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Subterranean struggles : New Dynamics of Mining, Oil and Gas in Latin America [Book review]

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Anthony Bebbington and Jeffrey Bury (eds), *Subterranean struggles: New dynamics of mining, oil and gas in Latin America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), pp. xiii + 343, \$34.95 (paperback), £28.99 (paperback).

In recent decades, there has been a dramatic increase in investments in subsoil extraction – including oil, natural gas and minerals – in Latin America. At the same time, huge political debates and social conflicts surround these investments. The work *Subterranean struggles*, edited by Anthony Bebbington and Jeffrey Bury, analyses the new political ecology of extraction and the socio-spatial conflicts related to the extractive industry in Latin America. The book makes an important contribution to bringing the subsoil into the core of the political ecology of nature, society and politics. In its Introduction, a review chapter of resource extraction in Latin America, eight case-study chapters and Conclusion, *Subterranean struggles* deals with many topics crucial for the political ecology of resource governance: the process of enclosure and struggles over access to resources; the articulation of global extractive networks with territorial conflicts and cultural identities; the need to integrate ecological and political analyses into the examination of the impact of extraction; and the responses of local populations to the transformations affected.

The work is based upon a large research project, during which relationships between extractive industries, socio-environmental conflicts and local livelihoods were analysed, mainly in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. In this respect, the title of the book is somewhat misleading, as there are no case-studies of Mexico, Brazil or Venezuela despite the fact that they are highly important countries in terms of mining and hydrocarbon extraction. The book presents cases of both mining and hydrocarbon sectors and of lowland and highland environments. The Introduction and Conclusion show important patterns in the dynamics of extraction, linking the similarities and differences between different cases to a wider political economy of resource extraction. The case-studies provide detailed analyses of the struggles over materiality and meaning within the changing patterns of resource access and of the multifaceted tactics through which people seek justice. The studies are based on multiple methods, including interviews and participant observation among local residents, government officials, company representatives and activists, analyses of archival documents, legal studies and media reports, and participation in different workshops and forums.

Several studies presented in this compilation work underline the role of extractive industries in the processes of enclosure and associated struggles over resource access. They carefully show how the

extractive sector's tendency to enclose the subsurface in the extractive zones transforms the rules of access to a wide range of surface resources crucial for local livelihoods, and how such enclosures generate many kinds of contestations. They also demonstrate how these contestations are not just struggles over resources but also struggles over identities and cultural meanings, where different knowledges, ideologies and ontologies of nature clash with each other. Based on the lively debate on the political ontology of nature in current political ecology, it would have been interesting if the authors had analysed the ontological linkages of resource extraction in a little greater depth, including how collective memory frames people's interpretations of contemporary extraction.

Subterranean struggles also responds to recent calls for a more careful combination of the analysis of the ecology and the politics within political ecology. Several authors show how bio-physical characteristics of minerals and hydrocarbons establish particular preconditions for extraction and how many of the conflicts around extraction hinge on the environmental effects, thus the need to carefully consider the ecological conditions of extraction. Simultaneously, they demonstrate that knowledges about the impacts of extraction are socially charged and politically contested and that multifaceted risks and hazards associated with extraction are artefacts of socio-natures, produced jointly by humans and nonhumans. Furthermore, they carefully demonstrate the fundamental role of institutional governance in the socially differentiated distribution of benefits and burdens related to extraction.

This work also provides interesting contributions to the political-ecological debate on scale. Several authors show how extraction is based on shifting cross-scalar relationships, while at the same time being tightly embedded in local socio-ecological systems. They also offer interesting perspectives to debates on frontiers and boundaries, showing how the interplay of subsurface, surface and atmospheric dynamics in the extraction produce complicated power relationships. While most of the studies focus on the extraction of one specific resource, several authors in this book examine the complexity of nested institutional arrangements, when different extractive projects lay claim to the same resource space and generate synergistic, often unpredictable environmental-social impacts.

By emphasizing how struggles over extraction are driven by a range of motivations and grievances the authors also challenge social-movement scholars to develop more detailed analyses of social mobilizations. They carefully demonstrate how there are movements that seek to block the extractive industry altogether, contesting what they view as unacceptable consequences of capitalist commodification; and movements that demand a more rule-driven state, with stricter regulation and

less trade-offs with the companies. There are movements that seek more transparent criteria for evaluating the impacts of extraction and more just compensations for harms affected, and movements that demand better access to the benefits of extraction, including employment and subcontracting. A recurrent theme in the mobilizations is concern for the loss of access to local resources and livelihoods. The tactics of the movements in building transnational networks with environmental and human-rights organizations also require attention to many layers and levels. While some organized struggles are sustainable over time, others pass through phases of latency, and many of them also include hidden dimensions of everyday grievances. As the authors of the book point out, even if some mobilizations do not achieve their goals, the dynamics surrounding extraction have changed profoundly in many places as a result of social protest. At the same time, the authors underline the huge power asymmetries between the actors seeking to influence the terms of extraction.

The introduction and conclusion offer excellent syntheses of the larger socio-spatial and political-economic processes related to extractive operations and their often unpredictable impacts on resource rights, local livelihoods, water supplies, human health and social dispossession. The case-studies, although interesting, remain somewhat sporadic and it would have been advantageous to link them better with each other. Overall, this work clearly shows how an analysis of extraction of minerals and hydrocarbons can help to reformulate the theoretical and methodological foundations of a political ecology of resource governance in order to better understand the huge socio-environmental transformations occurring in Latin America.

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