

2016

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Recommended Citation

Dorothy Kidd (2016). "Extra-Activism", *Peace Review*, 28:1, 1-9, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2016.1130365>

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“Extra-Activism”

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These are not resources. This is a life force, a life force that we have relationships to. We don't own it. We don't own the rivers. We don't own the salmon. We have relationships with these worlds...and responsibilities.
Togisty, Rights and Responsibilities. Unis'to'ten camp.

When I first proposed a Grassroots Response to Extraction Symposium to Rob Elias, the Chief Editor of *Peace Review*, he was supportive of the concerns we were raising. However, he was unfamiliar with the term extractivism and asked me whether it might be confused with social and political activism, or “extra-activism.” In many ways, he is right. The term “extractivism,” or sometimes “neo-extractivism,” describes the global economic regime in which the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and over 100 national governments of every political hue, have accelerated the massive exploitation of natural resources. Beginning in peripheral regions, extractive projects, and the massive interconnected transport corridors needed to move the minerals, oil and gas, are moving ever closer to metropolitan centers around the world. The growing scope and scale of extractivism has led to major disruptions and conflicts for citizens around the world, as indigenous territories, public lands and commons, have been opened up to private and transnational capital, which operate with few ownership and investment restrictions, while environmental, labor and human rights protections for citizens have been reduced or removed. Those who would protest are increasingly criminalized and stigmatized. The negative costs have been tremendous, including numerous murders, assaults, and increased violence towards women, toxic environmental degradation, loss of resilient cultures and ways of life, and of democratic governance.

Nevertheless, this symposium highlights the extraordinary activism, or “extra-activism,” of communities and movements in almost every region of the world. The complex local, national and transnational alliances of indigenous peoples, rural farmers, environmentalists, human rights activists, labor organizations, faith groups and citizens, utilize a very wide repertoire of tactics and organizing approaches, from direct action targeting specific sites and/or companies, to legal and legislative reform at all levels, to creative interventions at multi-lateral forums, and in all forms of mediated communications. To date, there have been significant successes: the suspension of mining concessions in Mexico, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru and Canada; the declaration by dozens of communities of mining-free territories, and moratoriums called by governments in Haiti, Quebec, Costa Rica, El Salvador, among others. These local and

national successes are facilitated by partnerships with international indigenous, environmental, and human rights organizations.

More than just saying “no” to mining and extractive industries, the emerging mining justice movement has been effective in changing politics as we know it. Lobbying for change in dominant institutions, and prefiguring changes on the ground, they have expanded the conceptions of human rights and of democratic participation, the focus of this introductory article. First, indigenous peoples, who are both the primary targets of extractivism, and the primary leaders of extra-activism, have mobilized for the recognition of their centuries-long relationships to the natural environment and of their collective knowledge, and cultural, political, and economic rights. For the first time, their perspective has spilled over to non-indigenous communities and movements, which are articulating the universal human right to healthy livable environments; and significantly, to the rights of natural formations, such as glaciers, and waterways, to human protection. Finally, in their praxis, the emerging mining justice movements are not only relying on legal actions, but are actively prefiguring more participatory and inclusive forms of democracy, such as community consultations, referendums, and people’s tribunals. But first, some of the context for the global extractivist project.

The current cycle of extractivism represents both continuity and rupture. The Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano encapsulated the colonial record of resource exploitation in his magisterial *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, and much the same history took place throughout North America, Africa and Asia. Gold, emblematic of colonialism, is again a major conflict mineral in the current cycle, examined in five of the Symposium reports. Gold’s value, as a financial haven, has risen during each global financial crisis; and it has also become indispensable in the manufacture of electronics and computers. As a result, the numbers of countries mining gold has risen steeply, from five major producers (South Africa, USSR, Canada, the United States and Australia) to recent openings of mines in China, Peru, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Ghana, Chile, Uzbekistan, Tanzania, Mali and Brazil; and as Anne Bartlett, Asmaa Khadim, Jane Regan, Nergis Canefe and Roland G. Simbulan, explain, exploration in Sudan, Argentina, Haiti, Turkey and the Philippines, respectively. With much of the high-grade ores gone, toxic chemicals are often used in large open-pit mines to extract the low-grade ores, often levelling and contaminating land and watersheds.

The rising global demand for commodities, and the regional shift of manufacturing from the global north to China and other new global hubs, has increased the demand for natural resources and changed the scope of production. In addition to gold, and the continuing need for copper, iron, aluminum, manganese, and other minerals, the rise of digital technologies and information capitalism, has led to a new demand for minerals such as coltan, silicon, tantalum and palladium. At the same time, the scale of extractivist production, and the demand for twenty-four/seven delivery to many different global centers, has required the building of extensive new mega-transport corridors, which, as described by Leontina Hormel, in northern Utah, and by Nergis Canefe, in Turkey, have disrupted existing land uses, and threaten more harm in the case of a spill.

Foreign capital developed mines during the colonial period. Another new dimension of the current cycle of extractivism, however, is the rise of a centralized,

corporate-friendly global political and legal infrastructure. During the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank promoted renewed foreign investment in mining in countries of the Global South, as part of the first round of neo-liberal capitalist interventions. Countries were encouraged to privatize national companies, and open up their lands, economies and governmental decision-making to foreign mining companies as part of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), and free trade agreements. The argument given was that the potential profits could provide employment, tax revenue, and other spill-on effects for local and national economies, as well as substantial new infrastructure, such as roads, transport and communications, schools and health clinics.

The extractivist bandwagon only grew in the 1990s. National governments of more than ninety countries signed on; privatized national production and distribution bodies; introduced regulations favoring multinational corporations through reduced foreign ownership restrictions and corporate taxes; and considerably softened environmental, labor, and human rights regulations. According to a study produced by the Peruvian investigative organization, Convoca, almost thirty percent of all financing from the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC) has gone to extractive projects since 1994, and as Jane Regan notes, the World Bank is a major player in boosting the sector in Haiti.

At the same time, extractivism has become a key policy within multilateral agreements and accords. Bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agreements have given corporations the right to sue national governments, among other new rights; the World Bank and rich countries such as Canada have helped redraft mining-friendly national laws in Haiti, Honduras, and other countries. Instead of state regulation, social and environmental concerns were to be addressed through voluntary codes and corporate social responsibility, but even where there have been official mechanisms to do this, as in Canada, there have been no independent investigations undertaken, no public reporting, and no measures to discipline companies that are found out of compliance.

National governments of all different political hues have instead provided political and financial support to the extractive sector. Complicating easy analysis, many of the governments of the "pink wave," including Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador, came to power on the strength of promises to reclaim their national sovereignty of their resources. Indeed, many national governments have changed the operating rules with the mining and other resource corporations, at least at the top: they have won tax and other concessions as part of strategies to drive economic growth, have been able to pay off some of their debts to international finance institutions, increase much-needed spending on social needs, and send a message to the rich countries of renewed regional economic strength. The pink turn to the extractionist model, however, has not reduced the concerns of indigenous and rural communities who are continuing to resist the encroachment of mining because of its serious impact on the health and welfare of local communities.

Welcomed by national governments, mining companies operate with the idea that their practices are protected by investment treaties. Exploring for new sites, they encounter rural and indigenous peoples who operate with very different concepts of land ownership and stewardship, as many of the authors explain. Rather than formal written titles to individual land tracts, or sub-surface rights, indigenous peoples have practiced

complex systems of stewardship over their natural environments which they have passed down orally from generation to generation.

In this neo-colonial nexus, hundreds of conflicts have arisen. The mining companies, with the exception of a handful of large companies, are “juniors,” or small start-ups staffed by geologists and mining engineers. They have very little experience, as Michael Wilson explains, in negotiating with local residents, and seldom have sought prior consent from local communities, or conducted adequate environmental studies. Many are incredibly litigious, such as Newmont Mining, described by Regan in Haiti, or in Khadim’s discussion of Barrick Gold in Argentina. When local communities have protested, the companies have often taken aggressive, if not violent actions, against local residents who protested; they are often backed by government police and armed forces. In 2014, Global Witness reported over nine hundred “environmental and land defenders” killed during the period from 2002 to 2013; the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has recently flagged serious concerns about the risk of “death threats, attacks, attempted killings, intimidation, harassment, as well as stigmatization . . .the abusive use of legal frameworks and the criminalization of their work.”

Today’s composition of extra-activism is perhaps even more complex. In the previous cycles of mining, miners and mining unions played a very important role in the culture and politics of several countries. Many of the unions were connected to social movements and political parties of the left, and it’s important to note that residual movements still play important roles, providing the base in numbers, and the strategic outlook for current campaigns, as Roland Simbulan examines in his discussion of the make-up of alliances in the Philippines, and Mariana Lyra discusses in Brazil. Nevertheless, indigenous movements, environmental and human rights organizations, faith groups, and resource-affected communities have taken up far greater roles in the current conjuncture. There is a consistency of demands against violence and toxic pollution of the land and watershed, and for a livable environment. As Canefe describes, the panoply of local demands and different forms of organization can appear to be “above politics”.

Not surprisingly, the rise of extra-activism parallels the emergence of a global indigenous movement, which has articulated a new set of collective identities, and political claims. Indigenous peoples are the primary targets of new mines and resource projects, and the most important protagonists in the new global mining justice movements. Indigenous peoples still face the harshest of conditions of poverty, social and economic exclusion, and the exploitation and depletion of their resource-based wealth by governments and corporations alike. After years of marginalization and the active disappearing of indigenous peoples by dominant political and cultural institutions around the world, many extraction-affected communities are asserting, as in the case of the Nez Perce, their deep connection to a specific eco-system; revitalizing older epistemologies and cosmologies tied to their relationship to the earth. They are renewing older indigenous self-governance structures and values of collective solidarity, communitarian access to land and to natural resources, and ecologically sustainable development practices. In ways far too complex to summarize here, they are both resisting the colonial legacy, and prefiguring a new form of engagement with their respective nation states and

populations.

Rejecting both the colonial and modernist social contracts, in which indigenous peoples were considered officially missing from empty lands, or not treated as citizens, many indigenous communities are using human rights discourse. In a set of political maneuvers, first described by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, indigenous groups lobbied for decisions in international courts and institutions, which they then boomeranged back to their own territories. During the 1990s and early part of the twenty-first century, communities used the International Labour Organization Convention (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Number 169. The ILO was one of the first international bodies to expressly recognize the collective rights of indigenous peoples. Convention No. 169 respects the ethnic and cultural diversity of both indigenous and tribal peoples; their special identification with their lands and resources; and their rights to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources. The Convention also obligates governments to consult with indigenous peoples. Twenty-two countries, fifteen of which are in Latin America, had ratified ILO Convention No. 169 as of July 2013, and importantly, courts in countries such as the United States, which have not ratified the Convention, do cite it in their deliberations.

More recently, they have cited the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. After long years of lobbying, the UN Declaration was finally adopted on September 13, 2007, by an overwhelming majority of countries. The four settler colonial states, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, were originally opposed but have since signed it. The Declaration has many different sections: most important for our purposes here is the recognition in Article 29 of the rights to the conservation and protection of the environment; the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources; and to the right to free, prior and informed consent, sometimes called by its acronym (FPIC), particularly in connection with the development, use and/or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

Neither the ILO Convention, nor the UN Declaration, has a binding effect in all jurisdictions, and mining companies have not ratified these rights. Mexico, as Stephanie Friede and Rosa Lehman explain, is an exception. In 2011 a constitutional amendment gave ILO Convention 169 a status equivalent to national legislation. As they underscore, the implementation by states of consultation processes are seldom without complex negotiations of power between governments, corporations and local interests.

Nevertheless, indigenous, and non-indigenous peoples, throughout the Americas, and in the Philippines, have drawn on these two instruments to challenge large-scale extractive development projects. In the Philippines, as Simbulan explains, indigenous people's communities have referred to the UN Declaration as part of their assertion and defense of their historic right to their lands and way of life. At the same time, indigenous and farmers' communities have called for and won support from municipal and provincial governments to either ban large-scale mining or enact mining moratoriums. In Mexico, over seventy communities, municipal, agrarian and indigenous authorities have declared their territories free of mining. In Honduras, despite the extremely violent atmosphere since the coup, at least ten communities have declared themselves free of mining, with an estimated ninety-one percent of Honduras opposed, in 2011, to open-pit mining.

Importantly, non-indigenous communities have also taken up the right to consultation and consent. Since the Tambogrande campaign described by Wilson, hundreds of communities throughout the Americas have organized *consultas* or plebiscites, which build on the right to free, prior and informed consent. In Guatemala, an estimated one million people in mining-affected communities have said “no” in municipal or community referenda; in a January 2104 public opinion poll, sixty-six percent of the population were opposed to mining according to Mining Watch Canada.

At the same time, communities, and the growing national and transnational networks of mining justice groups have drawn on two other international forums as political resources. Over the last decade, the Inter-American Human Rights system (The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights) have considered a number of cases, in the United States, Surinam, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and Guatemala, that have concerned investment projects and indigenous rights, natural resources, and environmental protection. The two courts have developed standards, similar to the ILO and UN, to give content to and define the contours of the collective rights to indigenous lands and territories, and the right to effective participation through a consultation process done in good faith and through culturally appropriate procedures.

Recently, in early November 2013, a transnational coalition of indigenous, human rights and mining justice activists, from South and North America, went to Washington to appeal to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS), and United States lawmakers. They demanded that “home countries,” and especially the United States, which hosts several large multinational companies, and Canada, with the largest number of mining companies in the world, take responsibility for the human rights violations perpetrated abroad by their national mining corporations. The coalition called for new legal remedies for indigenous and rural communities affected by the increasing level of conflict and disruption due to mining. They linked the problems in part to neoliberal free trade agreements that give inordinate power to mining corporations and investors, and all but remove any legal mechanisms for redress by affected communities, citizens and mine workers.

At the same time, indigenous and non-indigenous communities, in hand with national and transnational environmental movements, are negotiating for the rights of the environment. They are not only reacting to the toxic impacts of mercury, lead and other chemicals in their watersheds, and agricultural lands, but they are articulating pro-active discourses about the right to a healthy and sustainable environment. In Argentina, several provinces have banned open-pit mining and cyanide use, and as Asmaa Khadim explains, the national government has banned mining in glacier and peri-glacier ecosystems. These concerns map closely to older environmental concerns about pollution, biodiversity and water security. However, at the same time, new claims are being made to the defense of all life forms and lively ways, and the sacredness of rivers and of mountains.

The renewed cycle of extractivism has sparked a new round of extra-activism, or social change movement mobilization around the world. Assymetries of power abound, with international trade and government structures perpetuating long-standing colonial legacies of ingrained inequality, poverty, violence, environmental degradation and a failed social contract between powerful governments, corporations and multilateral institutions and peoples in resource-rich communities. Nevertheless, what is remarkable

is how much the emerging mining justice movement has been able to achieve. In this new cycle of extractivism, mining-affected communities are no longer so isolated. Intelligence on the forces they face, and the lessons of a victory are quickly disseminated over the transnational communications networks managed and operated by linked movements; news and video documentaries circulating the stories, such as that of Tambogrande Peru, have reverberated widely, and have contributed to hundreds of communities asserting the right to either ban mining outright, or curb the most toxic effects in their territories.

In addition, the mining justice movements have opened wide the debate over the values of extractivism as a form of development, questioning the taken-for-granted arguments of governments of the left and the right to support resource exploitation in the name of the “national interest” or of “national security.” At the same time, indigenous activists have moved beyond requests for recognition and inclusion, to challenge the claims that nation states and corporations exert over their territories as well as the visions of neoliberal capitalism. They have campaigned to expand the concepts of human rights to foreground the collective rights of indigenous peoples, and the re-inscription of their long historical relationship as stewards of the natural environment. And in doing so, they have helped to widen the debate and the consciousness of our necessary and inviolable human need for a healthy relationship to the land and natural environment in which we all live.

Suggested Reading

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