

REVIEW

Rose J. Spalding, *Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America*

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The mineral super-cycle of 2002–12 intensified academic interest in the social dimensions of extraction in the Global South. Scores of articles and collections have expanded our understanding of this phenomenon. Rose J. Spalding's intricate and meticulous book, *Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America*, comes after this wave of attention has crested – ideal timing for a work that is summative, definitive and wholly original.

Spalding's opus encompasses eight years of fieldwork involving over 200 interviews in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador and the United States. The book is painstakingly referenced, with almost 40 pages of citations, 197 footnotes across the seven chapters, and eight appendices. *Breaking Ground* exhibits a breadth of command over the regional context and the minutiae of the cases along with a mastery of the research on extraction and social movements. This imbues the book with sweep and complexity without sacrificing clarity and organisational logic.

The book is chiefly concerned with identifying the conditions for mining resistance movements' success. Spalding defines success as affecting policy change. To address this question, Spalding draws from the quasi-natural experimental conditions of Central America where the gold exploration boom of the 2000s took hold across the isthmus with varying outcomes by country. This set of country cases lends itself to the controlled comparison approach, and while Spalding infers causation and extrapolation without enough circumspection, overall the argument is extremely convincing.

Spalding identifies three chief conditions that influence mining resistance movements' success. First, social movements must be comprised of diverse, broad coalitions, with multiple logics, that maintain cohesion and unity of purpose. Second, national elites must not be unified in their support for mining-led growth, and third, the state must contain openings for social movement actors to latch on to. Spalding refers to these as 'docking points'.

Chapter 1 provides a lucid, comprehensive recounting of the major themes of mining scholarship over the past 15 years. It theorises policy change as a continuum of degrees of public control over mineral development, from improved local compensation on one end to full prohibition of mining on the other. Chapter 2

fleshes out the book's central arguments and theoretical contributions. Recent mining policy history divides into three eras: neoliberal reform, corporate social responsibility, and resource nationalism. Spalding develops a typology of resistance movements. Certain localised resistance efforts are 'distributive' in their focus. They are chiefly concerned with maximising material benefits captured from mining projects. Other movements are 'definitional', organised around collective visions of community self-determination. The third type, 'scale conflict', refers to movements opposed to transnational or commercial mining but open to artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

Successful movements – those that secure policy change – must exhibit three dimensions of cohesiveness. 'Spatial reach' is the movement's ability to articulate between local and national scales. 'Sectoral breadth' is the ability to integrate multiple constituencies. 'Frame alignment', arguably the most important of the three, is a convergence of purpose across distributive, definitional and scalar conflicts.

Beyond the social movement, societal elites condition movement success. Research that centres the grassroots often glosses 'the elite' as a unitary force. Spalding attends closely to the segmentation and tensions within political and economic elites. The seams, chinks and pressure points in an elite coalition provide spaces onto which activists can 'dock' to seed policy change.

Docking points are spaces in the elite assemblage where activists can insinuate themselves and infiltrate the decision-making apparatus. These include political parties, electoral campaigns, courts, bureaucracies, legislative committees and local governments. The active verb 'docking' does important work in this phrase. Unlike the enduring theory of political opportunity structure, which downplays the agency of the individual activist, in Spalding's analysis, activists seek, identify and, in many cases, pry open the fissures into which they dock.

The four empirical chapters correspond with the four country cases and are organised from most to least amenable to mining. Three conditions explain Nicaragua's embrace of mining-led growth: (i) the longer legacy of mining that entrenched ASM interests and organised labour in the sector; (ii) the geographical and ideological distance between resistance groups that inhibited frame alignment; and (iii) the legacy of authoritarianism that unified the elite coalition and limited docking points.

Guatemala represents an incomplete resistance movement project. Despite resistance around mining sites and national and international support, these movements never fully consolidated into an integrated national effort. In contrast to the inchoate resistance, economic and political elites stood together as a united front in support of mineral development. Guatemala's chief private sector trade association and lobbying entity, the *Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras* (Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations, CACIF), held the elite coalition together, inserted domestic investors into the mineral supply chain, and welcomed multinational investors into the fold. CACIF also controlled the policy direction of Guatemala's historically exclusionary and racist state. The sole exception was Guatemala's judiciary, which, strengthened by the United Nations and pressured by the Organization of American States, issued several rulings on behalf of anti-mining plaintiffs. The Constitutional and Supreme Courts determined that communities had not been

properly consulted, as required by international law, causing several stops in mineral production.

Given the contributions of Costa Rica's ecotourism industry and given, as Spalding puts it, 'Costa Rica's national brand as an environmentally sustainable haven' (p. 148), much of civil society, the elite coalition and the state were predisposed to be wary of mineral development. The Costa Rican state stands out from its neighbours with its fuller funding of a wider suite of public goods, especially environmental regulation and public health. Mining resistance was densely integrated across the country and dated to the mid-1990s, a decade before cognate movements crystallised elsewhere. This context increased docking possibilities within electoral politics, regulatory policy and the courts. Unlike the other cases, the mining industry in Costa Rica was always on the back foot. The industry invoked investor rights clauses of the Canada / Costa Rica bilateral investment treaty to pursue recourse through the courts, but despite some favourable judgements, in late 2010 Costa Rica passed legislation prohibiting open-pit mining.

El Salvador moved from actively seeking mining investment to becoming the first country in the world to legislate a mining ban in the span of a decade. Social movement cohesion, the fragmentation of the elite coalition, and strategic insertion into docking spaces made El Salvador the paradigmatic case. There was never ideological uniformity among the political elite in El Salvador. Since the 1992 Peace Accords, the Left has constituted a politically significant bloc. El Salvador lacks a strong private sector advocacy organisation like Guatemala's CACIF to hold together a coalition of business and political elites. Also, in contrast to the Guatemalan case, Salvadorean capitalists had not incorporated themselves meaningfully into the mineral production supply chain.

An outgrowth of the Civil War, El Salvador's nationwide infrastructure for social movement activism is dense, largely horizontal and exceptionally sturdy. It operates at the local, regional and national levels and is well connected to international solidarity organisations. When the spectre of mining emerged, this network sprang into action, coalescing around a national advocacy group called the Mesa Nacional frente a la Minería Metálica (National Roundtable against Metal Mining, known as the Mesa). The Mesa consistently maintained a singular objective – a law prohibiting metal mining. It aligned the various frames of its constituencies into a common emphasis on water scarcity and contamination. El Salvador's well-understood and longstanding hydrological precariousness made this framing especially effective. The Mesa, thus, created docking opportunities through electoral politics and government bureaucracies.

The Mesa's success stopped progress on Pacific Rim Mining Corporation's El Dorado project in 2009, leading Pacific Rim (the largest multinational mining interest in El Salvador) to pursue arbitration against the Salvadorean government in international court. After years of expense and uncertainty, in late 2016 the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) ruled on behalf of El Salvador. Months later, a bill to ban metal mining passed unanimously.

While Spalding's three conditions for policy change are no doubt influential, they are not deterministic, and *Breaking Ground* sometimes resorts to overly causal thinking. Spalding overlooks the role of the mining companies, for example, in shaping these outcomes. The concept of frame alignment, given its salience,

would benefit from further conceptual development. Finally, both the title and the introduction portray the book as encompassing Latin America, when the four cases represent just one unique sliver of the larger region.

Nevertheless, *Breaking Ground* is aptly titled. The title conjures the ruptures in civil society and elite alliances so central to the book's explanatory framework; but moreover, Spalding breaks ground in balancing scope and detail. She has written the rare book that offers significant empirical and theoretical contributions while remaining highly legible to students. She breaks ground navigating generalisability and heterogeneity among communities, elites, states and social movements. Ultimately, *Breaking Ground* is definitive in discovering the processes of social organising for policy change in the era of extractivism.