all actors are capable of relying on all strategies to the same degree. Which strategies and means are available to them depends on their position in the social field, which is structured by power relations (*Dietz and Engels* 2014: 82).

Many conflict contexts are characterized by the lack of participation and representation of local land-users, local authorities and local residents in the processes of granting concessions for exploration and exploitation. Typically, in these processes, either no institutional channels or de facto existing ways to raise the diverse claims and interests exist, or these are neglected by the state and private actors. In consequence, actors who are weakly represented in existing institutions often rely on unconventional and confrontational strategies of protest, such as occupations, blockades, and riots (*Engels* 2016, 2015: 7, 13): spontaneous and 'uncontrolled' demonstrations, which are limited in time and space, break with the institutional rules of political protest, and are sometimes accompanied by material damage.

Local opponents and social movements, because of the relative lack of influence at the local scale, frequently apply multi-scalar strategies in order to make their claims heard at the national and/or global scale in order to stop or halt the expansion of mining projects, and to claim human and participation rights and/or territorial control. Typical multi-scalar strategies are alliances that local actors form with other actors operating at different geographical scales, and narratives that discursively address the issue at different scales of action in order to gain more political influence (*Haarstad and Fløysand* 2007; *Svampa et al.* 2009).

In addition, the opponents of industrial mining also rely on conventional repertoires of protest, referring to rights granted by the respective national constitutions or laws. In several Latin American countries, popular consultations recently became important instruments in conflicts over mining: consultations

which call for local people to vote in favor of, or against, mining projects in their communities. *Mariana Walter and Leire Urikidi* (2015), in a first attempt to systematize experiences with this instrument across states, identified 68 referenda conducted in the period 2002-2012 in five Latin American states, most of them in Guatemala. In almost all the cases analyzed, new alliances between non-state actors (anti-mining movements, national and international NGOs, academics, indigenous organizations, peasants movements) and local state actors (local governments, communal parliaments) across scale played a decisive role for the choice of strategy. In all cases, the vast majority (80-100 percent) of participants voted against industrial mining in their communities. Central governments and companies usually do not accept the referenda. Nevertheless, the consultations are effective in terms of political mobilization and as lobbying and publicity instruments. In many cases, the planned establishment of an industrial mine could be stopped or the project obliged to make alterations to its plans.

6. Studying contention over mining through the lenses of place and scale: examples from Colombia

Drawing on our own case study research in Colombia, in the following section we show what it means to study conflicts over mining through a spatial perspective focusing specifically on place and scale as core analytical categories. The first case is a conflict between Afro-Colombian artisanal miners, a transnational mining company and the Colombian state; the second case is a conflict between a local anti-mining movement mobilizing against an industrial gold mine, the involved mining company and the Colombian state. Whereas in both cases protest actors apply scalar strategies to demand and reinforce their claims, place becomes specifically important in the first case.

6.1 The case of La Toma: artisanal vs industrial mining and the importance of place

La Toma is an Afro-Colombian community located in the municipality of Suárez, province of Cauca in Colombia. It encompasses 1,300 households and has had a tradition of gold mining since the era of Spanish colonialism (*Ararat et al.* 2013; *Vélez-Torres* 2014). The people of La Toma identifies itself as *agro-mineros*, whose livelihoods rely on small-scale farming com-

bined with artisanal gold mining along the river Oveja, that runs through the community. According to the Colombian constitution of 1991, and the law No. 70 (*Ley 70*) of 1993 on the protection of Black communities, La Toma is acknowledged as an Afro-Colombian community with the right of political representation, but is not granted rights of territorial autonomy.

In 2008, the Colombian state granted concessions for exploration and extraction of gold deposits to AngloGold Ashanti in the area, encompassing large parts of La Toma's territory. In 2009, the local mayor of Suárez gave the order to evacuate the settlement to clear the way for AngloGold Ashanti's extraction plans. The population resisted the evacuation. Knowing that at the local scale they could not enforce their interests of territorial rights of self-determination, they brought an action to the Colombian constitutional court against the national government. The argument was that the government had granted extraction concessions in an Afro-Colombian territory without previous consultation and consent of the communities. According to convention 169 (*Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*) of the International Labor Organisation (ILO), which Colombia ratified in 1991, mining concessions may only be granted in the territories of acknowledged indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities under the pre-condition of free, prior and informed consent by the local population. The constitutional court, in its decision of 25 April 2011, suspended the concessions granted to AngloGold Ashanti in La Toma (*Vélez-Torres and Varela* 2014). However, what at first seemed to be a success finally turned out to be a shift in the conflict constellations. At about the time of the court's decision, informal miners from other parts of the country came to the area. Equipped with diggers and other technologies of extraction, they began, without any formal concession, to dig the Oveja river that runs through the settlement of La Toma, searching for gold. Against this background, women from La Toma once more decided to shift their protest to the national scale. On 17 November 2014, 23 women from the community decided to go on a protest march to Bogotá, where they occupied rooms of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Silva Numa* 2014). For eleven days, they negotiated with representatives of the ministry, demanding that the state suspend legal and illegal mining activities in their settlement; that they be acknowledged as artisanal miners; and that they receive state compensation of their loss of income due to the conflict with the 'new' semi-industrial miners. By March 2015, the diggers had left La Toma. However,

some of the women who were engaged in the protests also had to leave the community as they had received anonymous threats.

Place was pivotal to the population's protest. La Toma has a long cultural tradition of Afro-Colombian life, which is closely linked to the Oveja river. Both, the concessions given to AngloGold Ashanti in 2008 and the emergence of new informal miners from outside, was interpreted as a threat of their cultural identity and the cultural meanings ascribed to the Oveja river and to artisanal gold mining practiced at the river-sides. The river is of high symbolical relevance: "For the women of La Toma, the river is someone, he has a personality. The destruction and contamination of the river by machines and chemicals is actually the reason why the story has exploded", one female activist explained in an interview (Cali, 25 March 2015).

6.2 The case of La Colosa: multi-scalar anti-mining protests

The gold mining project of La Colosa is located in the province of Tolima in the central Andean Mountains of Colombia. In 2006 AngloGold Ashanti was granted concessions for exploration and exploitation of gold and other mineral ores in the municipality of Cajamarca. In 2008, the company announced its plans to open an industrial gold mine in Cajamarca, called "La Colosa". In its original design, the project involved several sites in different municipalities: Cajamarca, the site where the mine is planned; Ibagué, the capital of the province and the original location of the processing plant, and the municipality of Piedras, where the mining waste was intended to be stored. Currently the project is still in the exploration phase, which is supposed to end in 2017; then the company hopes to obtain an environmental license for exploitation in order to start mining operations in 2023.

After local activists found out about project, they began organising at the local scale. First, a local NGO, and then a regional environmental committee, the *Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida*, was founded. The committee has established relations to social movements and NGOs operating at the national and international scale and other regional and local anti-mining initiatives. In 2012, the committee invented a context specific protest strategy called *marcha carnaval*, a kind of annual carnival like street demonstration, which since then takes place in Ibagué annually. The form

of the march was deliberately chosen to demonstrate the non-violent character of the protest, to lower participation barriers for non-organised actors and to hinder the government in terms of stigmatising and criminalising the protests as guerrilla operations.

Referring to legally sanctioned rights of popular consultations on mining issues at the local scale, the movement has furthermore successfully mobilised for a popular consultation process in Piedras. Initially, it was planned to transport the mining waste through a tunnel system from Cajamarca to Piedras in order to store and dispose of it there. In January 2013, when local dwellers from Piedras became aware of the first exploration works for the establishment of the pithead stocks, they blocked a bridge that accessed the area. The blockade lasted several months, and while blockading, the protesters, succeeded in persuading the mayor to conduct a popular consultation which took place at July 28, 2013. Of the local electorate of 5,105, 2,998 participated in the consultation, 99.03 per cent of whom voted against mining projects in their municipality. Though neither the national government nor the mining companies have, until now, recognized the consultation's result, AngloGold Ashanti reacted: in 2015, the company came up with a new project design that no longer includes waste disposal in Piedras.

From the perspective of politics of scale, the local referenda in Piedras can be interpreted as a form of political contestation over the scalar order of mining, and over the relationship between the local and national government. As in other cases in Latin America, where local referenda have been held, the overriding question at stake is who decides, at what scale, over the use of the resource. Conflicts over mining are mainly place-based, i.e. a direct relationship exists between conflict action and the mining sites. However, this does not mean that conflict action is limited to the local scale (Escobar 2001). Rather in mining conflicts, scales are an "integral part of political power struggles and strategies" (Swyngedouw 2004: 134).

Local conflict actors engage in networks with others and at different scales. They are flexible, albeit not totally, when choosing their strategies of action but restricted by existing power relations. In the case of the consultation in Piedras, local actors closely collaborated with regional NGOs and movements, scholars from national universities, international human rights organizations, and anti-mining movements in Peru and Argentina.

7. Conclusion

This article has investigated how in the context of the global resource boom and the consolidation of a national development model often called 'extractivism' or 'neoextractivism' conflicts over mining emerge, how conflict action is shaped by specific political and institutional contexts, actor constellations, strategies, and cultural meanings assigned to specific localities. It has furthermore shown how conflicts over mining can be theoretically conceptualized and empirically analyzed.

The empirical examples presented from the literature and our own research show on the one hand that the dynamics of conflicts, and the moment of their escalation, is by no means arbitrary; neither are the strategies on which the actors rely. On the other hand, the examples underline that a linear relationship of cause and effect between the resource boom, extractivism and conflicts at the local scale does not exist. Rather, the issues, strategies, and actor constellations of these conflicts vary depending on political contexts, on previous land use and land rights regimes, and on the historical relevance of the mining sector in the respective state or region. Where mining has a long tradition and strong mining unions exist, labor relations and labor conflicts often play an important role. Where artisanal mining is traditionally central to local people's livelihoods (e.g. La Toma), conflicts occur between artisanal miners and the actors engaged in mining with high capital and technology. Finally, conflicts emerge because alternative livelihoods (e.g. in agriculture) and territorial or communal rights of participation are not guaranteed.

Conflicts over mining are influenced by political opportunity structures at different scales. Events, processes, discourses, institutions, laws and regulations at the national, regional or international scale are the short- or long-term political opportunity structure for local conflict action. In Piedras and in other cases of local consultations on mining projects in Latin America, local actors refer to mechanisms of direct democracy that were introduced in many Latin American states, and in some cases codified in the national constitutions, under decentralization policies and political liberalization in the 1990s. As well as political opportunity structures emerge at different scales, strategies of the actors involved in conflicts over mining are multi-scalar. They engage, search for allies, responsibilities and solutions on the local, national, or transnational scale.

To pay respect to the spatial dynamics of conflicts over mining, in our analysis we combined the theoretical perspective of contentious politics with spatial theory, namely the categories of place and scale. Herewith it has become possible to analytically take into account the multiple spatial references of contentions over mining. These are reflected in different dimensions: the physical location to which a conflict refers and in which it takes place is not arbitrarily interchangeable but depends on resource deposits. In contrast to services, trade or industry, minerals and metals are spatially bounded and "locationally specific. They are where they are" (Dicken 2015: 244, original emphasis). Further, conflicts over mining are embedded in scalar power structures. These are pivotal for conflict issues, actor constellations, and strategies. A further characteristic of conflicts over mining is the particular meaning of specific places. These are shaped by the physical-material existence of resource deposits and at the same time by various cultural attributions. It has been demonstrated that place becomes relevant in the demands and strategies of collective actors. The fact that mining is spatially bound (thus, the material dimension of place) has an impact on protest strategies: in many conflicts over mining, an effective strategy of protest is blocking the roads leading from and to a mine, an exploration site or a harbor. Historical and cultural meanings are often influential in local mobilization, and in many cases, they are reference points in the protest actors' claims.

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