Book Review

Rose J. Spalding, *Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 308 pp.; Hardcover and ebook $83.

Rose J. Spalding's *Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America* examines the nexus of social movements and policy change in the Central American mining sector from 2002 to 2022. She compares the national cases of El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, countries that ranged from outright banning all metal mining (El Salvador) to the sustained promotion and expansion of mining (Nicaragua). Through this comparison, she elaborates the conditions under which movements have impacts on policy. To condense a more detailed argument, movements must be broadly networked and coherent, but also must be able to permeate the state through either allies or institutional opportunities. When elites remain opposed, and when the state is impenetrable, movements lose on the policy front. The book is deeply researched, counting on over 250 interviews conducted in the four countries. The controlled comparison between four cases lends the study explanatory power in answering the central puzzle. Why, despite the fact that all four countries underwent neoliberal mining reform in the 1990s and saw mobilization around mining, did they produce such different mining policy results?

She takes a *political process approach* drawn from the social movement theory tradition, tracing political opportunities over time to find the conditions for movement success, arguing mobilization is a "necessary but not sufficient condition for mining policy reform" (26). Three factors make the difference. First, the arrangement and negotiation of economic and political elites produces "political settlements," and if mining fits into the political settlement it decreases the likelihood of policy reform, while elite splits provide openings and create opportunities for movements to find "influential allies" (49).

The second variable is what Spalding coins as "docking points," or the locations of state permeability open to movements, including links with political parties, legal system access, sympathetic elements in the regulatory bureaucracy, and community consultation mechanisms like municipal referenda or the indigenous right to prior consultation derived from International Labor Organization Convention 169

 DOI 10.1017/lap.2024.22

(ILO 169). Without these docking points "... institutions remain off-limits to activist networks" (63).

The third factor needed is a multisectoral, national movement with coherent frames. Broad movements require *bridging*-based networks of weak ties that connect different *bonding*-based networks built on close ties. Those movement nodes must be engaged in struggle over the same goals, and mining conflict types in a movement can support or prevent coherence.

These variables are demonstrated through the cases. In Nicaragua, both political and economic elites pushed forward mining expansion, integrating transnational mining companies into the peak business organization COSEP, whose president Daniel Ortega directly incorporated into policymaking. Meanwhile, mining conflicts varied in goals, including over the distribution of mining rents, against the dispossession of artisanal miners by industrial mining, and against mining writ large, undercutting the chance for a coherent, bridged network. Furthermore, docking points in the parties, bureaucracy, and participation mechanisms disappeared as the Ortega administration trended further towards authoritarianism. Gold became Nicaragua's top export.

In Guatemala, while the mining policy broadly remained pro-mining, multiple projects were suspended by the country's court system. Guatemala strengthened the high court system through the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which allowed for strategic litigation to stop projects, most emblematically suspending the Progreso Derivada VII and Escobal mines for failing to comply with ILO 169. However, mining conflicts remained site-specific, and elites in Guatemala remained coherently pro-mining leading to stop-start mining dynamics.

By contrast, Costa Rica's broader environmental politics, "... raised a green wall against industrial mining" (177), successfully banning open-pit mining but only after policy vacillations for and against the industry. By 1996 the National Front for the Opposition to Open Pit Mining was formed, and the growing eco-tourism sector split elites who saw mining as a threat. As mining became politically toxic, both major party candidates denounced mining in 2002 and 2010, leading to a post-election moratorium on new permits and a ban on open-pit mining, respectively. However, in the interim, mining companies exerted pressure, including threats of international arbitration, and the Oscar Arias administration declared Infinitio Gold's Crucitas project as "public interest" in 2008. However, this reactivated national anti-mining networks to intervene judicially before the legislative ban.

In El Salvador, mining companies never had full support from the overlapping economic and political elites. At the same time, local struggles against mining and national organizations networked into the National Roundtable Against Mining (La Mesa) by 2005, allowing for both the "spatial reach" into various territories and "sectoral breadth." The movements found docking points in the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN)—the former guerilla organization turned political party—but also through bureaucracies and municipal consultations where communities voted against mining. Amid a broad rejection of mining, the ban was finally passed in 2017

https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.22 Published online by Cambridge University Press

following El Salvador's 2016 victory over transnational company Pacific Rim in the International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

Spalding also discusses the role of these international investment lawsuits, a major source of leverage for companies. These cases have been brought against El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. The analysis here is particularly astute, as she shows that this international arbitration has effects through the domestic variables she had already identified, particularly by closing off state access and unifying elites against mining reform out of fear of arbitration.

The book represents a robust deployment of the political process approach in how it tackles such a broad and varied history so systematically and thoroughly through developing conflict and policy typologies and identifying concrete explanatory factors. This makes it a major contribution to understanding mining politics more generally. The analysis creates typologies and categories of mining reform, network processes, mining conflicts, docking points, and elite interests. These typologies make possible not only the comparison of cases, but enrich our capacity to systematically think about messy processes of contentious politics.

Because the book is an exemplar of the political process approach, it also faces the long-debated challenges of that approach, in particular, how the broadness of political opportunities as a framework strains analytical precision and falsifiability (see Goodwin and Jasper 2004 on this debate). Indeed, grouping so many distinct processes (parties, courts, regulatory bureaucracy, community consultations, elite support, elections) would seem to maintain the problems of broad political opportunity structures. However, underpinning the work is a more precise theory of movement power, which is that while movements can generate collective frames, they truly exercise power through "influential allies" already existing (or soon to be) in positions within the state apparatus. This is a precise and clearly traceable mechanism and opens opportunities for future complementary work on the issue of power. For example, power may be exerted from below in mining conflicts in the economic and social spheres via blockades, strikes, or sabotage. This would follow a model closer to the disruptive power model developed by Piven and Cloward (1977). These disruptions likely shape elite perceptions of mining viability and may indeed shape policy responses, but as responses to crisis rather than through linkages to the state. Interrogating the disruptive mechanism of power would complement Spalding's theory of movement power, as both processes likely occur, but why one or the other occur at any given moment, and to what effect must be interrogated.

Another point of future research could come from continuing and expanding Spalding's docking points theory. While the framework is intended to find state permeability for movements, this theory also may run in reverse, finding social permeability locations for the state and elites. In Nicaragua, for example, Spalding shows how the post-2006 Ortega administration constructed its own sort of docking points into civil society, including FSLN connections to mining labor unions, the replacement of local participatory institutions with party-linked Citizens Power Councils, and the pressuring of FSLN mayors from above to push forward mining against local opponents. Companies and elites then control not only policymaking but

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also made inroads into societal-level control via perverse docking points. Deeper research into this phenomenon would be insightful.

Finally, one of the most important takeaways from the book is that mining and extractivism is not destiny. The Latin American region certainly underwent a major intensification of extractivist expansion since the early 2000s, leading to a "commodities consensus" in the region (Svampa 2015). The expansion of extactivism is also an inseparable part of capitalist growth's never ending need for raw materials, not to mention for the "energy transition." But Spalding shows that where and when expansion occurs remains a political question. Such a controversial industry as mining requires huge amounts of political, legal, and administrative support to secure profit-making, and as such the arena of politics still matters. Spalding demonstrates this in this excellent book.

Nathan Edenhofer
University of California Santa Cruz

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https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.22 Published online by Cambridge University Press