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What Makes Locals Protesters? A Discursive Analysis of Two Cases in Gold-mining Industry in Turkey

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Summary. — This study addresses the question why a struggle emerges between local communities and mining MNCs. Many studies in the extant literature tend to explain the emergence of these struggles by relying on some "objective conditions" such as the characteristics of the industry, strategies of companies, features of community, and governmental policies. Drawing on Foucauldian and Laclauian insights, we argue that the analysis of such struggles should rather focus on meaning-making processes, through which each party to a struggle articulates surrounding conditions in particular ways, thereby giving shape to new meanings and identities. By comparatively examining Efemçukuru and Çöpler goldmine cases from Turkey, in which a struggle emerges in the former but not in the latter in spite of similar conditions, we demonstrate that the emergence of struggles is mainly due to the construction of rival discourses that construct the issues of mining, environment, and development in highly different ways. We argue that already-prevalent conditions play a role in the emergence of struggles to the extent that they are employed, framed, and reframed in the rival anti-mining and pro-mining discourses. The argument goes further that the availability of anti-mining discourse when the local meaning systems are dislocated by the arrival of MNCs, as well as its popular appeal at the local level are critical in the emergence of local mobilizations against gold-mining. Finally, emphasis is put on the relational nature of struggle processes, where anti-mining and pro-mining discourses are mutually constituted and reconstituted through a constant reformulation of hegemonic strategies.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, adopting a development strategy based on the extractive industry growth, many developing countries have experienced a dramatic increase in natural resource extraction activities by multinational corporations (Bebbington, Hinojosa, Bebbington, Burneo, & Warnaars, 2008; Garvin, McGee, Smoyer-Tomic, & Aubynn, 2009). This expansion has led to an increased interaction between local communities and MNCs which varies from "no conflict", where local communities warmly welcome or acquiesce to extractive activities, to "severe struggle", where local communities fiercely challenge mining operations, or to "ambiguous responses", where locals splinter into competing groups over the mining controversy (Arellano-Yanguas, 2012; Bebbington, Bebbington *et al.*, 2008; Bebbington, Hinojosa *et al.*, 2008; Shriver & Kennedy, 2005). This variation raises the following question: why do local mobilizations against extractive MNCs emerge in some cases but not in others? In other words, what makes locals protesters? This paper addresses this question by comparatively examining Efemçukuru and Çöpler cases in Turkey which, despite sharing many similar features, differ due to the emergence of a local mobilization in the former but not in the latter.

In explaining mobilization of locals against extractive operations of MNCs, many studies in the literature tend to focus on the "characteristics of extractive industry"—i.e., the threat it poses to the natural environment and/or to livelihood of local people—(Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006; Walker & Howard, 2002); "strategies of companies" (Garvin *et al.*, 2009; Jenkins, 2004; Mannarini, Roccato, Fedi, & Rovere, 2009; Rees, Kemp, & Davis, 2012; Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003); "features of local communities" (Shriver & Kennedy, 2005; Urkidi & Walter, 2011); and "policies of governments"

(Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003). Some of these factors, such as characteristics of extractive industry and features of local community, are envisaged as influential in the emergence of local mobilization; whereas others, such as company strategies and government involvement, are regarded as important in preventing the emergence of local protests or in containing and repressing already emerged protests. However, notwithstanding their significant contributions, these studies cast little light on the question of why the cases with similar conditions in many respects involve radically different levels of conflicts. We argue that this shortcoming is due to two reasons. One is that these studies tend to regard the characteristics of extractive industry or the factors related with local communities as directly influential as they simply exist and, thereby, fall short of accounting the different ways these factors are perceived, framed, and reframed by the conflicting parties. The other reason is that, in examining struggles, they tend to focus solely either on company strategies, local movements, or governmental responses, thus neglecting the mutual impact of these parties on the strategies of one another. As such, they say little about how rival parties strategically interact through the course of the struggle, and how the changes in the nature of such interaction over time create different levels of conflict.

Drawing upon the post-structuralist insights of Michel Foucault, and Ernesto Laclau, we argue in this study that it is not the existing conditions themselves, but rather discursive practices attributing particular meanings to these conditions that

are critical in leading to mobilization of local communities against extractive operations of MNCs. Comparatively examining Efemçukuru and Çöpler cases, we demonstrate that both the emergence and the intensity of conflicts are due to the construction of different and contradictory meanings on the issue of gold-mining, environment, MNCs, and the use of lands. As shown in this paper, the emergence of the struggle in Efemçukuru is due to the articulation of two discourses, which attributed highly different and opposing meanings to the issues of gold-mining, natural environment, and economic development and, accordingly, provided different perceptual lenses to the locals to view gold-mining. Moreover, these discourses also defined the "interests" as well as the "identities" of the locals in highly different ways. While the pro-mining discourse constructed gold-mining as highly important for economic development and prosperity, the anti-mining discourse constructed it as a substantial threat to the local space, the livelihood as well as the spatially-bounded identities of the residents and, thereby, tried to ignite the locals to act against the mine. Evidently, this reveals that the meanings related with gold-mining and the environment as well as the identities and interests of local communities are not readily established and self-evident, but rather constructed in different discourses in divergent ways. It also shows that conflict arises when different discourses try to hegemonize the local social field. In the Çöpler case, contrarily, the absence of any local resistance is due to the articulation of *only* the pro-mining discourse that praised gold-mining due to its economic benefits for the locals.

It is also our contention that the intensity of conflict is, at the same time, closely related with discursive strategies and practices that rival parties *mutually* develop and carry out throughout the process of the struggle. Therefore, in accounting for these strategies and practices, we need to consider the close interrelationship between the rival discourses, the interaction between the rival parties, and how this interaction shifts power relations between the parties. As shown by examining the Efemçukuru case, the rival discourses were constructed by radically exteriorizing and, thereby, antagonizing one another. Accordingly, in their attempt to make their particular discourse dominant at local level, the pro-mining and anti-mining groups tried to not only increase the appeal of their discourses for the locals, but also decrease the appeal of the rival discourse, creating different levels of conflict in this way.

In the following sections, we first discuss the relevant literature and introduce the discourse analytic concepts employed in examining the cases. Following the methods section, we analyze the cases. Then, we comparatively discuss the findings. We conclude the study by pointing out its implications for the analysis of the emergence of local protests against MNCs.

2. COMMUNITY—COMPANY STRUGGLES: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The studies that examine the struggles between local communities and corporations in extractive industry have usually focused only on the characteristics of extractive industry, strategies of companies, features of local communities, or governmental policies and practices. For those studies that focus on the industry characteristics, the ecologically destructive nature of extractive industries (Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006; Walker & Howard, 2002) makes the emergence of local resistances to extractive projects almost inevitable. Therefore, what is crucial for companies, as they argue, is to develop "strategies" to reduce conflict. They suggest that proactive rather

than reactive, and community development, rather than community assistance, strategies (Jenkins, 2004) would be more effective in this regard (Garvin *et al.*, 2009; Ite, 2004; Rees *et al.*, 2012; Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003). The studies that focus on "features of local communities" argue that the likelihood of protest formation at the local level can increase if those communities have previously been engaged in collective actions, value common identity, have overlapping interests, and high degree of attachment to the location (Mannarini *et al.*, 2009; Shriver & Kennedy, 2005). Finally, those studies that envisage "governmental policies" as significant argue that governments attempt to reduce conflict either by suppressing local resistances while strongly supporting MNCs at the same time, or by acting as an arbiter between local communities and MNCs (Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003).

Despite their valuable contributions, most of these studies tend to explain the emergence of community–company conflicts by focusing their attention on those conditions, which, they assume, objectively exist—i.e., independent from human perception and social practices. As such, they neglect the processes through which the meanings of existing conditions are contingently constructed in varying degrees (Laclau, 1990) and fail to see that signifiers such as "mining", "environment", and "extractive industry" are never inherently meaningful. Rather, the meanings of these signifiers are constructed within broader discourses. In Foucault's (1972, p. 49) words, discourses operate as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". For instance, while the "extractive industry" may refer to ecological destruction in an environmentalist discourse, it may refer to economic growth in a developmentalist discourse. Therefore, the extractive operations of MNCs per se do not directly lead to conflicts between MNCs and local communities.

The objectivist tendency of the relevant literature also tends to fall into different forms of essentialism, which leads to highlighting some categories as providing ultimate explanations about the emergence of conflicts. Some studies (e.g., Mannarini *et al.*, 2009; Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003) essentialize social structures by regarding them as shaping and determining conflicts. They take structural factors at macro, meso, or micro levels, such as polity, economic development level, corporate culture, corporate learning capacity, local group identity, and place attachment, as given and external factors that "determine" the actions of local communities, MNCs, and governments separately. In contrast, some other studies tend to essentialize social agency by regarding them as rational by nature who know their interests and act accordingly to maximize those interests (e.g., Mannarini *et al.*, 2009; Rees *et al.*, 2012).

There has been an emerging research that uses the poststructuralist perspective to explain disputes in mining fields. Drawing upon Foucault's work on discourse and power-/knowledge, Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako (2016), for instance, explained the illegality problem around *galamsey* industry, low-tech, small-scale mining activity, in Ghana by focusing on why people are engaged in *galamsey* despite attempts by the government to curtail it. They make us better understand how the *galamsey* industry constitutes itself as a "legitimate" activity, and how regulatory institutions' continued criminalization of *galamsey* has failed to prevent local communities from mining illegally. By drawing also on the Laclauian insights in addition to the Foucauldian ones, our study expands this research into the conditions of possibility of the emergence of struggles between local communities and mining MNCs.