RIVERS OF RESISTANCE:

RESOURCE CONFLICT AND RURAL ORGANIZING IN THE AMERICAS

by

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ABSTRACT

In the last half of the twentieth-century, historians of every specialization framed their studies by national boundaries, and environmental historians of the so-called "global north" separated the domain of human culture from the domain of physical nature. For decades, scholars widely accepted and repeated these arrangements, but the lines of separation and division turned out to be far more effective as obstructions to understanding than as paths to insight. This transnational research sets a consequential example by removing those obstructions and by mapping those paths. This is an environmental history of two river basins in the Americas. The following chapters unpack parallels between these places, specifically, how people along the Río Lempa in El Salvador and the Tongue River in Montana used their local knowledge of the land to successfully prevent mining projects in the late twentieth and early-twenty first centuries. I examine the environmental, societal, and cultural factors that led to these successes from different scales–the global to the local–and highlight common themes they shared. Both movements focused on defending their watersheds from mining projects that would have damaged water quality and altered locals' ways of life. The leaders of both movements were not traditional environmentalists and did not consider themselves to be; rather, they were ordinary people who were fighting for what they valued–a life of dignity and respect for their surroundings. By examining two distinct case studies, I show that "success" stories are not singular anomalies. They serve as models for future action.

PREFACE

After spending four months in a small community in El Salvador, I had more questions than answers. I had studied the country's civil war as part of my undergraduate senior capstone course and thought it would be interesting to visit some of the places I had learned about while improving my Spanish. I committed to an internship with US-El Salvador Sister Cities, a transnational Nongovernmental Organization that had formed in the 1980s during the Salvadoran Civil War to accompany the repopulation movement.

Sister Cities placed a fellow intern and me in the highly organized community of Arcatao in the department of Chalatenango near the Honduran border. We were to continue the organization's mission of accompaniment and solidarity by working with the community's Comité de Memoria Histórica Sobreviviente (Committee of Surviving Historic Memory). During the third month of the internship, Arcatao was holding a referendum to vote on whether or not the community wanted to allow metal mining in their municipality. Community leaders asked Sister Cities (and me by extension) to help organize international observers to accompany this process, observe the vote, speak to the press, and write a report on the outcome.

A few days into the delegation, we sat under an awning just one and a half kilometers from El Dorado mine, a project that was the center of a lawsuit that the Canadian (and later Australian) company Pacific Rim/OceanaGold placed against the state of El Salvador for the country limiting mining exploration. Community members from La Maraña met with us to share how gold mining had affected their town. They said they had been successful in keeping the project out of their community, but at a cost. When the mining company first made its presence in La Maraña, the people did not know what the mine was, but representatives from the mining

company told them it would provide jobs and a better life for their children. The community soon realized, however, that the wealth generated from resource extraction would go outward and local families would be left with destroyed natural resources on which their livelihoods depended. When the company learned people were against it, there were multiple reported murders in the area and even more threats. Don Alejandro, one of the leaders who spoke with us, said that they continued to receive threats by phone, and once he and his thirteen-year-old daughter were shot at with pellet guns. His daughter was hit with twenty-one pellets and was still recovering when we were there, two years after the fact.

Emotionally drained but still in hopeful spirits, our group of activists, academics, and journalists from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Central America boarded a microbus and headed to Arcatao.[1] Arcatao was preparing to go to the polls and vote on whether or not to allow mining in the municipality. Our international group would serve as election observers to the process. We traveled throughout the region to learn about gold mining's effects on communities, which included fish kills and water contamination before heading and then headed to Arcatao for our observer training.

Throughout my internship, I kept wondering why my home state of Montana was so different. From what I understood, "The Treasure State" prided itself on its mining heritage and encouraged extractive projects. Sure, we were the first state to ban cyanide heap-leaching, a toxic process used mostly to extract gold from ore, but we also turned down laws that would hold mining companies responsible for clean-up. This project began with one case study: El Salvador.

[1] Our group had representatives from Canada, Germany, France, and the U.S., and observers from Denmark, Italy, Guatemala, and Norway joined us on the day of the consultation.

As I researched El Salvador while living in Montana, I continued to ask the same question: why is Montana so different? When COVID-19 started and travel to El Salvador was not possible, I took Montana on as a second case study and soon learned how wrong I was.

INTRODUCTION:

FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH

It would be difficult to imagine two places with more differences than the Río Lempa and the Tongue River. The Río Lempa begins in Guatemala before winding through El Salvador–the most densely populated country in Latin America–and emptying into the Pacific Ocean. Three out of every four Salvadorans live within the river's basin, using it to fish, irrigate crops, wash clothing, and swim. The river runs through a tropical climate with a wet and dry season where it is warm year-round with temperatures averaging thirty-one degrees Celsius. By comparison, the Tongue River is about 4,800 kilometers to the north. It flows through one of the least-densely populated places in the lower forty-eight states of the United States. People do live along its basin, but they are spaced out by multi-acre ranches or, if they live on the west bank, call the Northern Cheyenne reservation home.[1] This semi-arid steppe climate has little rainfall with harsh winters where the average temperature is well below zero degrees Celsius for over a quarter of the year.

Indeed, these are two very different places, but they may have more in common than what divides them. Both rivers flow through lands with high-demand minerals. The farming and ranching communities in each location fought against mining companies wanting to exploit underground resources that would have damaged the watersheds and returned few benefits to the communities. Residents in both communities chose water over gold or coal and resisted the

[1] Clint and Tammy McRae (Rocker Six Cattle Co. owners) in conversation with Jacey Anderson, June 14, 2023; Thomas Kotynski, "...as coal developers eye the Tongue River Valley," *Great Falls Tribune*, September 28, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

power of the mining companies and their false promises of economic benefits. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, rural ranchers in Montana, U.S.A. fought to prevent coal development in the Tongue River valley, and successfully prevented a coal-hauling railroad from ever existing. At close to the same time, farmers in Chalatenango and Cabañas, El Salvador organized to ban metal mining in their communities and eventually the entire nation. They achieved something no country in the world had ever done before.

This is an environmental history of two river basins in the Americas. The following chapters unpack parallels between these places, specifically, how people used their local knowledge of the land to successfully prevent mining projects. I examine the environmental, societal, and cultural factors that led to these successes from different scales–the global to the local–and highlight common themes they shared. Both movements focused on defending their watersheds from mining projects that would have damaged water quality and altered local residents' ways of life. The leaders of both movements were not traditional environmentalists and did not consider themselves to be; rather, they were ordinary people who were fighting for what they valued–a life of dignity and respect for their surroundings. They relied heavily on creating strategic relationships around mutual interests and played the long game, with each of these resistance movements lasting over three decades. By examining two distinct case studies, I show that "success" stories are not singular anomalies. They serve as models for future action.

This research employs and expands the concepts of economic underdevelopment and dependency theory where the process of "development" tends to only benefit one side–the "developers"–in global, capitalistic relationships. In the case of Latin America, this meant that the majority of the resources generated through development historically flowed outward and

benefited wealthy countries, while poor countries enjoyed little to no economic gain and ultimately suffered.[2] However, this transnational study reveals the ways this core-periphery pattern operates on different scales and in different locations–not just the global, but the local and regional, not just a north-south dynamic, but multidirectional. Rather than focus on the well-examined, top-down analysis of the core-periphery dynamic, this research expands on the agency and response of the "periphery," including the nonhuman environment.[3] The communities I examined in both El Salvador and Montana were well-aware of their positions in the global economy and fought to change the status quo.

Because the subfield of environmental history developed during the environmental movement in the United States, the field tends to have a US bias in its analyses, even though environmental history lends itself to examining histories that expand beyond the nation-state.[4] A

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[2] Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," in *Promise of Development* (Routledge, 2018), 111-123; Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

[3] Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: NYU Press, 1997); Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Environmental Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, Third Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographic Diffusion and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993); Alfred W. Crosby *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

[4] For the history of environmental history in connection to the US Environmental movement see Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Donald Worster, Richard White, Carolyn Merchant, William Cronon, and Stephen J. Pyne, "A Round Table: Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990): 1087-147. Many scholars have used environmental history to explain broader historical processes that expand beyond political borders. For examples, see, Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Environmental Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); and J.R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

transnational, comparative approach offers promising insights into how applying the principles of environmental history to other parts of the globe with actors who do not fit the traditional environmentalist mold might contribute to new debates within the field. Including more work of Latin Americanists and other scholars from the so-called "global south" to environmental humanities research in other regions (and vice versa) provides essential perspectives in debates surrounding extractivism, land sovereignty, and environmental justice.[5]

Environmentalism of the "global west" was a product of the early twentieth century United States and has historically focused on conservation of nonhuman resources, and what scholars now call "early environmentalism" was connected to patriotism and national pride. What Joan Martinez-Alier termed "environmentalism of the poor," however, connects concern for the environment with concern for social justice. Indeed, Marinez-Alier and others argue that environmental movements of the "global south" cannot be successful–or even exist–without also directly addressing human rights.[6] My research builds and expands upon prior scholarship by examining what similar patterns look like in a rural, North American community and uncovers the interconnected issues social movements across the Americas have addressed over the last century. By juxtaposing ranching resistance to coal development in Montana, U.S.A. with farmer resistance to gold mining in Chalatenango and Cabañas, El Salvador, this research unpacks the

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[5] Historians of what Patricia Limerick termed "New Western History" were partly inspired by Latin American history. They argued the US West was an internal colony marked by conquest that left lasting effects.

[6] Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2003); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Longman, 2000), 143.

relationships–landscapes to humans and people to people–played in shaping and fostering resource conflicts. It highlights two examples that demonstrate the most effective defenders of the land are those who work directly with it and rely on it for their livelihoods.[7]

Because this study is interdisciplinary and utilizes concepts from different subfields of history, it is worth taking a moment to define and clarify some of the terminology I utilize throughout the manuscript. When I use the term "environment," I am referring to the physical landscape and its inhabitants, both human and non-human. When describing the relationship between humans and the non-human environment, I will use the terms "landscape" and "non-human environment" interchangeably.

I explore "communities" at different scales and focus on the notions of "community organizing" and "community resilience." When I use the term "community," it includes both human and non-human actors as participants and members of the community unless otherwise noted.

I differentiate between "activist" and "organizer." In this manuscript, "activists" are active in social movements for shorter term goals and often participate in multiple projects at once, whereas "organizers" refer to people involved in one long-term struggle for an indefinite period of time.

Finally, the Americas are an important place in the history of globalization or, to borrow historian Lynn Hunt's definition, a "process by which the world becomes more interconnected

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[7] Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 172.

and more interdependent."[8] This study examines globalization in the context of the post-cold war era where neoliberalism was in the forefront of political thought. An echo to classical liberalism of the late nineteenth century, neoliberalism in the late twentieth century valued unchecked capitalism marked by tax cuts for the rich, privatization of public services, deregulation, and free trade policies. The neoliberal trend in the late 1980s through early 2000s rippled throughout the world, but the Americas in particular demonstrate the paradox of neoliberal promises: freedom from regulation meant freedom to harm the non-human environment, freedom from taxes meant decrease in public services and increases in poverty.[9] The actors in this story fought tirelessly in this era to find alternatives to the neoliberal model.

As described in the Preface this project is the culmination of nearly a decade of both formal and informal research in the United States and El Salvador. My original project proposal intended to make an intervention in oral history methodology by utilizing community workshops to uncover perspectives often omitted, forgotten, or ignored in archives, including the non-human environment.[10] In 2019, I was part of a team that created and facilitated historic memory and oral history pilot workshops in Arcatao, Chalatenango, El Salvador. These workshops focused on moments of resilience during the war era. My collaborator Molly Todd and I

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[8] Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2014), 52.

[9] Jürgen Kocka, *Capitalism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016) 150-1.

[10] Deborah Jean Lee and Kathryn Newfont, eds., *The Land Speaks: New Voices at the Intersection of Oral and Environmental History* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2017). Lee and Newfont curated a series of essays that show how the land has a voice, is an historical actor, and can be heard through the voices of people who work closely with it. The scholarship of Steve Stern and Molly Todd informed this methodology. Both Stern and Todd have incorporated memory studies into their analyses of violent conflicts in Latin America.

explored findings from the workshops elsewhere.[11] My plan for this project was to use similar methodologies to examine the environmental components of resistance to privatization of water and mining and advocacy for sustainable development and to then repeat the process in southeastern Montana with themes altered slightly to match the history of the region more closely. I planned to examine how historical legacies and community narratives shaped decisions people made regarding natural resources in the US West and El Salvador. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshops were not possible in this project's timeframe. These questions remain on the table for future research, but this current project relied on traditional oral history and archival research, which altered some of my original research questions.

My methodology for this project was based on research in private and public archives, as well as oral history, in two countries. For each case study, I have had the privilege of accessing private archives that organizers from these movements created. For the Montana case study, after discussion of potential collaborative history projects, the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC or "Northern Plains") allowed me to access its private collection of documents staff had collected since the beginning of the organization, including twenty-two archival boxes full of documentation about the Tongue River Railroad and the organizing efforts to prevent its construction. For the Salvador case, long standing connections with US-El Salvador Sister Cities allowed my advisor Molly Todd, me, and a team of undergraduates at Montana State University to collect personal papers from US activists who participated in the organization US-El Salvador

[11] Molly Todd and Jacey Anderson, "Through the Lens of Solidarity: Pictures of Conscience from Salvadoran Conflict Zones, 1979-2019," *Istmo: Revista de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* (Nicaragua), 44 (2022): 97-126; Molly Todd and Jacey Anderson, "El retorno de las historias exiliadas: Talleres de memoria histórica en Chalatenango y Cuscatlán," special issue on memory studies, *Revista Realidad* (El Salvador) no. 153, (March 2020), 93-121.

Sister Cities. Called "Project Solidarity," the collection includes tens of thousands of documents and photographs from the 1980s through present day that we employed in interactive exhibits and workshops in El Salvador and the U.S. Furthermore, as one of the first scholars to return to Salvadoran archives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I examined materials at El Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) and CRIPDES, that had only recently partnered with a Salvadoran historic memory organization, Fundabril, to organize its materials into archival boxes, which are still uncatalogued and not yet open to the public.

The materials I accessed in the archives necessarily shaped what I discussed and did not discuss in the following chapters. Because the organizers themselves created the archives I utilized the most, they highlight a particular perspective and context. In the case of El Salvador, the organizations' goal to build a unified front for their work overshadowed stories of individual actors. The documentation tends to reveal a top-down perspective within the social movement. This is also in part a cultural reflection of emphasizing the voice of the collective front over the individual, as well as the practice from the war of masking individual identities for security reasons. Like any archive, these repositories revealed some stories over others–mostly of the movements' leaders. The purpose of oral history projects to accompany the archival research was to address some of these silences and identify and highlight less obvious perspectives in both places. As these workshops were not possible, the archives and the stories in the following chapters–especially in the Salvador case–focus more on leadership and broader story lines, at times reflecting individuals with more resources and privilege.[12]

[12] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995). Trouillot analyzed how power dynamics alter the construction of historical narratives from archives through dissemination. This research operated in systems that

I organize this manuscript in three chapters that reveal the response and resilience of communities in El Salvador and Montana and how they successfully kept extractive industries at bay by employing long-term strategies of coalition-building. Chapter One sets the stage of extraction and resistance in both communities by exploring the concept of "sacrifice zones" in the neoliberal era. From the colonial period onward, the extractive model was the default in the Americas. This chapter reviews extractive processes and consequences in El Salvador and Montana and shows the ways these places were connected through mineral demands. This chapter focuses on global and regional patterns of extraction and resistance. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked a disruption to the status quo with a rise in activism throughout the Americas that brought in new voices to the environmental movement: people who had suffered in the wake of free market capitalism and had been pushed aside for capital gain. These movements critiqued old patterns of extraction as the default and proposed new alternatives. While there had always been resistance to extractive processes, I argue this era marked a paradigm shift in activism where people mobilized more effectively by learning from the past, committing to a long-term struggle, and growing their bases through alliance-building. Chapter One concludes with the origin stories of the organizations who led these fights: CRIPDES and Northern Plains.[13] Rural people with no formal organizing experience started both these organizations out of frustration with their circumstances and desire to defend their lands.

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privilege certain voices over others, making it difficult to uncover the full spectrum of actors involved in these social movements.

[13] CRIPDES (The Christian Committee of the Displaced) was founded in 1984. In 1992, they changed their name to The Association for the Development of El Salvador, but kept the same acronym, "CRIPDES."

After demonstrating how these communities shared a common thread of oppression and resistance to extractivism, Chapters Two and Three detail the nuances of each story of resistance and which characteristics of each place and people affected the outcomes of their struggles. Chapter Two uncovers the history of resistance to coal development in southeastern Montana, a story tied to territory and community. I focus on the strategies Northern Plains and its allies employed to prevent the construction of the Tongue River Railroad–a coal hauling railroad that would have created more coal development along the river basin. The railroad was the dream of a venture capitalist who recruited few but powerful investors over the years, including Forrest Mars, the candy bar mogul. Common to many core-periphery dynamics in resource-rich environments during the neoliberal era, the railroad's plan was to ship coal out of Montana for processing and use elsewhere. While the destination of the unmined coal shifted from the Midwest to the Pacific Rim, the goal of the investors was always the same–to make money by extracting a mineral at the expense of the local communities' economies and landscapes. The NPRC used any strategy at its disposal–delaying permits, stalling commenting processes, forming alliances to help identify historic sites that the railroad would damage, building unlikely and inevitable alliances and continuing to resist this project from 1978 to 2016.

Chapter Three focuses on the Salvador case study where gold and silver mining led by foreigners had plagued the country for centuries. Although mining paused during the country's civil war (1980-1992), at the end of the war, the country found itself in a hyper-globalized context where demand for gold and foreign trade accelerated. This chapter examines organizing strategies CRIPDES utilized to mobilize rural communities in the struggle to rebuild sustainably in a post-war, neoliberal context. Strategies and alliances adapted to changing times, and in 2006

the struggle against mining formalized with the ultimate goal of a complete national ban on metal mining. Like the Montana story, organizers in El Salvador took many avenues–legal, educational, and social–and played the long game until they finally reached the goal of a national ban on mining. And like in the case of the Tongue River Railroad, the only reason to take the mineral out of the ground was to make a few people very wealthy.

These two case studies come back together in the conclusion where I analyze the similarities and differences of each story and what we can learn by examining them side-by-side. The conclusion serves as a tool for historians and organizers alike. It weighs the outcomes of the tragedy of the commons, whereby few individuals acting in self-interest, deplete the land and reap its profit while the majority shoulder the burden, versus what historian Sara Dant termed the "triumph of the commons" where the solutions to environmental degradation across the planet will require a collective effort and–in the case of the US West–a step away from the region's settler culture of rugged individualism.[14] The Salvador and Montana case studies show that, through caring for the land, building alliances, and long term struggle, triumph is possible.

[14] The "tragedy of the commons" was coined by Garrett Harden in "The Tragedy of the Commons: The Population Problem Has No Technical Solution; It Requires a Fundamental Extension in Morality," *Science* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243-1248. Sara Dant introduced the concept of "triumph of the commons" in, *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 324.

CHAPTER ONE

‘WE ARE THE ANGRY ONES’:

SACRIFCE ZONES IN TREASURED PLACES

Alaina Buffalo Spirit grew up along the Tongue River on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana. “For us, it was our playground,” she recalled, “We swam along the river there and fished…We started taking the frying pan down there and we would fry catfish… so we could stay down there and swim and fish all day long.” While she lived in other parts of the country as an adult, she eventually returned home after hearing of potential coal and oil development near the river. “So I came home, and I started a newspaper. I titled it the *Tsistsistas Press.*” The paper’s main purpose was to inform tribal members of proposed development projects on the reservation. It would run from July 1976 to 1979.

A prolific artist, journalist, and organizer, Buffalo Spirit said her connection to the Tongue River, in part, inspired her to take political action against coal development near her home by joining the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC or “Northern Plains”). The idea came to her while walking her dog along the river. “It’s so beautiful down there. It’s serene. It’s in the alluvial valley. It’s undisturbed. That’s where we have our ceremonies, even today,” she shared, “And we were walking along and I’m gonna watch to see if she’ll take a drink of that water. And she was walking along and eventually took a little drink, and the water was clean and clear. I thought ‘I’m going to join Northern Plains because I really like how clean my water is here.’”

She joined the organization at a key moment; the NPRC was fighting against the biggest proposed strip mine in the world near her home at Otter Creek. The mining project also included

a proposed railroad that would haul the speculative mine's coal to market. The railroad would run parallel to the Tongue River on the opposite bank from where Buffalo Spirit swam, fried fish, and walked her dog. Having observed the environmental and social effects of similar projects nearby, she thought, "I don't want to see that kind of devastation near my home," and decided to act.[1] Buffalo Spirit's story, though unique, is connected to a broader pattern of heightened awareness of the effects of extractive industries on communities across the Americas in the late twentieth century.

This chapter explores the history of extraction and displacement in southeastern Montana and northeastern El Salvador, how both places became targets for outside commercial interests. It reviews extractive processes and consequences, including the displacement of people in favor of generating wealth for outside purposes, and shows how global and regional patterns of extraction and resistance connect these two places in unexpected ways. While communities in the Americas have always resisted colonial, extractive processes, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked a paradigm shift in activism when people mobilized more effectively by learning from the past, committing to a long-term struggle, and growing their bases through the formation of coalitions.

This chapter examines the concept of "sacrifice zones" in the Americas. Stemming from a long history of extraction and displacement, both the Tongue River and Río Lempa became potential sacrifice zones in the neoliberal era. Scholars—mostly from the fields of political ecology, human geography, and environmental studies—have revealed how communities,

[1] Alaina Buffalo Spirit, interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT, c. July 9, 2020.

usually in the so-called "global south," are designated as sacrifice zones after degradation caused by industrialization and resource extraction.[2] Others have explored how the intersection of race, class, and industrialization created sacrifice zones in urban areas.[3] However, few studies have examined this notion using comparative methodologies that include rural cases in the United States. Nor are there many examples of successful resistance to this process before the devastation occurred.[4]

The history of resource conflict in both the Tongue River valley and Río Lempa basin is deeply tied to land and territory. Both places experienced settler colonial processes that brought European people with an ideology that commodified land.[5] This process displaced and/or killed thousands of people who made their livelihoods in these watersheds for many generations prior to European arrival. The legacy of this mass-scale displacement of people and alteration of land use led to changes in the land that occurred after settlers planted their roots for several generations.[6] The settler-colonial process in the Americas embodied a shift from relationships

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[2] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[3] Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
[4] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2018). Hochschild describes communities in the United States' rural South that became "sacrifice zones." Her research focuses on explaining the roots of the political ideology of people rather than organized resistance to their predicament. Leisl Carr Childers, *The Size of the Risk: Histories of Multiple Use in the Great Basin* (Norma, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015). Carr Childers' research focuses on public land use in the Great Basin, with multiple stakeholders debating whether to use the land for nuclear testing despite people living there.
[5] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008); Caroline Fraser, *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (London, UK: Hachette, 2017).
[6] For histories of settler-colonialism, displacement, and resistance, see Louis S. Warren, *God's Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America* (New York, NY:

and economies of reciprocity with the land to commodifying and consuming the land. In other words, competing values of "progress" and "development" stemmed from a long history of conflict over resource use.[7]

Examining the history of two distinct places in the Americas shows how the global and local are intimately connected. Because of the different scales in which coal and gold demands operate, this chapter goes beyond local history and provides a broader look at the history of resource extraction and the movement of minerals across nations and the world. From US settler-colonialism to its global hegemony during and after the cold war, the US frontier operated at different scales—both continental and global, which ultimately affected the local as well.[8] Minerals were both the means and motive for expansion. Therefore, expansion and environmental management were "deeply entangled."[9] These frontiers are visible in both case studies, from eminent domain laws in the US West to covert and overt US involvement in El Salvador.

This chapter begins by examining the era when hyper-concentrated extraction tied to global markets was the default. The modern history of the Americas reveals a pattern of colonial expansion, driven by resource extraction, with human displacement as a consequence. Next, I

Hachette, 2017); Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1983).

[7] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

[8] I refer to the "cold war" rather than the "Cold War" throughout this text because I am not referring to the Cold War between the former Soviet Union and the United States but reverberations of the conflict in other geographic regions.

[9] Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Powers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

examine the late twentieth century, which marked an uptick in activism and resistance to the status quo of extractivism. People who worked the land for subsistence became active in contesting outside interests that threatened their communities' environmental and economic well-being. I conclude by summarizing some early work of two of the organizations who led these fights during the neoliberal era of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: The Christian Committee of the Displaced (CRIPDES, now called The Association for the Development of El Salvador) and the Northern Plains Resource Council.[10] Rural people with no formal training started both these organizations out of frustration with their circumstances and desire to defend their communities (including the non-human environment, as defined in the introduction) from outside interests. CRIPDES and Northern Plains were successful in this era and context as opposed to previous efforts because of their shared histories of displacement and intrusion and because they mobilized similar strategies of resistance. I address these factors briefly in this chapter and in detail in Chapters Two and Three.

Expansion and Displacement

The Tongue River and Río Lempa case studies share a history of unequal wealth distribution and concurrent resistance, with global structures favoring outside intervention. Colonialism in each location displaced people in favor of production, creating core-periphery dynamics on different scales. This section begins with a brief description of the settler-colonial process in southeastern Montana in relation to the cattle and mining industries. It then turns toward the Salvador case where similar patterns of conflict over land tenure and

[10] CRIPDES, The Christian Committee of the Displaced, was founded in 1984. In 1992, they changed their name to The Association for the Development of El Salvador.

commodification of the land led to displacement of people and an accompanying resistance to these processes.

The struggle over resources in southeastern Montana accelerated in the mid-nineteenth century when settlers encroached on western tribal territories and value systems clashed. As conflict shaped tribal identity, Manifest Destiny and the Euro-settlers' perceived entitlement to the natural resources they found as they moved west grew. The systematic removal of tribes from their land opened the door for settlers to move in from the east with the promise of economic success. For the Tongue River valley, economic success came in the form of raising cattle. In 1882, the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Miles City, allowing more people to come to the area who were interested in the cattle business. Some of these new arrivals left after struggling to endure the winter or failing to make a living in the arid conditions of the eastern Montana plains. Others, however, stayed for generations and made a livelihood, passing their knowledge of the land down through multiple generations.[11]

While settlers moved to the southeastern part of the state for cattle ranching in the late nineteenth century, many people traveled to Montana even earlier for mining. In 1889, less than fifteen years after Custer's defeat, Montana became a state that could govern itself. Adopted in 1905, the Montana state flag depicts a sunrise over the Rocky Mountains with the Missouri River flowing in the foreground. Waterfalls, trees, and grasses blend in effortlessly as part of the landscape. Front and center are a pick, shovel, and plow along with the state motto "Oro y Plata" (gold and silver in English). These symbols reflect Montana's ecological richness, as well as its

[11] Chere Jiusto and Kate Hampton, "Vetanove o'he'e/The Tongue River Valley: A Cultural Landscape Study," Montana State Historic Preservation Office, December 2001, 8.

proud farming and mining heritage. Montana earned its nickname, "The Treasure State," because of its literal treasures of precious metals.[12] This legacy and tradition of mining presented itself in the form of other minerals as well, including coal.[13]

The settler-colonial process created a new network of relationships between the land and the people and the city and country. The movement of wealth and resources flowed outward from the point of production in the rural west to the city, described by historians as a "hinterland-metropolis" dynamic.[14] Coal is an effective analytical tool to observe this relationship.[15] The purpose of the speculative, coal-hauling Tongue River Railroad shifted over the decades, but

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[12] Montana Secretary of State, "About the State Seal," accessed September 14, 2023, https://sosmt.gov/state-seal/.

[13] Thomas Kotynski, "Ranchers, Indians Oppose Tongue River Railroad Plans," *Great Falls Tribune*, September 29, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT. In 1923, entrepreneurs constructed sixty-four miles of grade between Miles City and Decker to access coal fields. The project was abandoned in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression. Although no rail was laid, railroad cuts from this project are still visible near Birney. Kotynski noted, "Little grows on the compacted soil of the railroad's old right-of-way, abandoned when developers went bankrupt in the '20s before all the track was laid or any train made the planned run between Miles City and Sheridan, Wyo." The cuts went straight through local ranchers Gary Ochsner's cornfield and Mark Fix's grazing pasture. The article called this an "ominous reminder to Ochsner and others who opposed the industrialization of the valley, of the railroad's proposed latter-day successor, the Tongue River Railroad." In other words, the pattern of extraction through mining and railroads continued throughout the twentieth century, with a pause during the Depression, before picking up again mid-century alongside a fierce opposition to development.

[14] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 1991).

[15] Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Needham examines how Phoenix exploited the Navajo nation's coal beds to power air-conditioned homes and offices in Phoenix. The wealth from the coal flowed away from the Navajo, leaving most Navajo families without electricity in their own homes.

there was one consistency in all its iterations: the extracted coal would always leave the area to be sold elsewhere. The local people living in the area of extraction received little direct benefit.[16]

Likewise, Salvadorans have historically depended on land for their livelihood, but prior to the civil war (1980 to 1992), a mere fourteen family oligarchs owned sixty percent of the land, which they used to grow export crops like indigo and coffee. Like most of Latin America, El Salvador developed not in isolation but connected to global powers which forced the region to rely on export crops over which they had no control of the prices, and very few benefited from this arrangement.[17] For the Salvadoran oligarchs, the needs of export crops ranked higher than the needs of campesinos.[18] This is evident through the literal displacement of people in favor of cash crops. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, indigo, a plant that creates a blue pigment used to dye textiles, and coffee dominated El Salvador's economy. When indigo was the main cash crop, oligarchs forced people to move uphill, because the indigo flourished in the

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[16] Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). There was a strong tie between coal production and railroad accessibility in the United States because both processes fueled and accelerated one another. Railroads made it possible to bring workers to the coal mines and to export coal from the mines to cities. Coal fueled trains more efficiently than wood, the previous energy source of choice. Through this relationship, coal accelerated time and diminished space for people. By the end of the nineteenth century, trains and coal became deeply linked across the country. Parts of the West would be uninhabitable without fossil fuels, as evidenced by the fact that some Native American tribes abandoned crops in these areas. When coal left the mines, it traveled on trains–powered by coal–to different parts of the country. This began to shape life for people across the country, from the concepts of time and space shrinking to the layouts of communities.

[17] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 1993).

[18] "Campesino" or "campesina" is loosely translated to "peasant." Salvadoran campesinos live in rural areas and mostly rely on subsistence farming to make their livelihood. Some scholars make this term gender-neutral by replacing the "o" or "a" with "x." I chose to use "campesinos" because it aligns with the time period, and some Latin American scholars have critiqued the use of the "x" as an Anglo-created phenomenon not genuine or practical to the Spanish language.

valleys. When coffee's demand rose and indigo's diminished, coffee farming often replaced indigo, so oligarchs forced people off the mountains, and back to the valleys so the landowners could grow coffee on the hillsides.[19]

Before the Great Depression, El Salvador tended to focus its energy and resources on whatever was the most profitable export commodity. Coffee was the main sector of the economy until the Great Depression when demand for coffee plummeted. Rather than focus their attention inward toward nationalizing business like other Latin American countries had done, El Salvador chose to diversify its exports. This was likely due to the country's limited land and opportunistic oligarchy. In other words, the Salvadoran government did not shy away from foreigners and instead looked for ways to encourage foreign investment and trade.[20] This was part of a regional pattern of liberalism that began in the late nineteenth century as countries gained political and economic independence from Spain.

The Salvadoran anti-mining campaign of the twenty-first century originated from a long history of struggling in highly oppressive contexts. The oligarchy controlled the militarized government and quickly silenced any attempts at land reform. In 1932, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez was the undemocratically elected president of El Salvador. Martínez canceled the 1932 elections for fear of losing to opposition candidates from the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), further stoking existing political unrest. Just one week after the canceled elections, a group of campesinos armed with machetes began to attack municipalities in

[19] Miguel Mejilla, Community Organizing Class, US-El Salvador Sister Cities, November 29, 2022.
[20] Jeffery M. Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

the coffee-growing region of El Salvador, eventually taking control over about half of them.[21] The military responded aggressively, regaining control of the region in less than a week and killing anyone its leaders thought might be associated with the uprising. Estimates of casualties range from 10,000 to 70,000, almost all of whom were non-combatant, Pipil-speaking campesinos. Those who survived hid their indigeneity by not speaking Pipil and avoiding dressing in traditional clothing. Now commonly referred to simply as "La Matanza" ("the slaughter" in English), historians consider the events that followed the 1932 uprising ethnocide.[22]

While many historians called the 1932 uprising a communist revolt, historian Erik Ching argued that the PCS had little to do with the campesinos attacks. Regardless, the political division between the oligarch-supported military dictatorship and communist resistance began a legacy that carried through the twentieth century and beyond. Ching described 1932 as a "watershed" in El Salvador's memory and politics. For the left, it symbolized oppression of the popular movement by the wealthy and powerful, while for the right, it affirmed their belief in a communist threat. The 1932 uprising served "as a benchmark for political identity in El Salvador," which appeared in political party names during the civil war later that century (described later in this chapter) "One of the notorious death squads chose as its namesake General Martinez," he explained, "while the coalition of guerrilla armies—the FMLN—named

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[21] Erik Ching, "In Search of the Party: The Communist Party, the Comintern, and the Peasant Rebellion of 1932 in El Salvador," *The Americas*, Greenville, South Carolina: Furman University, (October 1998), vol. 55, no. 2: 204–239, 206.

[22] For detailed descriptions of the revolt: William Roseberry (ed.), *Coffee, Society and Power in Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 232-61; Thomas Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Jeffrey L. Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

itself after Farabundo Marti, a leader of the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS) who was executed in February 1932 for his suspected involvement in the rebellion."[23] These analyses help inform the complex and tragic history of La Matanza but also exemplify the long history of campesino organizing and resistance, precursors to the armed conflict and anti-mining movement that followed. Similar to Montana, the 1932 uprising and massacre that followed show a displacement and erasure of indigenous people from the land, a process that would later galvanize movements to protect natural resources.

Uptick in Organizing

If the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of colonization and displacement in the Americas, the late twentieth century marked an increase in organized resistance to the status quo of extraction by outside interests, all while global colonial processes continued. Because the United States funded the Israeli military during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo in retaliation, sparking an oil shortage in the United States in what is now colloquially referred to as "the oil crisis."[24] This created a national desire to have a self-sustaining energy supply, paving the way for deregulation to achieve this goal. In this context, coal was an appealing alternative because of its availability within US borders.[25] At the same time, environmental consciousness was growing on a national level, reflected by national policies like the Clean Air Act of 1970 that

[23] Ching, 207.
[24] For detailed histories of the 1970s US oil crisis see Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011); Victor McFarland, *Oil Powers: A History of the US-Saudi Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
[25] Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2011), 177-180.

affected state environmental policies as well. In 1972, for example, Montanans rewrote the 1889 Constitution. A progressive and controversial document for its time, the new constitution added–perhaps most famously–that Montanans had the right to "a clean and healthful environment."[26] Montanans were growing more concerned about environmental issues, stemming from their connections to the land through farming, ranching, mining, and recreation.[27] This new document was also, in part, a response to the 1971 Chilean buy-out of Anaconda's largest mine, which led to massive layoffs.

While labor issues were a concern during the creation of the 1972 Constitution, the constitution was also a reaction to the North Central Power Study. The US Bureau of Reclamation and "21 private and public utility companies, electric companies, electric cooperatives, public power districts, and cities" conducted the study in the context of the national "oil crisis." They proposed forty-two new coal-burning power plants in the Northern Great Plains, twenty-one of which would be in Montana–most in the Tongue River valley. The plan relied on using water from the Yellowstone, Big Horn, Wind, Tongue, Powder, and North Platte rivers to cool the plants.[28] Ranchers from Birney, Bullhead Mountain, and Rosebud Creek attended the meeting. When they saw the report it appeared to them that their valley would become a sacrifice zone to fuel the nation. They knew this would not only change the way they operated their ranches for generations but make the land incapable of supporting vegetation and

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[26] Montana Constitution, Article 9, Section 1.
[27] Deborah Beaumont Schmidt and Robert J. Thompson, "The Montana Constitution and the Right to a Clean and Healthful Environment," *Mont. L. Rev.* 51 (1990), 411.
[28] United States Bureau of Reclamation, "North Central Power Study: Report of Phase 1", October 1971, Internet Archive, Montana State Library, accessed September 24, 2021, https://archive.org/details/northcentralpowe1971unit.

cattle, likely forcing them to leave their homes.[29] This story is part of the roots of what would eventually become the Northern Plains Resource Council.

Steve Charter remembered coal companies visiting Bull Mountain Ranch when he was in high school. This was in 1970, the same year that the Northern Pacific Railroad merged with the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad to become the Burlington National Railroad. At the time, the model for coal companies was to "buy people out." Landmen from the companies went door-to-door in an attempt to buy land, informing landowners that their neighbors had sold out even when, in many cases, they had not. Charter said his family did not necessarily consider themselves to be environmentalists "as much as we didn't want to be pushed around." For any offer the company gave Charter to buy his land, Charter said, "The coal companies were always $4.64 short." The McRae family of Rocker Six Cattle Company had a similar response, telling the companies, "You can't put a price on land that's not for sale." Charter explained that some neighbors did want to sell their land, and his family had "no hard feelings" against them. However, a small group of landowners formed from those who did not want to sell, and eventually joined with other similar groups to form the NPRC to leverage political power from "townsfolk" and university students.[30]

Homes along the east bank of the Tongue River were often acres, if not miles apart. Ranching families could easily stay on their properties a full day or week without needing to talk to their neighbors or go into town for supplies. Geographic isolation reinforced the rugged

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[29] Teresa Erickson, "Standing Together: Protecting Land, Air, Water, and People, The History of the Northern Plains Resource Council," 2020, accessed September 24, 2021. https://northernplains.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/StandingTogether_2020.pdf.
[30] Steve Charter, video interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, 2016, Northern Plains Resource Council Digital Archives, Billings, MT.

individualism culture of the West, but the nature of ranch work meant neighbors did at times rely on one another in particular times such as calving season or branding time. These workdays centered around the task at hand and a shared meal afterward. Culturally, there were many taboo topics, including religion and politics, that would be considered nosy to bring up. So while families often worked as teams for large-scale work, the unspoken rules kept the conversation professional and personal business private.[31]

Because of the local culture of individualism and privacy, the formation of Northern Plains was an unlikely, radical act. Families broke long-standing traditions of keeping to themselves and began to call each other when the Tongue River Railroad Company came knocking at their doors. Jeanie Alderson, the daughter of one of the original five families who formed the NPRC, shared, "Neighbors talking to neighbors was pretty radical, but that's what we had to do." Alderson said although strip-mine laws of the 1970s "divided us as a community," many families still chose to organize. "We [organize]," she explained, "because we love our places and because it's the right thing to do, and because we have such a good group of people."[32] According to both Alderson and Teresa Erickson, NPRC's Executive Director from 1986 to 2019, it was specifically women who broke the silence and began to build solidarity and camaraderie among ranching families. "The women were more willing to break taboos and talk to their neighbors about what was going on," Erickson explained.[33]

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[31] Clint and Tammy McRae (Rocker Six Cattle Co. owners) in conversation with Jacey Anderson, June 14, 2023.
[32] Jeanie Alderson, video interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, 2016, Northern Plains Resource Council Digital Archives, Billings, MT.
[33] Teresa Erickson, interview by Jacey Anderson, August 3, 2022.

Across the river on the Northern Cheyenne reservation, a parallel resistance to coal development was well underway. In 1974, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) used the Clean Air Act of 1970 to create three grades of air quality for nineteen specific sources of pollution, including pollution from coal plants. They imposed a blanket Class Two designation for the entire country with the option for state and tribal governments to reclassify for Class One designation.[34] Two years later, the Northern Cheyenne were the first to reclassify for Class One, which was a cleaner standard than Class Two, and stated that any change to air quality was significant. The Northern Cheyenne tribal council requested the EPA to reclassify the reservation's air to "prevent significant degradation of its pristine quality."[35]

This request encompassed long-standing tribal values and an understanding of the earth's interconnected systems; "The importance of clean air," tribal member Elliot Rockler explained, "does not stand alone in our minds. It is part of a larger whole that we make reference to when we think about what it is that makes life worthwhile and satisfying. We view it also in relation to the past, the present, and the future."[36] Benefits of the Northern Cheyenne's protected air spread to communities on the other side of the river, and their work set the precedent for others to petition for reclassification as well. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, members from the Northern Cheyenne worked directly with the Northern Plains Resource Council as voting members and board members. This relationship strengthened the groups' mobilizing capacity by creating more avenues to intervene against various projects that had the potential to change the

[34] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Summary of the Clean Air Act," September 6, 2023, https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-air-act.
[35] Elliot Rockler, "Environmentalists of the Year: Northern Cheyenne People," 1979.
[36] Elliot Rockler, "Environmentalists of the Year: Northern Cheyenne People," 1979.

Tongue River valley in ways that locals believed to be detrimental.[37] Details of this and other strategic relationships are covered in Chapter Two.

Early resistance to coal development in southeastern Montana was linked to a national shift in environmental consciousness with local people connecting to this process through their care of the land. Likewise, the organizing strategies of El Salvador's anti-mining campaign trace back at least as far as the country's civil war (1980 to 1992), which stemmed from unequal land distribution and oppression. The war itself was a key factor that prevented El Salvador from becoming a complete sacrifice zone. First, the timing of the war halted all mining operations for twelve years, forcing companies to move their projects elsewhere; and second, campesinos deployed many of the same strategies from the war era–from popular education to international solidarity–in the anti-mining campaign.

The 1932 uprising is an early example of grassroots, rural resistance to economic and social oppression grounded in the land, but the outcome did not produce the social changes the campesinos sought. Instead, the military dictatorship continued to rule for the next several decades. The government silenced and pacified grassroots organizers along with indigenous identity, forcing organizers to operate clandestinely. Scholars are now beginning to uncover continuity of community organizing during these decades led mostly by labor groups, teachers, students, and religious leaders.[38] By the 1960s, Salvadorans began to speak out more openly

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[37] Erickson, interview by Anderson.

[38] Kevin O'Sullivan, "Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-Based Humanitarianism," *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 2 (2021): 246-265; Rose J. Spalding, "Social Movements in Central America," in *Handbook of Central American Governance*, ed. Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein (New York: Routledge, 2013), 268-286; Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 35.

against oppression and listed their demands by holding peaceful protests and demonstrations. Specifically, they were frustrated by the lack of free and fair elections (exemplified by leftist leaders winning elections but never being instated) and the continued displacement of people for profit, like the construction of the Cerrón Grande Dam on the Río Lempa that displaced over 10,000 people.[39] The government responded to these community group's concerns by increasing levels of violence. As there were fewer and fewer legal routes to reform, many citizens turned to armed struggle.

The conflict came to a head in 1980 when five politico-militarized leftist organizations formalized a guerrilla coalition, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) to stand up against the militarized government.[40] Some of these groups had formed guerrilla operations before 1980, while other noncombatant groups decided to join forces in 1980 to create a united armed front against the military regime. For the political left, the government represented a legacy of oligarchy and had administered state-sponsored violence over the previous five decades. During the twelve-year conflict, thousands of people fled the country as refugees and lived in United Nations refugee camps in Honduras. According to the United Nations Truth Commission on El Salvador, about one-third of the entire population (5.2 million people) either left the country or were internally displaced.[41] This, and other so-called "dirty wars" throughout Latin America, were a product of broader global patterns stemming from cold war geopolitics

[39] Luis Barrientos, "Cerrón Grande: Un Proyecto Sin Historia," November 26, 2014, https://cosas503.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/cerron-grande-un-proyecto-sin-historia/.
[40] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 51.
[41] Report of the United Nations Truth Commission on El Salvador, 1993, accessed April 20, 2019, http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html.

where the United States played a heavy hand in funding military dictatorships to squash unrest, and El Salvador was no exception.[42]

Before the war had officially ended, Salvadorans living in refugee camps in Honduras organized to repopulate their homeland.[43] Frustrated by the lack of communication and understanding from the Honduran and Salvadoran governments and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Salvadorans living abroad began to leverage international support to go home and move forward with their lives.[44] In 1984, 400 displaced Salvadoran families met and formed the Christian Committee for Displaced Salvadorans (CRIPDES).[45] According to leftist organizer Lorena Martinez, "CRIPDES was a form of reorganizing the same people who participated in social struggles for better living conditions, access to land and a free society in the 1970s. The leaders of CRIPDES emerged from this

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[42] For descriptions of El Salvador's civil war see, Molly Todd *Beyond Displacement;* Aldo Lauria-Santiago and Leigh Binford, eds., *Landscapes of Struggle: Politics, Society, and Community in El Salvador* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004)*;* For cold war in Latin America, see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).

[43] Molly Todd's *Beyond Displacement* centered the role of non-combatant campesino organizing during the war, from strategically fleeing in groups in a complex system called "la guinda," to creating community in refugee camps and finally organizing to return to El Salvador on their own terms. Chapter three addresses the legacy of this organizing and specific strategies both the FMLN and non-combatant campesinos employed, building the skills and strategies needed to do something no country had ever done before: ban mining on a national level.

[44] Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles Against Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021).

[45] Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* 197. Today CRIPDES is called The Association for the Development of El Salvador, but still uses the same acronym from the 1980s.

experience and had their roots in the constructed consciousness of this struggle."[46] Part of their mobilization process included leveraging international solidarity to accompany the repopulation movement. The first region people repopulated was Chalatenango along the Río Lempa. According to Karen Ramirez, project manager of the Oxfam partner Provida, because these people were the first to own land, they were organized at a higher level than other communities. This was due both to the process it took to repopulate and the experience of owning land for the first time that meant they truly saw the value in protecting it.[47]

Although the war did not produce a clear winner for El Salvador, the late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of negotiated transition out of war and dictatorship toward democratic rule. This was part of a regional pattern that continued throughout the decade. In the case of El Salvador, armed opposition and government representatives had to work together to negotiate a way out of the conflict. In 1988, organizations in El Salvador organized a National Debate for Peace. This was an open social discussion of over 100 civil society groups led by the National Catholic Church.[48] The goal of this gathering was to bring consensus out of conflict. The debate focused on several core issues including economic structural injustice, institutionalized violence, and increased foreign intervention.

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[46] CRIPDES, FUNPROCOOP, CESPIS, MST, Desarrollo y paz, Federación Luterana Mundial, "Memoria de dos semanas de intercambio de experiencias: Brasil, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador," May 28 - June 8, 2002, Encuentro Internacional: "Frente a la globalización Neloliberal globalicemos nuestra lucha de resistencia," CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador (translation by author).

[47] Karen Ramirez, interview by Jacey Anderson, PROVIDA, San Salvador, El Salvador, January 17, 2023.

[48] Edward T. Brett, "Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador," *The Catholic Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2008): 717–39, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27745336.

Many of the conclusions of this debate were precursors to the anti-mining campaign. For example, participants criticized El Salvador's role in the global economy, arguing that the current economic struggle was in large part due to "an unjust structure of international commerce" and "the imposition of economic measures by international finance institutions." The "finance institutions" they referred to included the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which would later be involved in mining lawsuits. The National Debate for Peace also noted and criticized increased foreign intervention, particularly from the United States.[49] These stances complicate the conventional core-periphery analysis of Latin America, with the "periphery" critiquing its position and advocating for a change of the status quo. Rather than idly standing by as world powers continued to grow more powerful, Salvadoran organizers learned about the unequal economic dynamic they were in and worked toward changing it.

Toward Organizing Against Mining Projects

In the context of heightened environmental consciousness and increased deregulation of energy development, the idea of building the Tongue River Railroad materialized. The proposed railroad would run parallel to the Tongue River and shorten the distance from future coal mines near Ashland and Birney to the Midwest for processing and market sales. The route, purpose, and destination of the railroad shifted over the decades, but one consistency remained: a tension between the desire for a profitable venture against the longing to preserve natural resources and a certain way of life.

[49] Todd, *Long Journey to Justice*, 110-112.

Where residents of the Tongue River valley saw risk, entrepreneurs saw opportunity. In 1973, Wesco Resources of Billings began acquiring coal properties for a speculative coal strip mine called "Montco," short for "Montana coal," in the Ashland and Birney areas. Wesco Resources acquired 31,500 acres of surface control and 4,000 areas of private coal leases in the area that year.[50] Montco's goal, then, was to produce 5 million tons of coal in its first year and work up to 15 million tons per year with the hope of opening a strip mine in 1982.[51] What started as a Montana partnership (Wesco and Montco) dissolved itself in May 1977 and transferred its assets to out-of-state interests. ITT Resources, a subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraph, purchased a half interest in the proposed Montco mine. Washington Water Power and Washington Natural Gas acquired the remaining interest, and Burlington Northern began a study on building a new track to haul Montco coal out of state.[52]

In 1978, Montco submitted a twenty-two-year plan for a proposed strip mine called Nance. Most of the coal in the plan was either Burlington Northern coal leased to Peabody or state coal leased to Consolidation Coal. In an organizational newsletter, the NPRC noted, "Almost all of the coal in the plan is controlled by other corporations, and not by Montco." NPRC was concerned that allowing this permit would set "a dangerous precedent" by allowing mining exploration and studies to companies that did not yet own the coal. Mary Daniels, a leader of the Tri-County subgroup of Northern Plains, warned "How many other companies will

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[50] "ITT buys Wesco Ashland-Birney leases," *Forsyth Independent,* July 14, 1977, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[51] "Montco - ITT Float Plans for Tongue River Mine," *The Plains Truth: The Newsletter of the Northern Plains Resource Council,* Vol. 6, No. 7, September 1977, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[52] Patrick Dawson, *The Billings Gazette,* July 14, 1977, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

come to you in the future and say, 'we have a surface lease on such and such areas, now help us plan our mine'?" Also in its plan, Montco stated that Burlington Northern would build a railroad "approximately 45 miles from Colstrip to the proposed Nance mine. There would be two railroad loops in the Tongue River valley to load out the coal. The railroad track would go down Tongue River for about 25 miles, then cross the river north of Ashland and cut through about 20 miles of rangeland to join the BN track at the Peabody strip mine near Colstrip."[53]

Ranchers had concerns about the logistical issues of raising cattle on land bisected by a railroad. Trains could hit cattle or block them from accessing water and grass. Railroads also increased the risk of starting fires and spreading weeds and creating noise pollution. These railroads would not benefit ranchers as their only purpose was to transfer coal, not to bring cattle to market or passengers to and from the area.[54]

Apprehension over the proposed Tongue River Railroad and its associated coal mines was multi-layered; while expressing concerns of the consequences of coal mining on the non-human environment, Northern Cheyenne tribal members also voiced worries about the effects of an influx of outsiders to their communities and repeated historical patterns of oppression by the federal government. In September 1980, Thomas Kotynski, a reporter for the *Great Falls Tribune*, called the railroad project "a speculative bet that the coal markets would rebound." While on a tour of the valley, tribal president Allen Rowland told Kotynski, "It's likely to tear up the country, and there will be an influx of people onto the reservation. We barely have enough

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[53] *The Plains Truth: The Newsletter of the Northern Plains Resource Council,* Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1978, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[54] Sophie Q. Olson letter to Carl Bausch, c. 1983, Box 1980-81 TRR 70IA, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

room in our own schools for our children on the reservation. We've been planning to build a new high school (at Lame Deer), but we didn't plan for the influx of non-Indians."

In addition to worries over the influx of newcomers, tribal members were concerned because the proposed mine area overlapped with historical and sacred herb-gathering and burial sites.[55] Bertha Medicine Bull, the Birney district councilwoman for the tribe, explained that the developments could pollute the land that she believed the tribe needed "to attain self-sufficiency, and ultimately, survival." Medicine Bull also recalled, "her grandmother telling of a deal once proposed by the federal government during the days when the Cheyenne lands included that part of Montana east of the Tongue River. 'It was taken away with such small promises.'" Rowland lamented that Senator Mike Mansfield "turned chicken" on the Northern Cheyenne in the 1970s when he failed to sponsor a bill that would have returned the Custer National Forest's Ashland Division back to the tribe. "If the Cheyenne would have got the Custer Forest back," Rowland explained, "there would not be any development there today." Along with stories from the past that were connected to the land, tribal members had medicinal herbs that grew along the river and some had ancestors buried above the coal Montco proposed to mine. In other words, the tribe viewed the Tongue River Railroad as a detriment to their understanding of the past, present, and future.[56]

The historic and physical division between the Northern Cheyenne on the west bank of the Tongue River and white ranchers on the east bank made their alliance unlikely, yet they

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[55] Thomas Kotynski, "Ranchers, Indians Oppose Tongue River " *Great Falls Tribune.*
[56] "Northern Cheyenne Split over Developing oil, Coal Resources," *Forsyth Independent,* September 25, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

managed to come together around similar frustrations with the proposed railroad construction and associated coal development. People on both sides of the river had knowledge of the land they had worked and played on for generations that taught them constructing a railroad to haul coal to market did not have enough benefits for their communities to outweigh the risks. For example, both groups understood that the soil near the proposed Montco mine was sodium-rich. If the soil were disturbed through mining, it would leach into the water, causing unhealthy levels of sodium for the irrigation of crops and cattle.[57]

The NPRC formed not just from people in the Northern Cheyenne reservation, Bullhead Mountain, and Rosebud Creek ranchers, but also from other groups of people working on natural resource issues across the state of Montana. One group, the Bull Mountain Land Association (BMLA) was composed of families in central Montana whose ancestors began ranching in the early and mid-twentieth century. According to founding BLMA member Ann Charter, the BLMA formed out of frustration. "We are the angry ones," she wrote in a 1978 NPRC newsletter years later, "The Bull Mountain Landowners Association was formed out of anger. It made us mad to be lied to, to be treated like Appalachian mountaineers of 50 years ago. It made us mad to be offered 1 cent a ton royalty for the coal under our land, and to be told we had no rights and couldn't hope for a better offer." The early struggle BLMA faced was against Consolidated Coal's (or "Consol") plan to build coal fire plants in the Bull Mountains and send the power to large cities in the east. "Don't let any of us forget that one reason the coal companies came West was to avoid having to be responsible corporate citizens," Charter lamented, "They chose to get

[57] Thomas Kotynski, "Ranchers, Indians Oppose Tongue River," *Great Falls Tribune.*

out from under Union demands by coming to the unorganized West. These companies haven't changed. Let us never let down our guards or forget whom we are dealing with."[58]

Another group, the Rosebud Protective Association (RPA) was composed of third-generation ranchers whose ancestors immigrated to the region in the late nineteenth century. Their ranches tended to be larger than those of the BLMA, and parallel to the geographic distances between people was a value system of individualism and self-sufficiency. Property owners could go days without seeing their neighbors, much less asking them for something or creating casual small talk. The RPA's main struggle was against Montana Power and Peabody Coal's efforts to condemn private property vis-a-vis mineral rights, a topic Chapter Two covers in greater detail. Because of the distinct cultures and world views of the BLMA and RPA, stemming from the geography and history of their land, they hesitated to join forces until 1972 when they officially formed the NPRC and chose the name "Resource Council" to keep their topics broad enough to form more coalitions and attract more communities facing similar struggles. They required members to pay modest dues to hire a small staff to help with legislative and other organizing work.[59] The NPRC called sub-groups like the RPA and BLMA "affiliates"

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[58] Ann Charter, "BLMA: Defending the Land," *The Plains Truth: The Newsletter of the Northern Plains Resource Council,* Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1978, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[59] Cody Ferguson, *This is Our Land: Grassroots Environmentalism in the Late Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 30-37; Teresa Erickson, *Standing Together: Protecting Land, Air, Water, and People* (Northern Plains Resource Council, 2021); Stephen D. Paulson, *Environmentalists: An Eyewitness Account from the Heart of America* (Stephen D. Paulson, 2016). Ferguson is a historian who examined three case studies of environmentalism in the United States, including the NPRC. Erickson was the executive director of the NPRC for over thirty years. Her book highlights the organization's history. Paulson, Former NPRC staff and current Development Coordinator, self-published a book that also details the history of the organization through different projects. These sources have been invaluable in providing a history of NPRC and have greatly informed this project.

and over the years continued to gather more affiliates through different citizen groups. These affiliates worked on various resource issues and created state legislation including the Strip Mining and Reclamation Act, Coal Conservation Act, Coal Severance Tax Act, and the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977.[60] Early on, Charter anticipated the need for the NPRC to build alliances and continue to grow. "It's time to seek alliances nationwide, "she wrote, "People roused up enough to fight for basic human rights are a force that can cope with tremendous odds."[61] In 1979, the NPRC joined similar citizen groups in North Dakota and Wyoming to form the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC). Both the NPRC and WORC offices were based in Billings, Montana and still operate there today.

Once the NPRC established itself as an organization, it used member dues to hire a small staff to research coal development in Montana. In land and mineral ownership records, they found that "at least eighty-seven companies had leased more than a million acres of coal lands in eastern Montana and northeastern Wyoming [...] In total, about one and a half million acres, approximately 2,400 square miles, were slated for strip mining."[62] Because of this, the NPRC's early work focused on fighting strip mining through advocating for and proposing state legislation. These included demanding an outright moratorium on strip mining, amending Montana's eminent domain law so that companies could not condemn private property,

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[60] *The Plains Truth: The newsletter of the Northern Plains Resource Council,* Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1978, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[61] *The Plains Truth: The newsletter of the Northern Plains Resource Council,* Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1978, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[62] Gary Langley, "Million Acres of Coal Marked," *Billings Gazette,* March 9, 1973, in Cody Ferguson, *This is Our Land: Grassroots Environmentalism in the Late Twentieth Century,* 42.

advocating for limitations on strip mining, and requiring land reclamation after any mining practice.[63]

The formation of coalitions in the early days of the NPRC shaped how NPRC members organized and understood how their local struggles fit into broader, regional, national, and global patterns. Historian Cody Ferguson explained, "In the process of addressing their local issues, they often realized how similar their issues were to those of others. Slowly, these activists became globalized in their thinking; they began to understand their issues as part of larger systems of environmental, economic, or social injustice."[64] In other words, the scale of proposed extractive projects caused Northern Plains to shift its perspectives and create a movement larger than themselves.

The history of organizing around environmental issues in El Salvador shared a similar pattern of multi-level organizing and a shift from a local perspective to a global vision. In 1992, as the war came to an end through negotiated solutions, Salvadorans found themselves in a globalized economy on an unprecedented scale. The postwar era provided a unique context for Salvadorans to fight for something beyond mere survival; they began to imagine a life of dignity where their communities could thrive. Their reimagining process included reworking the Constitution of 1962 to address the needs of citizens, limit government power, and prevent a situation like the civil war from happening again.[65] But the postwar era brought about an additional challenge; Salvadorans had to think through how their country fit into a new,

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[63] Ferguson, 43.
[64] Ferguson, 69-70.
[65] "Analisis y acuerdo político de la concentración ciudadana por la paz, la dignidad y la justicia social," Box D, Folder 2, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

neoliberal context. International courts were overseeing the legal cases of Salvadoran massacres, and the United Nations took an active role in supporting the postwar peace process. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank lent money to reconnect El Salvador to the global economy.[66] Salvadoran campesinos saw potential to move forward with alternative structures, but they still faced old patterns of power with the Salvadoran elite courting international interests.

Salvadoran organizers were aware of their precarious position in this new, global economy. In a meeting of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, International Workers' Rights, and Trade, participants discussed the emergence of the cold war as a struggle to connect to the globalization process. Attendees critiqued the flows of capital and noted that wealth was concentrated in "few countries," that "the 48 poorest countries have less than 1% combined," and that the gap between rich and poor was growing at an alarming rate.[67] Around the same time, the Movimiento Popular de Resistencia-12 (MPR-12, Popular Resistance Movement in English), a group of NGOs including CRIPDES that had created a collective front for protection during the civil war, produced a report titled "The Ratification of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States by the Legislative Assembly Would Be a Betrayal of the Salvadoran People." In it, they listed the "negative impacts" of the Free Trade Agreement (TLC, acronym for Tratado de Libre Comercio), including massive imports of US products that they

[66] John Eriksson, Alcira Kreimer, Margaret Arnold, "El Salvador Post-Conflict Reconstruction," The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington D.C., USA, 2000.
[67] "Confederación internacional de organizaciones sindicales libres los derechos internacionales de los trabajadores y el comercio: la necesidad de diálogo" CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

argued would make El Salvador more dependent on the United States in obtaining basic food products and creating a commercial deficit.[68] Large meetings over the challenges of a globalized, post-war era were part of a regional pattern, and solidarity between Central American nations began to grow at both grassroots and official levels. In 1999, for example, presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama held a regional workshop to work on their strategic plans. The purpose of this workshop was to try to find unity among the region in the new, globalized era.[69]

After the signing of the Peace Accords, CRIPDES showed a commitment to organized popular resistance by formalizing its work and writing a strategic plan. The plan promoted the fight against globalization and sought the creation of an alternative model to neoliberalism that could only be built "from the people." The plan used popular education in the construction of social movements, defining it as a "participative process that implements consciousness methodologies to change reality." Combining process with action, the plan noted that CRIPDES work must be a collective process, that is "part of people's experiences, of their most felt needs." Emphasizing the importance of community and collaboration over individual competition, the essence of the plan was, "to transform society so that it is more just and democratic...there are no experts...it arises from the people and returns to the people, it is a subversive practice because it confronts the system in order to transform reality."[70]

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[68] MPR-12, "La Ratificación del TLC con Estados Unidos por la Asamblea Legislativa Sería una Traición al Pueblo Salvadoreño," Box D, Folder 1, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.
[69] Secretary General, "Informe de la integración centroamericana: Informe final memoria, primer taller regional de planeación estratégica," August 1999, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.
[70] CRIPDES, FUNPROCOOP, CESPIS, "Memoria de dos semanas," 2002.

Despite Salvadoran campesinos' concerns over neoliberal policies in the postwar era, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) passed in 2005. It included Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. US President George W. Bush invited ambassadors from each of these countries to a signing ceremony at the White House. Ambassador René León Rodríguez and Vice President Ana Escobar of El Salvador's right-wing ARENA party attended the signing. Before signing CAFTA-DR into law, President Bush gave a speech that described the historic nature of the bill, noting how "unfair" trade agreements were to "Americans" pre-CAFTA. "Right now," he explained, "Central American goods face almost no tariffs when they enter the United States. By contrast, U.S. exports to Central America still face hefty tariffs there. CAFTA will end these unfair tariffs against American products and help ensure that free trade is fair trade." In addition to highlighting all the "benefits" of laissez-faire capitalism, like creating jobs and a "vibrant middle class," Bush emphasized the importance of CAFTA for security and freedom with eerie echoes to US cold war intervention in the region:

> Two decades ago, many of the CAFTA nations struggled with poverty and dictatorship and civil strife. Today, they're working democracies, and we must not take these gains for granted. These nations still face forces that oppose democracy, seek to limit economic freedom, and want to drive a wedge between the United States and the rest of the Americas. The small nations of CAFTA are making big and brave commitments, and CAFTA is a signal that the United States will stand with them and support them. By helping the CAFTA nations build free societies, we'll help them eliminate the lawlessness and instability that terrorists and criminals and drug traffickers feed on. And this will make our country safer.[71]

True to its tradition of encouraging foreign investment, El Salvador was the first country to sign CAFTA-DR. However, it had already begun operating under this value system for many

[71] "President Signs CAFTA-DR," Office of the Press Secretary, White House Archives, August 2, 2005, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050802-2.html.

years. As just one example, between 1998 and 2003, the government gave twenty-nine exploratory licenses to foreign gold mining companies, including the Canadian-based mining company Pacific Rim.[72]

Throughout the process of passing CAFTA-DR, there was strong opposition. In 2004, the Bloque Popular Centroamericano, Alliance for Responsible Trade, and the Hemispheric Social Alliance wrote a report titled "Why We Say No to CAFTA: Analysis of the Official Text." In it, they included sections on agriculture and the non-human environment. Both sections highlighted the environmental vulnerability and biodiversity of Central America. They called CAFTA's environmental section a "marketing ploy" and "an attempt to sweeten a truly toxic stew with green ingredients." They criticized the negotiators and stated the CAFTA plan had "converted nature into merchandise."[73] After this report, SHARE and U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities created a bulletin to distribute throughout their networks. It used Mexico and NAFTA as a case study to explain the repercussions of free trade. They wrote, "We feel it is important to show you this information because CAFTA is a proposed extension of NAFTA and by looking at the situation in Mexico, we can see possible problems that will occur in Central America if CAFTA is passed."[74] Solidarity activism surrounding environmental issues in the 1990s and early 2000s

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[72] Amy Westervelt, "Lawsuit Against El Salvador Mining Ban Highlights Free Trade Pitfalls," *The Guardian,* May 27, 2015.
[73] Angel María Ibarra Turcios, "Environment" in "Why We Say No to Cafta: Analysis of the Official Text", 2004, Box USESSC, Folder Allies Archives Stop CAFTA!, Project Solidarity Archive, Montana State University.
[74] Erica Solis, "The SHARE Foundation and U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities, Understanding the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Implications of Free Trade," Bulletin #3: NAFTA Nine Years Later–Hard Lessons Learned by Mexico, Folder Allies Archives Stop CAFTA!, Project Solidarity Archive, Montana State University.

built momentum for the anti-mining campaign that followed. The uptick in organizing during the neoliberal era created strategies and alliances CRIPDES would utilize in the years to come.

Disputes over the meanings of post-war "development" occurred on many levels. While the Salvadoran government embraced free trade policies, many working-class Salvadorans opposed them. The organization Citizenship and Development created a report that noted concerns of new, neoliberal policies. They argued that since the introduction of neoliberal economics over the previous few years the government had "reduced the role of the state to promotor of development" and, as a result, economic, social, and environmental problems had "sharpened." Citizenship and Development leaders shared that while spaces of democracy had opened since the signing of the Peace Accords, they still needed to deepen to be truly democratic. In addition to a call for stronger democratic processes, the report described a need to create a plan of development that would allow sustainability, equal distribution of resources, and better quality of life for the population.[75]

The mid-1990s marked a resurgence of the social movement after several quieter years following the Peace Accords. One motivation to organize stemmed from the Agropecuaria debt, an unpayable $400 million debt from land transfer programs in the 1980s. Tens of thousands of campesinos mobilized to demand the cancellation of the debt. In 1995, the Alianza Democrática Campesina (ADC) started the debt cancellation movement and created a coalition called the Foro para la Defensa y Recuperación del sector Agropecuario (or Foro for short). According to sociologist Lisa Kowalchuk, "neo-liberal agrarian policies in El Salvador prompted a high level of coherent, unified action among peasant organizations of diverse composition within both the

[75] "Ciudadanía y Desarrollo" CRIPDES Archive, Box A, Folder 4, San Salvador, El Salvador.

ADC and the Foro." The movement was eventually successful in canceling the Agropecuaria debt, an example of evolving networking and international alliances–a massive success story, and a precursor to the anti-mining campaign's success.[76]

The uptick in rural organizing was part of a broader, transnational peasant movement called La Vía Campesina. With its origins in Latin America, the movement was made up of smaller rural organizations that organized in the context of weakened nation-states. The movement was a response to neoliberalism where small, agrarian-based communities were at risk of disappearing due to increased industrialized agriculture. The goal of the movement was to defend campesino life and demand participation in international debates. La Vía Campesina is an example of heightened organizing and push-back to global capitalist processes in the late twentieth century.[77]

Grounded in the landscape, historical memory and lived experiences informed Salvadoran organizing at the tail end of the war and post-war era. The 1991 New Initiative for Popular Self-Development was a document written in response to the neoliberal context. It linked local development with national and international economic systems. The document was a product of Salvadoran community organizations and development institutions and had the overarching goal of constructing "an alternative model of development, a unified, coherent effort." The authors critiqued the neoliberal model directly, lamenting "the effect on the vast

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[76] Lisa Kowalchuk, "From Competition to Cooperation: Threats, Opportunities, and Organizational Survival in the Salvadorean Peasant Movement," *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe,* 74 (April 2003): 43-63.
[77] María Elena Martínez-Torres and Peter M. Rosse, "La Vía Campesina: the Birth and Evolution of a Transnational Social Movement," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (2010) 37:1, 149-175, DOI: 10.1080/03066150903498804.

majority of the population," of "lower living standards and…devastating poverty." Emphasizing local activists' experiences and power, they suggested economic alternatives. The stakes of these alternatives, they argued, were "literally a matter of life or death." Noting there was no simple alternative, "The construction of any alternative will happen in the practice, based on the history of El Salvador's popular movement, rooted in local initiative and creativity, while drawing from the experiences of other nations and other movements." The alternative economic models were grounded in the non-human environment and noted that an internal market would be necessary to lower dependence on export production. "Agrarian reform is central to this strategy," they explained. The initiative blended themes of community, survival, defense of rights, and environment into criteria for community development. "El Salvador is the most environmentally distressed nation in Latin America," they explained, "The impact on the environment must be considered in all projects and projects need to be designed to conserve resources and improve the environment."[78]

Parallel to neoliberal development in El Salvador ran a strong concern among Salvadorans for the non-human environment in direct relation to agrarian work. In 1998, over a dozen non-governmental organizations representing the majority of federations of cooperatives and development associations, signed an environmental declaration. Many of the signatories produced basic grains, sugar cane, coffee, and other crops vital to the integration of El Salvador's

[78] "The New Initiative for Popular Self-Development in El Salvador," c. May 1991, Box 8-2, File ES Mesa de Trabajo, Arvidson Collection, Project Solidarity Archive, Bozeman, MT.

economic development. They saw their work as directly tied to environmental protection to "achieve a true sustainable development for the campesino."[79]

"Environmentalism of the poor," or the concern and understanding of environmental and social issues as interconnected and needing to be addressed simultaneously, was a current that ran strong through the postwar era. In 2006, the Analysis and Political Agreement of the Citizen Coordination for Peace, Dignity, and Social Justice held a meeting to discuss the struggles in El Salvador including violence against women, high cost of living, terrorism of the state, and the antiterrorist law corruption and impunity, and hegemonic world power. In their meeting report, the group listed the "retos a enfrentar," or, "challenges to face" alongside the "banderas de lucha/utopías," or, "flags of struggle/utopias." The plan named immediate tasks as well as long-term tasks.[80] The concept of "utopia" was common among the Salvadoran social movement, and it is well-documented by Latin American historians.[81] Rather than purely reactionary, the organizing concept of "utopia" always kept the long game in mind. Organizers were aware that a utopia was a destination that could never be reached; progress would ebb and flow, but the utopia served as a light to guide the social movement toward a change, and, true to the

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[79] El Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales y las Organizaciones Campesinas Firmantes de la Declaratoria Ambiental, June 26, 1998, Box D, Folder 2, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[80] "Analysis y Acuerdo Político de la Concertación Ciudadana por la Paz, la Dignidad y la Justicia Social," September 5, 2006, Box D, Folder 6, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[81] Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 275.

movement's Marxist origins, the utopia was always focused on the wellbeing and strength of the community over the individual.

Examples of valuing the collective over the individual are consistent throughout CRIPDES documentation in the postwar era. A 1997 CRIPDES report described the concept of "La Organización Comunal," defining formal organization as "a mechanism or structure that allows working people to work together in an efficient way." The report pointed to the strength and value of community over the individual, "The sum of the force of people when they are organized is better than the sum of the force of individuals when they are not organized." Furthermore, visualizing the future, the authors of the report argued, "should be the result of participation from everyone involved." They then listed eight principles of organizing, breaking each one into specifics.[82]

In February 2003, CRIPDES held an internal discussion on how to implement a communitarian process into its work. The plan included a synopsis in the following categories: community philosophy, culture, ideology, economy, society, institutionalized community, legislative, democratic participation, and utopia. At the heart of this plan was the belief that another world was possible, one that valued community over profit. This was the "utopia" the participants hoped a communitarian process could work toward. Furthermore, the plan included the non-human environment as part of the community, noting that, "the work sacrifices of the present have an objective to create the base of a new society [...] where we would live in

[82] "La Organización Comunal" San Salvador, Abril 1997, Box A, Folder 1, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

harmony with nature and arrive at happiness."[83] The practice of a prolonged, popular struggle was evident during the postwar era and was a key to the success of El Salvador's anti-mining campaign.

Practices of envisioning an alternative to neoliberal development naturally expanded beyond international borders. In 2002, CRIPDES and FUNPROCOOP (the Fundación Promotora de Cooperativas, Cooperative Promoter Foundation in English, created by the Catholic Church in 1967) organized an event with 1,440 participants from a total of 116 communities across Central and South America. The objective of the event was "to learn and exchange strengths of the organizing struggles in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and El Salvador and to glimpse possibilities for interaction support in the future in order to strengthen the construction of a national movement, to contribute to the construction of an international voice so that the struggle of resistance joins against/before the neoliberal model and the construction of new hopes and dreams." Published after the event, a report highlighted El Salvador as an example, emphasizing how Salvadoran communities actively participated in the war together to construct new hopes. This served as an example, the report argued, that in the present context of peace it was both possible and necessary to fight against threats like neoliberalism and globalization. Using the war as an example of why Salvadorans must not take the present context of peace for granted, the report gave an in-depth description of what was at stake for those who fought on the left during the war, "The majority of these people contributed to this exchange from their life of fighting for the transformation of this country, people who were persecuted and displaced, who organized in

[83] "Modelo de Sistema Comunitário," Written with support of Licendiado Aquiles Montoya Economista y Profesor en UCA, Borrador para discusión interna," Febrero 2003, Box D, Folder 9, CRIPDES Archive, San Salvador El Salvador (translation by author).

order to fight for the defense of their rights…people who had been beaten around but even so had a very defined political position and many aspirations of change."[84] It was in this context of heightened organization and consciousness that mining exploration began to pick up across the country.

Conclusion

When she learned of the plans for the Tongue River Railroad, Alaina Buffalo Spirit remembered, "So many things went through my mind because growing up was so peaceful there." By joining the NPRC, she said she was able to learn about laws and actions to take to protect the land and air. "For me that's one of the best things I've done in my life to protect my home."[85] Others along the same river felt compelled to take action as well. Observing the devastation of coal development in other areas motivated residents of the Tongue River valley to organize to prevent their treasure state from becoming a sacrifice zone. They had observed the effects coal mining had in other communities and were proactive in fighting the Tongue River Railroad before it could harm their watershed.

Likewise, the Salvadoran struggle was a fight motivated by love of the land. From the 1932 uprising through the war and postwar era, Salvadorans organized to protect their natural resources with a vision of living harmoniously in community with their places. Both Montanans and Salvadorans built coalitions and learned to value the community over the individual to reach their goals of protecting their places from outside interests. The neoliberal context necessarily

[84] CRIPDES, FUNPROCOOP, CESPIS, "Memoria de dos semanas," 2002.
[85] Buffalo Spirit, interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, c. July 9, 2020.

meant the movements had to think and act both locally and globally to achieve their goals and adapt strategies to fit different scales.

CHAPTER TWO

‘WE OUTLASTED THE BASTARDS’:
THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL
AND THE DERAILING OF THE TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD

Teresa Erickson first learned about the Tongue River Railroad in 1986 when she became director of the NPRC. Upon hearing about the speculative railroad, the first thing she thought was, “Oh my God, this is such a great issue because everybody's getting screwed.” Erickson was not necessarily happy about “everybody getting screwed,” but she knew from an organizing standpoint it meant “you have opportunity” because, “There’s tons of self-interest.”

From her years of experience as an grassroots environmental organizer in the rural US West, Erickson learned that the most effective way to mobilize different groups of people was to unite them based on common self-interests. The movement against the Tongue River Railroad was a hodgepodge of people: from railroad and coal mine unions to tribes and white ranchers who lived along the river. “It was just like a dream coalition,” she recalled. Erickson emphasized how they stayed focused on the common goal rather than what divided them: “In a lot of ways, it wasn't really hard to bring people together. It was more just being able to read people's self-interest and focusing on what we had in common, not what we didn't agree on. 'Cause if, if we wanted to talk about what we didn't agree on, there could have been a lot of things and we just didn't do that.”[1]

[1] Teresa Erickson, interview by Jacey Anderson, August 3, 2022.

This chapter tells the story of a railroad that never existed. The Tongue River Railroad was the dream of a few venture capitalists who tried to tap into a shifting coal market from the 1970s until 2016 when the project finally went bankrupt. There would be four versions of the railroad that never existed with each version serving a slightly different purpose. Over all four versions of the Tongue River Railroad, two consistencies prevailed: the railroad would encourage and necessitate more coal development in southeastern Montana and the NPRC and its allies would fight it every step of the way.

Although the destination of Tongue River coal shifted from the Midwest to the Pacific Rim, the goal of the investors was always the same–to make as much money as possible. As the purpose and plans of the Tongue River Railroad changed over the years, so did the organizing strategies of the NPRC. The NPRC had to adapt and adopt new strategies to prevent the railroad plans. This often meant stalling the process in order to buy more time to build stronger opposition. For over three decades they delayed permits, encouraged commenting processes, and created alliances and collaborative projects to continue their resistance movement. Parallel to the Salvador case in the next chapter, the NPRC used local knowledge of the land, care for the community, and strategic alliances at local, regional, and national levels to successfully prevent extractive projects along their river. This was part of a broader global pattern of heightened resistance to the status quo during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. People were more aware of the potential devastation of extractive projects. Rather than continuing the previous pattern of cleaning up after the destruction, communities began to prevent projects before the devastation could occur.

I organize this chapter into three parts with each section highlighting a different strategy the NPRC activated to successfully prevent the construction of the Tongue River Railroad. Part one showcases the NPRC's adaptability and flexibility in their organizing strategies. Different versions of the railroad would serve national and international markets, and the NPRC had to adjust tactics based on the railroad's plans. Part two covers legal strategies the NPRC took to delay the construction of the railroad, which often emphasized local knowledge of the land through comments on draft Environmental Impact Statements and letters to elected officials. The NPRC leveraged members' knowledge of the land to point to holes in the required Environmental Impact Statements the Tongue River Railroad Company and its affiliated mines produced. They were up against federal and state policies that favored development, as discussed in Chapter One, that led them to take on additional issues like mineral rights and eminent domain. Part three highlights the different alliances the NPRC formed over the years to fight the Tongue River Railroad in its different iterations. The purpose of building alliances was twofold; alliances created a stronger, larger base and the stories of the unique, sometimes unlikely, relationships served as fodder for the movement's voice. The chapter concludes by sharing some of the tensions and power dynamics at work within the network and how, despite these challenges, they were able to put the Tongue River Railroad to rest at last.

Strategy: Adaptability and the Long Game

Mike Gustafson saw an opportunity and seized it. In the context of the 1973 energy crisis, the North Central Power Study touted coal development in Tongue River Valley as Montana's next big economic boom. However, boosters lamented the lack of a transportation system to deliver coal to market. Gustafson, owner of Billings-based WESCO Resources, created a plan to

build a coal-hauling railroad from Miles City to Ashland where the proposed Montco mine would be located. The original plan was to build an eighty-nine-mile rail line run between Ashland and Miles City where it would connect with the BNSF line. The idea of the Tongue River Railroad was born.[2]

As argued in Chapter One, residents along the river had a deep understanding of the land and the negative effects a mine and accompanying railroad would have on their communities. In 1980, WESCO Resources began work on the first draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tongue River Railroad. The same year, under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, the NPRC filed a petition titled, "Tongue River Lands Unsuitability" arguing that the extensive mining unleashed by a railroad would overburden the Tongue River with salts, making the water unfit for irrigation.[3] Nick Golder, a Northern Plains member whose ranch was near Rosebud, told *Agri-News,* "What this all comes down to is this: My business, really, is grass. If the grass isn't good, then the cows won't do well [...] I have to depend upon the grass for my living, so I study it very carefully, continuously." Golder also noted the capricious nature of the coal market and questioned the demand for coal in the future, "It just doesn't make sense to any of us who make our living off the land to expend it for temporary and perhaps questionable energy needs. When we start talking about long-term effects such as the destruction of the aquifer–the underground water carrying capacity of this land–and the leaching of harmful salts to the surface and into our

[2] Matthew Frank, "Bringing Coal to China Ignites Along Rail Routes," PBS Crosscut, August 22, 2011, https://crosscut.com/2011/08/bringing-coal-china-ignites-battles-along-rail-rou.
[3] Kotynski, "Ranchers, Indians," *Great Falls Tribune.*

rivers where it can affect irrigated lands, we are talking about unimaginable impacts on agriculture in areas such as this one."[4]

The risks of mining coal along the Tongue River were clear to residents, and, as Golder predicted, the purpose for mining the coal in their valley changed over the years, further solidifying their stance against development and their need to shift strategies to oppose it. As noted above, one of the original arguments for developing coal along the Tongue River valley was to help the country become more energy self-reliant, but one of the first planned destinations for Montco coal was to move it to the west coast for shipment to Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. In 1975, Montana put a ban on shipping coal to overseas markets, but this was short-lived and repealed by 1980.[5] The Reagan Administration saw coal as "a key to energy security by oil-dependent nations" and unveiled a coal export policy that would "stimulate the U.S. economy while advancing the economic health and stability of our allies and trading partners." Because one-fourth of the world's recoverable coal supply was in the United States, Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldridge said their plan emphasized, "our commitment to greater American participation in the international coal trade, and our determination to remove government impediments to the achievement of that goal.'" Baldridge said increased coal exports would strengthen the U.S. economy, lower inflation, and help the nation's trading partners lessen dependence on oil. "Today's announcement," he shared, "lays the groundwork for a renewed effort to develop greater energy security not just for the U.S. but throughout the free world." The

[4] Terry L. Shorb, "Ranchers Fear Proposed Mine Railroad Impact," *Agri-News*, September 26, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[5] "Law Change Heralds New View of Coal in Montana," Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

plan listed tasks the administration promised to carry out, including "relax surface mining and leasing regulations." This broader international context of neoliberal deregulation put NPRC organizers on high alert.[6]

From early on in the proposal to ship coal to Asian markets, the NPRC took a strong stance against mineral development, citing its concerns over water use and contamination, as well as the boom-and-bust cycles of coal mining. In an internal memorandum, NPRC staff Margaret MacDonald said Northern Plain's primary reason for opposition was "the long-term cost of strip mining to the land and water of this state." She explained, "We do not think that water is a resource to be scoffed at, as Western history has emphasized time and again." In addition to environmental concerns, MacDonald stated economic concerns, "There is an inherent legacy in any mining, but especially strip mining by its very nature, of a bust," she argued, "The equipment is built to last 30-40 years, and the mines are designed to last that long. Within our lifetimes many of us may witness a 'bust' of a magnitude to dwarf that which Anaconda, Butte and Great Falls are suffering from."[7] In other words, during the neoliberal era, organizers understood the harmful effects of large mining projects and pointed to past projects as examples of why they were against new mineral development.

By the early 1980s, Gustafson's Tongue River Railroad Company (TRRC) announced plans to ship coal to Asia. According to Teresa Erickson, one of the strategies Northern Plains

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[6] Administration's coal export policy unveiled" *United States Department of Commerce News*, Washington DC, July 17, 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[7] Margaret MacDonald, Memorandum to the NPRC Organizational and Finance Committee, July 13, 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

had to employ was tracking Gustafson's investors over the years. "One of the most infuriating parts of [Gustafson's Tongue River Railroad plan] was that he was a speculator and he made an enormous fortune just being a speculator," she explained. "One of the things we tracked was, you know, they say follow the money. He had this revolving door of investors. He was the silver-tongued devil. He could talk people into putting a lot of money into his idea."[8]

Whether he was a silver-tongued devil, or simply a gifted negotiator, Gustafson managed to convince Burlington Northern to design a railroad to ship to the West Coast, despite the fact that coal coming from Montana and Wyoming on this line would be lower quality than what Asian markets would accept, an argument the NPRC would vocalize throughout the process of the TRRC trying to make this plan a reality.[9] In June 1980, Western Analysis, a Helena consulting firm, published a report for the Montana International Trade Commission, a private non-profit composed of Montana businessmen with ties to Democratic Governor Thomas Judge. The report stated that exporting coal to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan could mean $84 million a year and 1,125 jobs for Montana by the year 2000. Many of Judge's constituents accused him of trying to promote the export of western coal, but Judge stated his official position was that the Montana Legislature should decide.[10] Wally McRae, an early NPRC member and Colstrip area rancher, called attention to the overall hypocrisy of the situation, "Montana ranchers have been told they have a patriotic obligation to ensure domestic self-sufficiency in energy," he lamented, "Now, suddenly, we have an international responsibility. It seems to me that my responsibility to

[8] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.
[9] David Alberswerth, "Memorandum to Interested Persons", June 2, 1982, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[10] "Study says Coal Export Could Bring Millions to State," *Billings Gazette*, June 11, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

the people is to make sure they have enough food, which is more of a basic energy requirement than ever-increasing use of energy by both domestic and foreign energy users."[11]

By 1981, Vancouver, Washington opened a port to ship coal to the Pacific Rim. Despite the fact Montana coal was not the right quality for Asian markets, Gustafson and his investors hoped that would change by 1990.[12] The resistance against the Tongue River Railroad extended across multiple governor administrations. In July, NPRC chairperson Helen Waller wrote to Lieutenant Governor George Turman, scolding him for turning on his election promises. She included a newspaper clipping that stated "...Schwinden Admin taking an activist role in promoting the sale of Montana strip-mined coal to Pacific Rim nationals." Waller questioned why the Governor's administration had shifted from its strong stance against exploiting Montana coal in their primary race. Then, on behalf of the NPRC, she requested a meeting in Billings "in order to clarify the Administration's position on this issue."[13] The clipping Waller enclosed detailed a trip Turman took to Taiwan where he spoke with Chang Kwang-Shih, the Minister of Economic Affairs for the Republic of China. According to Turman, Chang said "Only we [U.S.A. and Canada], with our coal could provide an alternative to the use of nuclear fuel for energy. And only we, with our technology could eventually provide for the alternatives to fossil fuel combustion."[14] By December, the export plan was well underway. An article in the *Billings*

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[11] "Law Change," Northern Plains Resource Council.
[12] Marj Charlier, "Vancouver Clears Way for Coal Port," *Billings Gazette,* December 1, 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[13] Helen Waller (NPRC Chairman) letter to Lieutenant Governor George Turman, July 8, 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[14] Roger Clawson, "Turman sees Taiwan Market for Montana's Coal in 1990s," *Billings Gazette,* c. 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

Gazette stated that the Port of Vancouver, Washington "agreed to allow a Billings-based firm to build a $30 million coal terminal that will open Oriental markets to Western coal." The decision followed an hour-long hearing where, according to Joe Presely, president of the coal company Westmoreland Resources, Inc., "No opposition was heard," and, "they approved it enthusiastically."[15]

Despite the approval to build a terminal on the West Coast, NPRC and its allies continued to loudly oppose exporting Montana coal to Asian markets because they knew it would lead to more mining projects near their homes. In May 1982, David Alberswerth of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC, the parent organization of the NPRC and other resource councils in the West, described in Chapter One), sent a memorandum to three resource councils, including the NPRC. In it, he warned that Burlington Northern was looking to make a new line through Montana in anticipation of large volumes of coal destined for Asian markets. He told the organizations that it was time to "inform both the domestic promoters of coal exports and potential Asian markets that we will not let that happen." One of the issues that made this export likely was that there was an oversupply of coal in the Powder River Basin. Although the coal was not to the caliber of Asian markets and was expensive to transport, the fact that Burlington Northern was confident enough to begin investing in rail improvements would make the deal more attractive to foreign markets. Alberwerth described an overarching strategy for the resource councils to implement. "We should communicate our unequivocal opposition to exports both publicly and privately to Asian trading interests," he explained, "We can use the facts of

[15] Marj Charlier, "Vancouver Clears Way for Coal Port," *Billings Gazette,* December 1, 1981, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

poor coal quality/high transport costs/public opposition to truly make export very unlikely." He concluded the memo by encouraging the resource councils to being work soon, stating, "'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'"[16] This example shows how Northern Plains had to operate on different scales depending on the shifting plans of outside interests.

After over a decade of planning with no yield, in 1991, the Tongue River Railroad Company requested a forty-two-mile extension to its permit to connect with Wyoming coal mines, extending the length of the line to 131 miles. They called this version the "TRR II." The following year, the NPRC gathered over 1,100 verified statements to submit to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) against the TRR II from farmers, ranchers, railroad workers, and other area residents.[17] Established in 1880, the ICC was the first federal regulatory agency that sought to prevent railroad abuses, but much of its power was waning by the 1990s due to the deregulation policies of the 1980s.[18] Regardless of its status and diminishing power, in 1991, the ICC required each statement to be notarized and required twenty-two paper copies of each letter. NPRC organizers embraced this challenging process and traveled around the region with computers, printers, and notaries so locals could submit their statements. "We set up stations in about six towns," Erickson remembered, "all the affected towns, like Miles City, Forsyth, Lame Deer, Ashland, Hardin. And we advertised that if you wanted to make a comment, we had people

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[16] David Alberserth (WORC) Memorandum to the Northern Plains Resource Council, PRBRC, DRC, May 5, 1982, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[17] Copies of the statements, along with a cover letter written by Teresa Erickson on behalf of the NPRC to the Interstate Commerce Commission are in a box in the NPRC archive labeled "TRR I."

[18] Federal Register: The Daily Journal of the United States Government, "Interstate Commerce Commission," National Archives, accessed October 16, 2023, https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/interstate-commerce-commission.

standing by who would write your comment so we didn't put words in your mouth…And we had notaries standing by to notarize them." Erickson said Northern Plains volunteers carried out most of the work because computers "weren't really [the ranchers'] thing."[19]

The US Postal Service then delivered archival-sized boxes containing over 24,000 pages to the ICC office. The variety of people from different interest groups who wrote statements exemplified the quantity of individuals with different backgrounds who all opposed this railroad– from ranchers to school superintendents, scientists, and business owners. "When it arrived at the Interstate Commerce Commission," Erickson shared, "there were like twelve paper boxes. And so the guy from the mail division called us and he said, 'I have this shipment from you. We didn't order paper.' […] And we were like, 'those are comments.'" Northern Plains' strategy was less about getting the ICC to respond to what was happening, and more about building a base of concerned citizens. "We figured [the ICC] wouldn't pay any attention to [the comments]," Erickson explained, "but it was building, you know, 1,100 people made comments. We got their names, we got their addresses, they felt like they did something…there was an empowerment side to that."[20]

The Tongue River Railroad Company and its associated mining projects often spent more time wooing investors than working toward constructing the railroad, so their permits would expire and need to be renewed. The NPRC took advantage of this pattern by intervening in the hopes of further delaying construction. In 1994, for example, Montco applied to the state for renewal of its permit. NPRC challenged Montco stating, "we feel the law requires Montco to

[19] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.
[20] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.

diligently develop the mine at the risk of losing its permit." The state denied Montco's permit because the mine had been permitted for twelve years. The state granted permits for five years and Montco had already renewed its permit twice. This was the only time in Montana history that the state canceled a coal permit, and the NPRC celebrated this accomplishment among their members through newsletters.[21]

The fight against the Tongue River Railroad lasted so long that organizations changed leadership and names, and the NPRC had to continue to learn and adapt its strategies. In 1996, the ICC was absorbed into the newly created Surface Transportation Board (STB), which, like the ICC, oversaw the railroad industry in the United States. Later that year, the STB issued a permit for the TRR II, "subject to conditions," including a stipulation that the company had to complete the project within three years.[22]

Because the NPRC was in the struggle with the Tongue River Railroad for so long, they came up against unexpected challenges that tested their adaptability and flexibility. In 1996, after years of public outcry and demand, the Clinton Administration bought out the Crown Butte Mining Company's proposed New World gold mine in the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park, ending the threat of cyanide leaching into the nation's "Wonderland." At first, many people, including the NPRC, saw this as a victory at first, but part of the buyout included an unspecified trade for federally owned minerals in Montana. The Otter Creek coal tracts–which the TRR II would have serviced–became the pawn of that agreement.

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[21] "Derail the Tongue River Railroad Newsletter," September 1997, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[22] Surface Transportation Board, "Tongue River Railroad Co. — Rail Construction and Operation—Ashalnd to Decker, Montana," Finance Docket No. 30186, Decided March 19, 1991, https://www.stb.gov/wp-content/uploads/BV-4-Jan99-Jul00-30.pdf.

As this issue again became national in scale, the NPRC had to change the scale and methods of its organizing. In February 1998, NPRC formed a delegation of Tongue River ranchers, railroad union representatives, and members of the Northern Cheyenne to go to Washington D.C. and lobby the Secretary of Interior to not give the state of Montana the Otter Creek tracts because they knew it would lead to further coal development. After attending public hearings on the Otter Creek tracts exchange in Miles City, Marc Racicot, Governor of Montana, went to Washington D.C. to meet with Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. Racicot demanded that the federal government give the state of Montana the Otter Creek tracts one, two, and three as part of the New World gold mine settlement–the opposite of what his constituents were demanding. Part of the buyout would give Montana $10 million in "mineral resources." Perhaps to Racicot's surprise, Babbitt and Solicitor General John Leshy refused Racicot's demands to give Montana the Otter Creek tracts.[23]

The battle over the New World Agreement lasted for years. Many organizations, including the NPRC, opposed the New Word gold mine. However, according to an NPRC newsletter, "speculation began that the federal assets would involve coal" almost immediately after a 1995 agreement for the federal government to trade Crown Butte Mining Company $65 million in federal assets in exchange for its mining claims at the New World mine site. So while the NPRC and others opposed the New World gold mine, they did not approve of the plan to exchange the project for coal development. Racicot then proposed the "Montana Initiative" which called for the federal government to trade "about $35 million of timber lands in western

[23] "Twelve Month Report of Activities of the Derail the Tongue River Railroad Campaign," September 11, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

Montana and $30 million of coal in eastern Montana to exchange for the mining property." NPRC supported the Agreement but "vociferously objected to the Montana Initiative because the $30 million of coal property was being pushed by Mike Gustafson." NPRC believed if the trade were to be completed, Gustafson would recruit additional investors by boasting that coal in the Ashland area would be closer to development. Racicot eventually gave up the Montana Initiative, but the effects of the New World Agreement were far from being realized.

Soon after Racicot dropped his initiative, Congressman Rick Hill introduced a bill to take advantage of the New World Agreement and proposed a transfer of ownership of 500 million tons of federally owned coal in the Otter Creek area to the state of Montana. This was the final straw for NPRC, which opposed the proposal and sent another delegation to D.C., this time to lobby Congress.[24] The New World Agreement begged the question of what land was valuable to whom. A national park can be considered a "wonderland" or "national treasure" while a productive valley that is home to different people who had lived and worked the land for generations or millennia can just as easily be deemed a "sacrifice zone," and both can be turned into pawns to negotiate extraction.

Strategy: Knowledge and Laws

Part of the long game included using knowledge of the land and legal system to delay the construction of the Tongue River Railroad Company and its associated mines. This section covers three examples of legal strategies the NPRC implemented to delay the construction of the railroad. First, Northern Plains members responded to draft Environmental Impact Statements

[24] "Derail the Tongue River," 1997, Northern Plains Resource Council.

(EIS) using their local knowledge to point to gaps and falsehoods in the reports. Second, they worked on a broader level by learning more about their rights as landowners, which led them to be involved in the movement to change eminent domain law. Finally, as they learned more about property and cultural resources, the NPRC and Northern Cheyenne led an extensive survey along the river to identify cultural resources that would be protected by the National Historic Preservation Act. These three strategies allowed Northern Plains to operate on different scales and mobilize new groups of people to build a stronger opposition to coal development along the Tongue River.

In 1982, the NPRC filed extensive comments on the draft EIS for the proposed Montco strip mine near Ashland. This speculative mine was the Tongue River Railroad Company's (TRRC) justification of the first version of the Tongue River Railroad. NPRC took its comments to Washington D.C. to oppose the company's application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, a certificate that, if granted, would give the TRRC the power to condemn people's land in order to construct the railroad. Ranchers who owned property under or near the proposed rail line wrote most of the comments. Through their comments, the opposition poked holes in the company's plans, highlighted hypocrisies, questioned justifications, and emphasized personal, local impacts of the project.

Sophie Olson, a rancher near Prey, asked, "Where do they plan to get their water to build their road and railroad? They say they'll keep it watered down to minimize the dust pollution but where do they get the water to keep the road and railroad watered down during construction? If this past summer is any indication, the rainfall sure won't take care of it." Olson used her knowledge of rainfall patterns she developed by observing her property year after year to

question the practicality of the railroad. Similarly, Boyd and Margaret Blum depended on water from the Tongue and Yellowstone to irrigate their crops and used their knowledge to demand answers. "Water is such a precious resource here in the west," they wrote, "If the water in this river should become so polluted it would destroy these highly productive valleys." They went on to say that agriculture, "has been the life blood of this part of the state of Montana," and, "we dare not let this application for the building of this railroad and the opening of these mines be approved without first investigating and having answered positively those questions regarding the availability and the usability of this water."[25]

Patty Kluver of Genie Land Company, a ranch near Forsyth, quoted the EIS directly where the document stated some residents "speculated" that aquifers disturbed by mining would be "permanently depleted or destroyed, and that increased erosion and accidental discharges of wastewater will diminish water quality to the point that it is unsuitable for use." Her response to this comment was, "It is no speculation! We know that a railroad constructed with the sole purpose of hauling coal will ultimately lead to the opening of coal strip mines, and finally to the further degradation and destruction of the ground and surface water of this semi arid agricultural region."[26] These were just three examples of many comments that demonstrated a deep knowledge of the land–in particular water–and how reliant they were on the land operating in a certain way, free of coal mining.

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[25] Boyd and Margaret Blum letter to Carl Bausch, October 15, 1983, Box 1980-81 TRR 70IA, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT; underline mark from original document.
[26] Patty Kluver (Secretary-Treasurer Genie Land Co.) letter to Interstate Commerce Commission Washington, D.C., October 15, 1983, Box 1980-81 TRR 70IA, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

The back-and-forth debate of draft EISs is a pattern that continued throughout the thirty-eight-year fight over the Tongue River Railroad's construction. In 1984, the TRRC released a second EIS, which in theory recorded potential environmental threats and issues the TRR and associated Montco Mine could produce. The Office of Surface Mining (OSM), a branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior, prepared the draft EIS and asked for comments to be as specific as possible.[27] In a letter from Dennis Hemmer, Commissioner of the Montana Department of State Lands to John Smillie of NPRC, Hemmer responded to NPRC comments from April and June of 1984 regarding the Montco mine and draft EIS. He responded item by item to NPRC comments and said that NPRC was making unfounded claims against the Montco mine and the draft EIS. In particular, NPRC was asking for Montco to draft a supplemental EIS because Montco had made changes to its original plan. Hemmer replied that, although Montco did make "numerous revisions to the permit application," none of them were "substantial or significant and in total they reduced the impact that the mining operation, if approved, would have on the environment." He concluded that the department did not believe the edits to the Montco mine and reclamation plan created substantial changes or added significant information that required a supplemental EIS. Instead, he noted that "adequate information" was contained in the draft and final EISs and the permit application. Furthermore, "the Department and OSM have provided NPRC, the Montana State Council of Carpenters and others numerous opportunities to provide

[27] Acting Chief, Division of Environmental and Economic Analysis memorandum to Reviewers, February 8, 1984, Box TRR Lawsuit 1980s, Folder Tongue River: Railroad ICC EIS/Comments, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

additional comment and input."[28] In sum, while its requests were sometimes pushed aside or dismissed, the NPRC did not stop its fight and looked for alternative ways to intervene in the process.

Although NPRC members had a strong, practical understanding of the land, they were up against federal and state policies that favored the construction of railroads and the mining of minerals, as covered in Chapter One. This issue had been a longstanding topic of apprehension for Montana property owners. In 1962, Senator Lee Metcalf wrote to Governor Forest Anderson, sharing concerns he had over eminent domain laws and how they affected working Montanans. "Some Ranchers, Farmers and residents of Montana towns," Metcalf wrote, "find their land and whole future in jeopardy, because of Montana's Eminent Domain Law. It permits Mining companies to acquire surface rights to which they do not have title, if they have the sub-surface mineral lease."[29] During the three decades the NPRC fought the Tongue River Railroad and its associated coal mines, federal and state policies that favored resource extraction remained heavy threats.

In 1985, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) awarded the TRRC a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, laying the tracks for the TRRC to begin construction of the railroad over private property. NPRC appealed the decision and won a postponement of the decision, but the TRRC continued toward its goal, forming alternate routes and reapplying for

[28] Dennis Hemmer (Commissioner of Department of State Lands) letter to John D. Smillie (Northern Plains Resource Council), November 8, 1984, Box TRR Lawsuit 1980s, Folder Tongue River: Railroad ICC EIS/Comments, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[29] "Birney Land Protection Association Fact Sheet No. 2", Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "Misc", Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings Montana; capitalization from original document.

permits.[30] NPRC developed education campaigns around this issue, galvanized by various proposed railroad routes affecting different members' properties. An educational newsletter by the Birney Land Protection Association, an affiliate of the NPRC, described eminent domain law as, "simply the right of the public to take private property if the public use for which the property is to be condemned is considered the more necessary public use than the public use to which the owner has devoted his land."[31] Because Tongue River ranchers typically only owned the surface land and not the subsurface minerals, the extraction of the minerals could be considered a public benefit, which meant their land was at risk of condemnation.

In the late 1990s, NPRC members had to put their education to use when the TRRC began sending notices to landowners along the Tongue River. When Marilyn Fortune checked her ranch's P.O. box in the summer of 1998, she found a rather disturbing letter. "YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED that TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD COMPANY, after having given you this thirty (30) days' written notice, intends to enter upon the land set forth on Exhibit 'A' [...] for the purpose of establishing the route of a railroad and related facilities."" "Exhibit 'A'" was on the Triangle T Ranch that belonged to Fortune and her family. Fortune was one of many property owners along the Tongue River receiving similar notices.[32]

The NPRC organized a landowner survey asking people if landmen from the TRRC had visited them or sent a notice like Fortune's. The survey also asked general landowner opinions about the Tongue River Railroad. It came as no surprise to the NPRC that the results of the

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[30] Steven D. Paulson, "Timeline: The Northern Plains Resource Council and the Tongue River Railroad" Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[31] "Birney Land Protection Association", Northern Plains Resource Council.
[32] Notice from Tongue River Railroad Company to T Triangle Ranches, Inc., July 30, 1998, Box TRR Early 1980s, Folder LO Surveys, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, Montana.

survey were overwhelmingly against the construction of the railroad. Fortune wrote in her survey, "We have been held hostage by this railroad for nearly 20 years."[33] Kelly Radue, whose ranch was near Miles City, shared environmental and economic concerns, "I believe the TRR, if built, would be environmentally bad for water quality in the Tongue River. This of course would have negative impact on our crop yields and on the wildlife carrying capacity of the area in general […] The TRR, if built, would come close to our ranch. It would cause a decline in property value and quality of our lives."[34] Other landowners were less verbose and simply wrote or circled "against" with no comments, or succinct comments, like the owners of the Quarter Circle U Ranch, who wrote, "AGAINST. Because it's a needless piece of crap."[35]

In August of 1998, the NPRC formed a committee "of landowners to develop specific proposals on eminent domain reforms," that they planned to present to the Environmental Quality Control (EQC) branch of the Montana Legislature. In a newsletter, NPRC cautioned about the risk of land condemnation, reminding its members to stay vigilant, "you may remember that at this time last year," the newsletter explained, "the right-of-way agents for the railroad were terrorizing landowners. Nearly all of our members received 30-day notices in July of 1998. These notices threatened that if they didn't grant permission for entry, TRRC would begin legal action toward condemnation." To assist ranchers in advocacy work, NPRC staff

[33] Marilyn Fortune, NRPC Landowner Survey, July 15, 1999, Box TRR Early 1980s, Folder LO Surveys, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, Montana.
[34] Kelly Radue, "NPRC Landowner Survey", July 15, 1999, Box TRR Early 1980s, Folder LO Surveys, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, Montana.
[35] Quarter Circle U Ranch, NPRC Landowner Survey, July 15, 1999, Box TRR Early 1980s, Folder LO Surveys, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, Montana.

shared draft letter templates to write their representatives and encouraged NPRC members to write candidates to share why they should be opposed to the Tongue River Railroad.[36]

In 1999, the Montana legislature faced five different bills that proposed changes to eminent domain law, "Law has not been significantly changed since its enactment in 1877," an NPRC work plan explained. NPRC concerns centered on construction of the Tongue River Railroad and their precarious position, hoping reforms in the law might give private property owners more rights to keep any development in their control. An internal fax read, "The Montana legislature has enumerated the construction of railroads as a public use and has granted all railroads eminent domain power 'to acquire lands, timber, stone, gravel, or other materials to be used in the construction and maintenance' of TRR." The uncertainty of NPRC's position stemmed from the legal rights the Tongue River Railroad had to occupy land and take material from the land for its construction.[37]

Because it was a legislative year, the NPRC ramped up its education campaigns, disseminating fact sheets and newsletters with its members. One fact sheet summarized the four property rights bills that the legislature would be voting on, including one where the landowner would not be responsible for hazardous spills, wrecks, or damage caused by development, and another that stated landowners would be compensated for damage caused by development.[38] The

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[36] "TRR Draft Message" with annotations, c. 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[37] Northern Plains Resource Council, Eminent Domain Work Plan, c. September 22, 2000, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR Strategy Em Dom Reform Interim Study", Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings Montana.
[38] Northern Plains Resource Council, Fact Sheet "Eminent Domain Reform: Four Bills to Protect Property Rights," c. 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Loose Documents, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

fact sheet included quotes from landowners describing how the passing of these bills would be a change for the better. The legislature voted on two of the bills. Both failed, but the legislature did create an interim committee to study the implementation, adequacy, and potential revision of eminent domain law.[39]

Burlington Northern and the TRRC saw the NPRC as the biggest–perhaps only–roadblock to the construction of the Tongue River Railroad, forcing them to take the NPRC seriously. In a private meeting between NPRC members and Burlington Northern, which would operate TRRC's trains, a Burlington Northern representative said, "We want to find out where we can build a railroad. We usually take 30 acres/mile for right of way. We plan to have a public meeting sometime soon to let people in the area know what we have in mind."[40] To combat the upper-hand position of the railroad company, NPRC continued education campaigns to inform landowners of their rights and to encourage them to be ready to take action if and when the TRRC and its associated mining companies made any legal slip-ups. NPRC organizers sent members materials that described the responsibilities of the TRRC and what the courts needed to weigh before giving the railroad the green light.[41]

Staying updated on the TRRC's plans was a key strategy NPRC ranchers had to implement. Mark Fix, whose ranch lay near Miles City, knew the Tongue River Railroad would

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[39] Eminent Domain Subcommittee, "Environmental Quality Council Draft Work plan", July 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR Strategy Em Dom Reform Interim Study", Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings Montana.
[40] "Meeting of RPA with BN concerning a Railroad from Colstrip to Birney," selected meeting minutes, May 11, 1977 (at Wally McRae's), Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder "Tongue River RRBN Prospecting", Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[41] Northern Plains Resource Council, Fact Sheet "Eminent Domain Reform: Four Bills to Protect Property Rights," c. 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Loose Documents, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

bisect his property, separating cattle from one of his grazing pastures. He had tried to negotiate with the TRRC and recommend different routes, but the company resisted his recommendations. His concerns extended beyond his own property. In November 1999, Fix wrote to NPRC organizers Alan Rolston and Ted Lange to inform them that the Miles City Library did not have a copy of the Draft Programmatic Agreement the TRRC released. Required by federal law, the purpose of Programmatic Agreements (PA) "to stipulate any future identification, evaluation and mitigation strategies that will be taken for any alternative licensed by the [Surface Transportation] Board."[42] In a time when the internet was not ubiquitous in rural Montana, Fix feared his neighbors would not be able to read the copy before the deadline to submit comments. In his note, he included criticism of the route, including that the route would have to cross the Battle Butte Battlefield located on the upper end of the Tongue and that the time limits set up for people to review data and comment seemed "extremely short." He also criticized the TRRC for stating it could not assess environmental damage on private property; Fix himself said he would let company men on his land, and they had already been on his land. The company lied in order to try to circumnavigate procedures.[43] Years later, Fix explained that allowing surveyors onto his property was part of a strategy property owners used to prevent land condemnation. When ranchers appeared to be open to negotiations, the railroad company would postpone condemning their land.[44]

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[42] Catherine Nadals (Environmental Protection Specialist), letter to Section 106 Consulting Parties, Box STB, Folder TRR2, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, Montana.
[43] Mark Fix letter to Alan Rolston and Ted Lange, "Comments on the Draft Programmatic Agreement," November 22, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[44] Mark Fix, interview with Jacey Anderson, June 16, 2022.

The previous two examples of commenting on draft EISs and fighting to change eminent domain laws were defensive strategies where organizers had to work to prevent damages from established laws. However, Northern Plains went on the offensive when it partnered with more members of the Northern Cheyenne to conduct cultural resource surveys. Although members from the Northern Cheyenne tribe had been involved in the NPRC since the 1970s, as described in Chapter One, some projects involved deeper collaboration with more tribal members. One such project produced cultural property surveys as part of the Environmental Impact Statements required before the Tongue River Railroad Company could put shovels to dirt.[45] This required the NPRC ranchers on the east side of the river to work closely with tribal members on the west bank in order to identify cultural resources on their properties. The Northern Cheyenne already had extensive experience working with preservation law. In an email exchange between Ted Lange and Jeanie Alderson, Lange shared information he received from Eugene Little Coyote (of the Northern Cheyenne) including a list of contacts and suggestions for what other tribes were doing to assert their rights under historic preservation laws and the Native American Freedom of Religion Act.[46] After realizing the Section 106 review only utilized windshield surveys to determine cultural properties at risk, members of the NPRC and Northern Cheyenne began to conduct detailed, on-the-ground surveys of cultural resources along the proposed route.[47] NPRC consulted with an archaeologist who recommended "on-the-ground pedestrian surveys" in order

[45] Mark Fix, interview by Jacey Anderson, June 16, 2022.
[46] Ted Lange email to Jeanie Alderson, "Tribal Contacts re: Historic/Cultural Preservation,", December 21, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder TRR Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[47] Alan R. memo to TE, MR, TL, Jack Tuholske, May 4, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

to have the most detailed, thorough report of cultural resources that could potentially be disturbed by the proposed railroad route.[48]

The NPRC continued to leverage cultural resource law as a tool to combat the construction of the Tongue River Railroad. Similar to previous legal strategies, one way it used the NHPA to its advantage was as a delay tactic. A 1999 memo listed strategies for how to utilize Section 106 of the NHPA as an organizing tool. "We should use our leverage under Sec. 106 to force a Class III inventory of the 130 mile TRRC route. This would be cheaper than a lawsuit and would cause a hell of a delay not to mention the cost," the memo stated. Another delay strategy included contesting all treatment and recovery plans. "As you see in the PA [Programmatic Agreement]," the memo explained, "every event has a 45 day review period, so we can use these time periods to our advantage." They quickly put these strategies to work. In a letter containing NPRC comments in response to a draft Programmatic Agreement on the construction and operation of the Tongue River Railroad, Alderson wrote, "Overall, this draft agreement raises far more questions than it answers. We therefore have many serious questions about whether an adequate attempt will be made to fully identify and protect historical, prehistorical, cultural and sacred sites."[49] In the same letter, NPRC requested to be a consulting party and questioned which tribes would be invited to participate in meaningful consultation. They also criticized the "windshield survey" approach as insufficient to determine and find potential historical sites. In addition to the obvious goal of preventing the railroad from being

[48] Kerry Lippincott letter to Chief Elaine K. Kaiser, November 26, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[49] Jeanie Alderson letter to NPRC, "Supplemental NPRC Comments on the Draft Programmatic Agreement Regarding Construction and Operation of the TRR," Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

constructed at all, part of this delay strategy was to "unnerve" investors and "cast doubt on the viability of the TRRC."[50]

The strategy to leverage historic preservation laws to prevent the construction of the TRR came with its own set of controversies. In an internal NPRC email from Ted Lange to Margot Liberty, Teresa Erickson, and Alan Rolston, Rolston included a list of names and "notes from several different conversations with various people about historic preservation stuff." He shared insights people gave him about various people connected to the fight against the Highway 93 expansion, another development project that was being delayed due to historic preservation research. Rolston included the names of people at the Department of Transportation who were "not willing to stick their neck out," as well as leaders of the Flathead Resource Organization who were fighting the expansion of Highway 93. He also listed the name of someone who "gave a lot of dirt on MT SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] saying they just work with lobbyists and are in Racicot's pocket."[51] Inner correspondences like this one showed that the historic preservation strategy to prevent the TRR came with its own set of politics and, as a result, a new way of maneuvering to mobilize the NPRC base.

Not only was employing the NHPA a successful delay tactic, it also caused NPRC's fight against the Tongue River Railroad to gain national attention. In summer 2014, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), an independent US federal agency that advises the President and Congress, wrote to the Surface Transportation Board with concerns about the

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[50] Alan Rolston, Memo to "TE, MR, TL, Jack Tuholske," May 4, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[51] "Inside Scoop on Historic Preservation," email from Ted Lange to Marot Liberty, Teresa Erickson, and Alan Rolston, November 16, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder TRR historic assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

Tongue River Railroad project. They said the draft PA "does not adequately reflect the recommendation that we provided to STB regarding the development," and they "would be remiss to agree to the development of a draft PA that did not ensure that effects to historic properties were given adequate consideration in this decision making process." They provided a list of comments pointing to holes in the plan, including that the plan assumed approval, without providing a no-action alternative.[52] By bringing the Tongue River Railroad project to the attention of federal entities, the NPRC was able to leverage power and foster connections with national leaders, which allowed them to have a louder voice and stronger legal power against the railroad's construction.

Strategy: Alliances

As described in Chapter One, the NPRC itself was a network formed from alliances of different families and communities. Over the three-decade struggle against the Tongue River Railroad, the organization continued to build relationships with different groups of people including tribes, unions, scientists, and school districts. They used this strategy to build a larger, louder voice against the TRRC and as an advertising tool.

The alliance that persisted through the entire thirty-eight-year fight against the Tongue River Railroad was between the Northern Cheyenne and white ranching families. The proposed railroad would have run along the Tongue River that served as the eastern border of the Northern Cheyenne reservation. According to Northern Cheyenne tribal member Alaina Buffalo Spirit, not only would the railroad have crossed sacred sites and disturbed local salmon habitat, but mining

[52] Charlene Dwin Vaughn (ACHP), letter to Victoria Rutson (STB), September 8, 2014, Box STB, Folder TRR2, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

in the Tongue River valley would also have harmed everyone downstream including the Lummi Nation, and Spokane and Coeur d'Alene tribes.[53]

As detailed in Chapter One, the NPRC and the Northern Cheyenne started to work together against coal development well before the TRR was a threat. One of the first issues they collaborated on was the tribal-led petition for Class I air standard under the Clean Air Act. The NPRC supported this process by raising money for the cause and helping with publicizing the issue. During this time, Teddy Rising Sun became a spokesperson with the NPRC on that issue, serving as a chair on the board. When the idea of the Tongue River Railroad came to the attention of the NPRC and the Northern Cheyenne, they again worked together based on mutual benefits from preventing the railroad. Erickson explained that the tribe, "hated the railroad 'cause they already had a railroad running through [the reservation] and it killed people on a regular basis…'cause there were no armed crossings [...] it was somewhat easy to rally people. Like, this railroad has nothing in it for you." She emphasized that the only way this coalition stayed strong was that it was genuine, not forced, and benefited all parties involved. "It has to be a genuine mutual self-interest for it to be successful. I believe that really deeply," she explained, "'Cause if you wanna just help people from an altruistic point, that's thin [...] but when you have something in common [...] that's when I think you have these rich enduring relationships where you can really, you know, you can endure some tough times."[54]

The transnational relationship between white ranching families of the NPRC and tribal members of the Northern Cheyenne was distinct from the organization-to-organization coalitions

[53] Alaina Buffalo Spirit, video interview by Northern Plains Resource Council, c. July 2020, Northern Plains Resource Council digital archives, Billings, MT.
[54] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.

because it endured through all versions of the Tongue River Railroad. The relationship had a longer history of struggling together against coal development in the valley. At the same time, NPRC used the same strategy of marketing the alliance to further leverage the cause. A letter from Alan Rolston of NPRC to Geri Small of Native Action shared an itinerary they had prepared for a visit by Joe Mazurek and Mike Cooney, who were both running for office. The itinerary included visiting different ranches, historical sites, and the fish hatchery to demonstrate how the railroad would affect these areas and resources. In his letter, Rolston noted that "These guys are both running for office, so it would be nice to have a good turnout of Indian and non-Indian people who are opposed to the railroad."[55]

The NPRC recruited new allies with each new iteration of the railroad, often touting the interests of its alliances in battle cries against the Tongue River Railroad. A newsletter titled "Derail the Tongue River Railroad" stated, "NPRC believes that the property rights of Tongue River ranchers, the jobs of railroaders and coal miners, the businesses of people in Forsyth, Sheridan and Glendive and the traditional ways of the Northern Cheyenne far outweigh any perceived need for the TRR."[56]

The NPRC developed two other unlikely alliances with the mining and railroad unions. Because the Tongue River Railroad shortened established routes, the new routes would have forced layoffs or relocation of workers. Although the purpose of the Tongue River Railroad was to open more mines, the plans would have cut off access to existing mines, leading some miners

[55] Alan Rolston, letter to Geri Small, 28 May 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "Misc", Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, Montana.
[56] "Derail the Tongue River Railroad Newsletter," September 1997, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

to oppose the project. With Montana's geographic proximity to the upper-midwest markets, they had an advantage over Wyoming because of cheaper transportation costs despite the fact that coal development in Wyoming was generally cheaper due to less overburden, thicker seams, and less severance tax. If the railroad were to be constructed, then, this would have moved Gillete areas closer to upper-midwest markets, which would give Wyoming the upper hand in competition. NPRC's "Derail the Tongue River Railroad" newsletter hypothesized, "It is possible this could result in the closing of the Sarpy Creek and Colstrip mines. In fact, the Absaloka mine is publicly opposed to the TRR."[57] This led to the unique alliance between ranchers who opposed the railroad in the interest of protecting their property and miners who opposed the development on economic grounds.[58]

The railroad union also opposed the new railroad but wanted control of these trains if the plan succeeded. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) approached railroad crews for an agreement to operate the Tongue River Railroad trains. The unions came to an agreement with the corporations, but the NPRC still considered the unions to be an ally. A Northern Plains newsletter explained, "First, it does nothing to lessen the unions' opposition to the railroad, in fact, they continue to support the fight to stop the railroad. Second, the agreement reached with BNSF stipulated that trains operating over the TRR will run from Decker to Glendive. This means that the trains will <u>not</u> stop in Miles City and Miles City will <u>not</u> gain any permanent jobs

[57] "Derail the Tongue River Railroad Newsletter," September 1997, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.
[58] Document "Elements of the Tongue River Railroad Issue that Might Make a Good Story" c. 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

because of the railroad."[59] In other words, NPRC seemed to at times leverage the narrative of their allyships as an organizing tool more than the relationship itself serving as a necessary key to success.

Range scientists who worked with the land were also concerned about the railroad project. Fort Keogh was once a major cavalry post along the Yellowstone River, but by the 1930s had become an agriculture range experiment station for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a hub for agriculture geneticists to create strains of cattle and plants that could "stand up to the extremes of climate encountered in Montana." The lower portion of the proposed Tongue River Railroad took its line across Fort Keogh. According to Dr. Robert Bellows, a researcher at the station, "[the railroad] would eliminate, or severely affect six of the 18 research projects currently underway." An experiment at the site began in 1934 and was the nation's oldest continual study of range environment and examined how cattle reacted to grazing pressure and weather. The proposed railroad would have ended this study.[60] In 1980, Fort Keogh Research Station said it planned to attend future meetings with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) that granted permits and oversaw the construction of new railroads. Representatives from Fort Keogh said they decided to participate because it was hard to put a dollar estimate on the damage this would do to range and plant research in the area.[61]

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[59] "Derail the Tongue River Railroad: The Train's in Trouble" Newsletter Supplement, October 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[60] "Researchers view TR railroad as threat to years and years of work," *Forsyth Independent,* 25 September 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine, Folder Coal Exports, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[61] "Researchers View TR Railroad as Threat to Years and Years of Work," *Forsyth Independent,* c. September 25, 1980, Box TRR Montco Mine Coal Exports, Folder Combined, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

The NPRC highlighted their alliances to further galvanize the movement, using their unique story as an organizing strategy. By showing how the railroad negatively affected other groups, not just a few ranching families, they pointed out how the project was problematic on many levels, not just a classic "Not in My Back Yard" tale. In an internal organizing flier titled "Elements of the Tongue River Railroad Issue that Might Make a Good Story," the author further emphasized the special power of these unlikely alliances. "Unique coalition of ranchers on the Tongue, Northern Cheyenne and Crow, railroad unions, coal mines, and several town Chambers of Commerce while MT congressmen all support it."[62]

Conclusion

Over the tenure of their fight against the Tongue River Railroad, residents of the Tongue River valley defended their land because the land was their livelihood. Yet they also used the land itself as a tool to play the long game, win legal battles, and gain allies. In a memorandum between NPRC organizers, Ted Lange shared a filming itinerary with Paul Whiting, Jeanie Alderson, Teresa Erickson, and Jeff Barber. It included a "wish list itinerary for filming on the River." They named Clint McRae (son of Wally McRae, quoted earlier in this chapter) from the north end of the river and Victoria Bales from the south end to "act as tour guides" for a film about the Tongue River Railroad. Lange listed specific places as "HIGH PRIORITY" shots, but also added, "in all cases, you should have an eye out for particularly scenic country, whether it's dramatic buttes and cliffs or lush bottomland hay meadows, that would be bisected or otherwise checked up by the railroad. Think in terms of capturing the peaceful, bucolic feel of the country

[62] "Elements of the Tongue River Railroad Issue that Might Make a Good Story," c. 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

and how it would be shattered by huge coal trains every few hours."[63] Although residents of the Tongue River valley were acutely aware of the value of their land, they had to convince others.

The NPRC knew its fight would be stronger with the help of the Northern Cheyenne. In an internal email, Tom Smith said, "...we'd have the best shot at it if we did it jointly with the tribe." He compared the struggle to writing a grant where "crafting the narrative right is key." He added, "Playing up the 'Cowboys & Indians working together' angle could be very effective. A clear case would have to be made that survival of the Cheyenne culture is tied to preserving the open space, peaceful character, plants, animals, sacred sites, etc." In other words, although the NPRC and Northern Cheyenne had collaborated since the NPRC's formation and there Northern Cheyenne members took on roles and leadership positions in the organization, some organizers in the NPRC still viewed NPRC as "white cowboy" and the Northern Cheyenne as "Indians" separate from the NPRC.

The separation between groups became more apparent through various communications, including when the NPRC was trying to recruit more native knowledge for its NHPA surveys. In an internal NPRC note titled "Conversation with Little Coyote," the author said the tribe had "no clue what's going on," and there was no dissemination of information on the reservation. The note shared that the Northern Cheyenne culture committee was volunteers who met monthly. Little Coyote agreed to share a pamphlet or fact sheet with the community.[64]

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[63] Ted Lange, memorandum to Paul Whiting, Jeanie Alderson, Teresa Erickson, and Jeff Barber, "Filming Itinerary," August 3, 1998, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder "TRR," Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

[64] Author unknown, notes from a conversation with Eugene Little Coyote, November 30, 1999, Box TRR Eminent Domain, Folder Historic Assessment, Northern Plains Resource Council, Billings, MT.

The NPRC worked with the Northern Cheyenne on many levels from tribal members serving on the NPRC board to working with native nonprofits and different government agencies within the broader tribal government. Erickson said the relationship ebbed and flowed depending on with whom they were collaborating. “Sometimes the tribal government is on your side, sometimes it’s not.” She explained, “Sometimes it’s corrupt, just like any government.” But the most important part of collaboration was finding common ground. “We’d work with whoever we can find that we have something in common with.”[65]

The Northern Cheyenne and Northern Plains fought the Tongue River Railroad for over thirty-five years by responding to draft Environmental Impact Statements, surveying the route for historic properties that were eligible for federal protection, and sharing the railroad’s potential negative consequences with communities, newspapers, and elected officials. They continued playing the long game, delaying the railroad and coal company’s plans however they could. The railroad company responded by changing its plans and routes often, winning new permits, and trying to shake the pesky locals off its tail. As routes changed, so did the response of the NPRC and the interests of its allies. Erickson remembered when “the railroad guys dropped off,” their coalition started to change, “and I began to worry like, oh my God, could we really lose this fight?”[66]

Though there were many times the railroad seemed inevitable, on November 25, 2015, the Tongue River Railroad Company asked the federal Surface Transportation Board to suspend work on the railroad’s application. Northern Plains responded to the company’s request by filing

[65] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.
[66] Erickson, interview by Anderson, 2022.

a formal petition with the Surface Transportation Board requesting the dismissal of the application. Although the railroad company argued the project was still viable, the NPRC learned that one of the coal companies that had invested in the project had already lost its lease for half the coal tracks. Without that half, the remaining coal was not economical to mine. The Tongue River Railroad had hidden this fact from the Surface Transportation Board, the bankruptcy court, and the public. NPRC gave notice of this fact to the Surface Transportation Board on April 15, 2016. Eleven days later, the Surface Transportation Board formally denied the permit application for the Tongue River Railroad, putting the project to rest at last.[67] Erickson said despite the victory being somewhat anticlimactic, "no one else can really take credit for that victory. It was us and our work and all the people [...] And it was really one of the best victories that protected the valley. I mean, that valley would be so, so, so different if that railroad had ever been built, and we stopped it." Mark Fix, a Northern Plains rancher, noted, "If there was a silver bullet in this fight it was just sheer gumption to play the long game. Northern Plains fought it for 37 years, never once giving up on it despite many claims that it was just about to be built. We outlasted the bastards."[68]

[67] "Tongue River Railroad Application Denied," *Great Falls Tribune,* April 26, 2016, https://www.greatfallstribune.com/story/news/local/2016/04/26/tongue-river-railroad-application-denied/83551088.
[68] Mark Fix, "Tongue River Railroad: Winning Against Long Odds," Western Organizations of Resource Councils, March 17, 2017, https://www.worc.org/tongue-river-railroad-win-against/.

CHAPTER THREE

'NO TO MINING, YES TO LIFE':

EL SALVADOR'S ANTI-MINING CAMPAIGN

Zulma Tobar grew up in Cinquera, a municipality in the department of Cabañas. As one of the first communities to repopulate after the war, Cinquera was highly organized. In the early 1990s, Tobar's mother and five older sisters rebuilt a house and worked a small plot of land to cultivate corn, beans, sesame seeds, and peanuts for food. Like most of the community, Tobar's mother and sisters relied on the river and rainfall to irrigate their crops. Tobar recalled a "belief" or "idiosyncrasy" of the people of Cinquera. "During the rainy season," she explained, "we would sometimes face a phenomenon where there was no rain." She remembered as a child there was a tradition where you would walk "as a community" to the river to bring large stones from the river up to the church where they would sing and pray together for rain, "When we did that, it poured."[1]

Like most of El Salvador, Cinquera's repopulation was deeply tied to land and natural resources. After the Peace Agreements in 1992, formerly landless campesinos received parcels of land to grow crops. During the reconstruction process, Cinquera's Asociación para la Reconstrucción y Desarrollo Municipal (ARDM, Association for Municipal Reconstruction and Development in English, similar to a town council) decided to preserve part of the forest as an ecological park. The same forest was a place where guerrilla fighters–as well as civilians–hid

[1] Zulma Tobar (US-El Salvador Sister Cities Senior Co-Coordinator), originally shared this story at "Flow," Interactive Historical Exhibit, Face-to-Face, Philadelphia, PA, October 2018. She then clarified added detail to the story during a conversation with Jacey Anderson, February 27, 2024.

from the military during the war. “The trees in the forest often saved the lives of groups there, so it was time for the Cinquereños to take care of the forest, to save the forest,” Tobar explained. People from other areas went to the forest and cleared large amounts of wood and went to the river to fish and take crabs. However, “Because of community organizing,” Tobar argued, “there were many times community members stopped the people when they were taking the products out of the town.” As the years went on, community leaders, the local women’s group, youth groups, and the church created an ecological forum. Tobar recalled making art in school to learn to care for the forest and river “and lead a healthy life.”[2]

In 1992, Cinquera “sistered” with activists in Chicago, Illinois as part of a broader movement of solidarity and accompaniment between El Salvador and the United States, an alternative to the relationship between the countries’ governments. The word “solidarity” had been a part of Salvadoran vernacular for decades. The word’s cultural ubiquity can be traced back at least as far back as the 1930s when a rural uprising of campesinos resulted in the government-sponsored massacre of thousands of indigenous peasants, leading to clandestine organizing within rural communities. But solidarity carried through decades later during the civil war, when Salvadoran refugees organized an international movement to help them return home. In other words, solidarity between different groups of people was a large component of Salvadoran organizing strategy long before the anti-mining campaign began.

This chapter follows organizing strategies in El Salvador’s struggle toward environmental justice from the war era (1980 to 1992) through the end of the anti-mining campaign (2017).[3]

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[2] Zulma Tobar, conversation with Jacey Anderson, February 27, 2024.

[3] Scholars have examined El Salvador’s anti-mining campaign, but examining the movement’s history in relation to other successful movements is a novel contribution. For social science

Organizers in El Salvador took many avenues to become the first country in the world to ban metal mining. They were adaptable and flexible, used knowledge of the land and their communities to fight legal battles and build alliances, and played the long game until they finally reached the goal of a national ban on mining. Many activists in the anti-mining campaign did not necessarily identify as environmentalists, yet they managed to achieve nation-level legislation that protected the land from harmful mining practices, something no other country in the world had achieved. The work of these organizers was not tied to an identity or label; instead, it was a community-oriented movement that seriously took into consideration the interest of the land and its inhabitants.

The multi-layered networks the Salvadoran social movement participated in can be likened to Maristella Svampa's notion of the "eco-territorial turn" that "refers to the construction of collective action frameworks [...] by different actors." These networks, she argues, create their own form of knowledge which values peasant-indigenous local knowledge "independent of the dominant discourses." The networks then expand the understanding of environmental issues, create new social networks, and uncover new avenues and strategies to act.[4] The Salvadoran

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perspectives on El Salvador's anti-mining campaign see: Robin Broad and John Cavanagh, *The Water Defenders: How Ordinary People Saved a Country from Corporate Greed* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press books, 2021); Rose Spalding, "El Salvador: Horizontalism and the Anti-Mining Movement," from *Rethinking Latin American Social Movements: Radical Action from Below* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 311-330; James Alejandro Artiga-Purcell, "Variegated extractivism: Rescaling El Salvador's Anti-Metal Mining and Pro-Extractive Politics," *The Extractive Industries and Society* 9 (2022): 101035; Gabriel Zucker, "El Salvador: Mining the Resistance," *Monthly Review* 62, no. 2 (2010): 40; Andrés McKinley, "The Mining Struggle in El Salvador and the Role of the Catholic Church," *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining* (2022): 80.

[4] Maristella Svampa, *Neo-Extractivism in Latin America: Socio-environmental Conflicts, the Territorial Turn, and New Political Narratives* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2019), 40.

social movement was not necessarily antagonistic to all corporate networks, nor did it shy away from "development." Rather, its relation to alliances and other entities ebbed and flowed. As anthropologist Fabiana Li explained, "Collaboration does not mean that participants are driven by common goals; indeed, they may not even understand each other's agendas. Collaboration [...] maintains friction at its heart."[5] There were many tensions and paradoxes of US-El Salvador solidarity relationships. Historian Molly Todd examined how the relationship was far from perfect and sometimes repeated structures of unequal power while trying to resist those very structures.[6] This chapter builds off the work of Svampa, Li, and Todd. Like Montana, the Salvadoran victory against mining is not a pure good-activist-versus-bad-mining-company tale. Instead, each relationship had its own tensions and frictions driven by self-interest. These interests operated at different scales and led to unlikely alliances and collaborations in the anti-mining campaign.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of mining interests and resistance in El Salvador. Because the mining interests were from foreign businesses, CRIPDES (The Association for the Development of El Salvador) had to adapt strategies and organize at different scales with a large portion of its energy focusing on international solidarity in order to hold foreign mining companies accountable. The overarching goal of El Salvador's anti-mining campaign was a legal one: achieve a national ban on metal mining. Section two explores how local knowledge of the land, paired with educational campaigns and legal strategies, were key

[5] Fabiana Li, *Unearthing Conflict: Corporate Mining, Activism, and Expertise in Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.
[6] Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles Against Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 17.

factors in the movement's success. The uneven power dynamics between foreign mining companies and Salvadoran communities meant the Salvadoran movement had to mobilize a large base in order to stand a chance, something its participants were experienced in from the war period. They built alliances at different levels and reinvigorated the international alliances they built during the war to hold mining companies accountable and make sure their opposition was heard beyond their national border.

Strategy: Adaptability and the Long Game

Mining has been a part of Salvadoran history for centuries. Many Salvadorans had artisanal mines along the Río Lempa long before the Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century. Large-scale gold and silver mining did not start until the early twentieth century after European settlers "discovered" Central America's gold belt that ran through El Salvador directly under the Río Lempa. In 1904, the San Sebastian mine opened in the department of La Unión. It was mined through artisanal methods until the 1970s when a US metallurgist introduced cyanide as a substance and method to extract gold from the mine's ore.[7] Although all mining ceased during the civil war, at the turn of the century, foreign mining interests grew throughout Central America as free trade policies caused countries to compete with each other to lower trade tariffs and allow foreign companies to access their resources.[8] In other words, while gold mining had a

[7] Michael L. Dougherty, "El Salvador Makes History," *NACLA*, April 12, 2017, https://nacla.org/news/2017/04/19/el-salvador-makes-history; Kendall W. Brown, *A History of Mining in Latin America: From the Colonial Era to the Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).
[8] Michael L. Dougherty, "El Salvador Makes History," 2017.

presence in El Salvador for centuries, it was not a substantial contributor to El Salvador's economy until the 1990s with the introduction of neoliberal policies at the end of the war.

At the turn of the millennium, foreign mining interests focused their attention on the region as free trade policies caused countries to compete for foreign business. This was in large part due to federal governments across North and Central America passing free trade agreements, as described in Chapter One. After the signing of NAFTA in 1994 and before the signing of CAFTA-DR ten years later, Central American countries entered rivalries with Mexico and Canada for foreign business. In particular, they wanted a Foreign Direct Investment in mining in anticipation of the end of the Multi Fiber Agreement that could have led to the collapse of the textile industry. In 1995, El Salvador established a three percent royalty rate for mineral production. In 1997, Guatemala reduced its royalty rate from six percent to one percent. To respond, El Salvador reworked its mining law and lowered the royalty rate to two percent in 2001.[9] Just one year after El Salvador lowered its royalty rate to two percent, Pacific Rim Mining Corporation (based in Vancouver, Canada) bought the rights to El Dorado gold and silver deposits in San Isidro, Cabañas. The Francisco Flores administration (1994 to 2004) supported Pacific Rim's efforts.[10] During the Flores administration, the Salvadoran government granted twenty-nine metallic mineral exploration permits to foreign mining companies in the northern portion of the country, the majority of them along the Río Lempa. More than seventy percent of

[9] Michael L. Dougherty.
[10] Michael L. Dougherty, "The Global Gold Mining Industry, Junior Firms, and Civil Society Resistance in Guatemala," *Bulletin of Latin American Research Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies*, Volume 20, Issue 4, (October 2011).

the population lived in departments the river ran through, and it was the country's main freshwater source.

CRIPDES worked on issues of water in connection with social justice before the anti-mining campaign had a clear vision and goal for a national ban on mining. In 2006, the organization created a project to strengthen citizen mobilization for the defense of clean water access through a human rights perspective. Goals included educating communities on the relationship between water and mining and promoting citizen mobilization to find solutions "with a rational use of natural resources and in harmony with the environment." The entire project rested on three core values: human rights, gender equity, and environmental sustainability. The project stemmed from concern with access to clean water:

> The water quality of the main river in the country, the Río Lempa, has been categorized as water not apt for human consumption and it is not optimal for agriculture either. The water in our country is already contaminated and the situation will become even graver through mining activity. It will affect the quality and quantity. It will become unsuitable for irrigation. It will put the majority of the population at risk, especially the most vulnerable. Mining projects are not viable nor compatible in the Salvadoran environment.[11]

Despite concerns from Salvadorans, Pacific Rim continued exploration and development during the Flores administration and planned to open a mine in the Cabañas region.[12] It seemed El Salvador was well on the trajectory of exploiting its precious metals until there was nothing left. But parallel to the growth in mining interest was increasing concern of mining on the environment. Salvadorans did not think the potential economic gain from mining would

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[11] CRIPDES, "Fortalecimiento de la Movilización Ciudadana Para la Defensa del acceso al agua libre de contaminación en El Salvador," (Project Report), October 2006, Box E, Folder 8, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador (translation by author).
[12] Andrés McKinley, *El Derecho de Saber y Decidir Sobre La Minería Metálica: El Caso de El Salvador* (Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Centroamericana, José Simón Cañas, San Salvador, 2015), 8 (translation by author).

outweigh environmental costs. In 2007, the University Institute of Public Opinion (Spanish acronym IUDOP) of the University of Central America surveyed rural communities across the country to gather data on public opinion on mining. The survey found that sixty-eight percent of the population considered mining projects to contribute little or nothing to economic development. Sixty-three percent of the population considered El Salvador not to be an appropriate place for metal mining at all.[13]

These concerns eventually grew loud enough that President Antonio Saca of the right-wing ARENA party put the first moratorium on mining in 2008 before being expelled from the party for violating the party's principles.[14] In 2009, El Salvador elected Mauricio Funes, the first president from the FMLN party, who finalized Saca's moratorium. At this time, Pacific Rim was exploring the old El Dorado mine in Cabañas, a mine that closed during the war but was ready to reopen. Upon hearing the news of the moratorium, Pacific Rim sued the government of El Salvador through the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes of the World Bank based in Washington D.C. for $77 million.[15] Pacific Rim cited CAFTA's clause that protected investors from "discrimination" and "indirect expropriation."[16] In 2013, the Australian company Oceana Gold bought Pacific Rim. By 2014, the total sum Pacific Rim/OceanaGold demanded from El Salvador was $315 million.[17]

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[13] Andrés McKinley, 4.
[14] Amy Westervelt.
[15] Andrés McKinley, 4.
[16] Anti-mining resistance in El Salvador: a primer in three pages, 2013, Box 1, Folder MT-01-53, Project Solidarity Archive, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.
[17] Michael L. Dougherty, "El Salvador Makes History."

The International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, a faction of the World Bank, oversaw the cases and created a tribunal to oversee trade disputes. The anti-mining campaign criticized the arrangement due to the World Bank's advocacy for neoliberal policies. The case ran from 2009 to 2016 when, to most people's surprise, the tribunal dismissed the case because OceanaGold was an Australian company and therefore not a part of the CAFTA-DR agreement. The tribunal ordered OceanaGold to pay $8 million to cover the case's legal fees.[18] OceanaGold did not pay these fees, but it did withdraw from El Salvador. The ruling was the final catalyst in the anti-mining ban. Salvadorans continued to mobilize at the local, national, and international levels, pressuring the Salvadoran government to ban mining and educating the population of the threats mining posed on the Salvador landscape. On March 27, 2017, seventy out of eighty-four of El Salvador's Legislative Assembly voted in favor of banning all metal mining exploration and exploitation throughout the entire country.[19]

Strategy: Knowledge and Laws

The movement against mining in El Salvador relied on leveraging existing knowledge and gaining new knowledge in order to effectively work the legal system to their advantage. Education campaigns employed popular education pedagogy, in which "educators" and

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[18] Professor Dr. Guido Santiago Tawil, Professor Brigitte Stern, and V.V. Veeder Esq (The Tribunal), "In the Matter of an Arbitration Before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes ("ICSID") Brought Under the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement ("CAFTA") and the Investment Law of El Salvador, (ICSID Case No. Arb/09/12), October 14, 2016.

[19] Pedro Cabezas, "El Salvador Votes for Water Over Gold: After a 12-year struggle, Salvadoran lawmakers voted to ban mining for metals," *Institute for Policy Studies*, March 30, 2017, https://ips-dc.org/el-salvador-votes-for-water-over-gold/.

"students" were equal in knowledge creation, grounding their analyses in lived experiences.[20] This strategy of shared analysis was a legacy of organizing during the war and a key strategy in mobilizing a base to fight extractivism in the neoliberal era.

Early in the anti-mining campaign, CRIPDES regional branches hosted events for people to exchange experiences and ideas. In 2006, they organized a workshop with communities from all over Chalatenango to present the Fondo de Milenio (Millennium Fund) development projects, a product of the United States' goal to promote development in the "third world." Participants formed working groups to discuss their positions on the projects. The workshop included representation from the mayoral offices of each community. The groups determined issues they found compelling and wrote brief proposals on potential ways to organize around the issue. All advocated for adequate studies on environmental impact.[21] One group proposed a plan for social and environmental compensation as well as studies on environmental impacts. Another noted that road development in the north could be important but asked "who is going to pay for the damages caused to the environment and private property?" They also nodded to the importance of communities to stay informed and involved in all development decisions and proceedings.[22]

Salvadorans were wary of development projects and their effects on the non-human environment. It was in this context, when mining operations accelerated throughout Central

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[20] Salvadoran popular education pedagogy was largely based on the philosophy and pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

[21] Comité Anti Minas Chalatenango, "Taller de Discusión Sobre el Proyecto Fondos del Milenio y la Carretera Longitudinal," July 28, 2006, San Antonio los Ranchos El Salvador, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador.

[22] Comité Anti Minas Chalatenango, "Taller de Discusión Sobre el Proyecto Fondos del Milenio y la Carretera Longitudinal," July 28, 2006, San Antonio los Ranchos El Salvador, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador.

America while popular opinion was against it, that the social movement responded with the creation of La Mesa Nacional Frente A La Minería Metálica (The National Roundtable Against Metal Mining, or "La Mesa"). La Mesa formed a coalition of Salvadoran social organizations (including CRIPDES), religious, environmental and investigative groups from both rural and urban areas. In 2006, La Mesa began investigations and community outreach programs surrounding foreign mining plans. Through its efforts, the group generated broad support from both the right and the left. In 2007, solidarity organizations from the United States and Canada formed International Allies Against Mining in El Salvador, or "Allies," to accompany La Mesa's work.[23] US-El Salvador Sister Cities was one of the first organizations to join Allies, an echo of its history of solidarity with El Salvador. According to Allies, "Each of the organizations that made up the Allies has a history of solidarity work with El Salvador. Based on their mandates they closely follow the socio/political development of the country." Because it was a product of La Mesa, Allies had similar objectives like demanding sovereignty, right to water, organizing fact-finding delegations, letter writing, and protests. Eventually, seventeen non-profit organizations from the United States and six from Canada made up La Mesa's international solidarity partnership.[24]

Communities feared mine tailings would contaminate their water sources as they observed with the San Sebastian mine. The anti-mining campaign drew from past organizing knowledge and successes by educating Salvadorans and recalling community values of defending the land for future generations, a reverberation of the war's repopulation movement. A

[23] "About us," *Allies*, accessed 20 March 2017, https://www.stopesmining.org/about-us.
[24] "About us," *Allies*, accessed 20 March 2017, https://www.stopesmining.org/about-us.

2007 conference of episcopal churches of El Salvador had the sole focus of understanding the importance of caring for the land in the context of speculative mining projects. The post-conference report noted "We are all responsible for conserving and defending [the land] because the environment is the 'home of everyone': of us, and of future generations." Specifically, conference participants discussed concerns about the possibility of authorizing exploitation of precious metals through open pit and underground mines in the north. After listing specific social and environmental concerns, the report concluded by stating, "No material advantage can compare with the value of human life."[25]

La Mesa organized many educational workshops and presentations to provide information about mining's effect on the land. In a slideshow presentation, La Mesa organizers shared a map of economic development potential from different sectors including mining, forest products, grains, and tourism. The map proposed tourism development and argued that mining would be in conflict with this goal. Another slide showed a map of existing and projected mining projects that would interfere with tourism in El Salvador's most scenic places (i.e. along the river). The slideshow also explained the difference between underground and open pit mining alongside facts about how much water mining would require and the risks of acid drainage and its effects on water quality. Although the purpose of the slideshow was educational, it did not shy away from sharing its opinion on mining. One slide in particular showed a skull and crossbones next to a drainage pond with the question, "How secure is this pond in an earthquake or storm?" The presentation even came across as alarmist at times. For example, one slide stated, "When mining is gone, the jobs will leave too; and we're left with an environment that produces less due

[25] "Cuidemos la casa de todos", Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador (CEDES), May 3, 2007.

to contamination." Alongside this was a photo of prostitutes, implying the introduction of miners from other areas may bring about changes in community culture and safety. The slideshow addressed other promises mining companies made like employment and countered these promises with data that showed most jobs only lasted the first ten months the mine was open and displayed graphic images of deformities and other illness caused by acid mine drainage.[26]

On Saturday, July 22, 2006, a group of organizations left early in the morning from Desvío de Amayo, Chalatenango to begin a three-day walk, a "peregrinación por la vida," (pilgrimage for life) to impress upon the Ministry of Economy that they protested and denounced publicly "the mining projects in El Salvador and their negative impacts" before the national and international community. They listed nine "negative impacts" of mining along with three demands. The negative impacts included that the government had granted fifty-two exploratory licenses to foreign mining companies since 2004. They noted that the area of mining exploration intersected with the major watersheds of the country, including the Río Lempa, Río Sumpul, Río Goascorán, Río Torola and the Río Grande de San Miguel, all of which would be at risk of contamination from acid drainage from the proposed projects. Organizers directly linked concerns for the environment to agriculture. "An important percentage of agricultural production" the report explained, "is obtained in the northern part of the country. As a result, this activity will be affected, since mining favors deforestation and water pollution, an essential

[26] Slideshow, "Minería Metálica: Oportunidad o Amenaza," MESA Nacional Frente a la Minería, c. 2007, Box D, Folder 5 (translation by author).

element for the development of this activity." The north part of the country had few forests and reserves left.[27]

In addition to using its own knowledge and education strategies, the anti-mining campaign leveraged "official" recommendations in their demands. In 2006, The Latin American Tribunal on Water (a judicial tribunal created in 2000) issued a series of recommendations to the government of El Salvador. The intention was to encourage the government to cease the granting of metal mining exploration licenses in the country. The tribunal pointed out that mining was "high-risk activity" for the environment and the health of the Salvadoran population, arguing that mining was incompatible with sustainable development because of excessive water consumption and mines having a fixed lifespan of twenty years or less. In other words, mining gold was not contributing to renewable resources, and environmental damage lasted long after the closure of mines. The tribunal also argued that the mines would not benefit communities economically. Communities and the country would only earn one percent of the profits. The tribunal pointed out the unequal wealth benefits, noting that, "The concessions of mining exploration and exploitation privileged the enrichment of transnational businesses, and made thousands of the country's inhabitants vulnerable." The anti-mining campaign listed several demands including immediate and definitive suspension of all mining exploration permits and for the Salvadoran Ministry of Economy to listen and take into account the opinion of the Latin American Tribunal

[27] Organizaciones y comunidades en la gran peregrinación por la vida, Memorandum to Yolanda Mayora de Gavidia (Ministry of the Economy), July 24, 2006, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

on Water "regarding the needs of social development that are compatible with our environment for the good of the country and its present and future generations."[28]

Parallel to patterns in the pre-war era, the anti-mining campaign denounced propaganda and called out government officials' conflicts of interest. In a 2007 press conference report, La Mesa stated that the mining companies were treating them like large countries with less dense populations that could absorb some ecological damage without affecting agricultural productivity and health. La Mesa noted that the National Coalition Party (Partido de Conciliación Nacional, PCN) and some ARENA officials were interested in trying out a new mining law written by Pacific Rim that would allow exploratory permits without government oversight. But FMLN President Sacas stated the companies had not shown they can mine responsibly. The report then asked ministries of health and environment to suspend activities by the Canadian company Pacific Rim.[29] A second report by the communications team of La Mesa stated that Roberto Angulo, president of the Congressional Commission, lied in order to allow the visit of representatives from Pacific Rim, authors of the new PCN mining law. According to the report, Angulo, along with colleagues Orlando Arévalo and Francisco Merino, were proponents of the mining companies. In other words, La Mesa had to audit politicians to determine which ones

[28] Organizaciones y comunidades en la gran peregrinación por la vida, memo to Yolanda Mayora de Gavidia (Ministry of the Economy), July 24, 2006, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[29] Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería, propuesta de documentales de Fidel Chavez de Ley, c. April 2007, Box, D Folder 5, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

were allies and which ones were courting foreign mining companies, stances that were not always clear in politicians' rhetoric.[30]

As described in the Preface, a group of leaders in San Isidro, Cabañas was fighting the reopening of the El Dorado mine because they were suffering health issues that they had traced back to the mine's earlier operations. The community depended on fishing and had observed fish kills due to mine leakage. In 2005, Pacific Rim requested to reopen the El Dorado project that lie upstream from the San Isidro fishing community. The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, MARN) denied the permit because the company did not follow proper permit procedures. The Ministry made this call in the context of increasingly vocal concerns from grassroots organizers surrounding the environmental and social consequences of mining. Stories from communities like San Isidro eventually became common and loud enough to pressure the government to set up a moratorium on mining. The goal of the moratorium was to pause mining operations for a period of time so that companies could address environmental damages caused by their mines and so they could work to prevent new mines from creating these types of damage.[31]

The anti-mining campaign often cited mining company lawsuits and violations of permits as reasons mining was not feasible in El Salvador. Yet Salvadoran campesinos themselves tended to be against mining for issues that affected their everyday lives, rather than pointing their finger at one particular company's actions. Early on in the anti-mining conflict, community

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[30] Communications team of La Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería Metálica, "Minería metálica: Empresas admiten que presionan al Ejecutivo," Box D, Folder 5, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[31] Jacey Anderson, fieldnotes, referendum observation delegation visit to San Isidro Labrador, November 2015.

members met often to assess the risk mining would bring to their communities. In 2006 and 2007, CRIPDES and its regional branches held “working days of consciousness building” around the impacts of mining. These meetings included theatrical pieces about the risks of mining, songs against exploitation, and commentary for all ages. On average, 120 people participated in these gatherings with the goal of developing “a strong opposition to mining.” Anti-mining commissions from the departmental and municipal levels shared general reports at these gatherings, and organizers opened up debate between leaders on their positions regarding mining. One such event did an evaluation with community leaders from 100 municipalities. After presentations and discussions, participants made a proposal to establish an organized municipal network of the six municipalities in the same mining interest radius so that they would have a stronger front against the mining companies.

La Mesa organized youth-specific working days with the objective “to have a new experience of the work we carry out as youth from different communities and how to slow social problems like mining exploitation.” These events included artistic presentations and collaborative plans to stop megaprojects “that attack us day by day.” Part of the purpose for the youth-specific working days was to make sure everyone affected by mining was included in organizing against it. The report concluded by stating, “...we believe that these workdays help to strengthen and resist mining projects among other projects, the experience is to involve all sectors including youth, women, people with disabilities, prosecutors and educators all to the

working days and the activities should be creative and participation of everyone to consolidate their support, which is very important to our Association."[32]

In June 2015, the University of Central America conducted a second survey showing a significant increase in the number of Salvadoran citizens rejecting the mining industry. In the new survey, seventy-six percent of the population was opposed to the opening of mining projects in their municipalities. Eighty percent expressed that El Salvador was not an appropriate country for metal mining. Seventy-seven percent believed the state of El Salvador should ban metal mining in the country. Despite the critical situation of unemployment in the surveyed communities, eighty-seven percent of the population indicated that they would not be interested in working in a mine. Ninety percent of the population thought that the water contamination from the metal mining would be "very grave," and approximately four out of five people considered that because of these levels of contamination traditional forms of life in the country, such as agriculture, farming, and fishing would be "very damaged." Sixty-seven percent opposed the development of metal mining projects in border countries for the impact they could have on shared water sources, and ninety-three percent of people who knew of the foreign mining companies' lawsuit against the state of El Salvador affirmed that they were "against a foreign business forcing the country to give permission for mining exploitation."[33] Another study showed similar opposition but with qualitative data. In one interview a Salvadoran farmer said,

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[32] Santiago Serrano Mejia, "Informe Final Narrativo del Ultimo Desembolso del Proyecto ICCO-CRIPDES," 2007, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

[33] José Simón Canas, "Encuesta sobre conocimientos y percepciones hacia el medio ambiente y la minería metálica en El Salvador," Consulta de Opinión Pública de Abril de 2015, Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública Universidad Centroamericana (San Salvador, El Salvador 2015).

"It's more than just having employment alternatives to mining, it's about having a future for Salvadorans created by Salvadorans, where all perspectives are respected."[34]

Strategy: Alliances

The creation of La Mesa and Allies came from a legacy of the Salvadoran social movement's strategy to create international alliances and to leverage people power. While living in refugee camps in Honduras during the war, people organized to carry on with their lives, creating sophisticated systems of sharing everyday chores and even holding their own classes for children–and adults–to continue their education. After more than a decade, with the war having no clear outcome, Salvadorans began to organize to return home. They knew repopulating their country in the middle of a violent conflict was dangerous. They called upon people in the United States who were frustrated that their government was funding the Salvadoran military dictatorship and asked them to accompany the journey home. These US activists acted as "human shields" of privilege, walking in solidarity with Salvadorans as they crossed their war-torn country and rebuilt their communities.[35] This relationship continued in the postwar era through the country's anti-mining campaign. Solidarity organizing was an alternative to the status quo. From the US side, activists pushed back against their government funding the military dictatorship by partnering with Salvadoran organizers and listening to what the Salvadorans asked for: accompaniment in the repopulation and reconstruction processes and denouncement of the US government's involvement in the war. In exchange, the US activists gained insight into

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[34] Tanya L. Zakrison, et. al, "The Perceived Consequences of Gold Mining in Postwar El Salvador: A Qualitative Study," *American Journal of Public Health,* (November 2015), 3.
[35] Joanie Brooks, interview by Jacey Anderson and Rachel Dunlap, October 2018, Project Solidarity Archive, Bozeman, Montana.

the sophisticated Salvadoran organizing strategies to apply to their own struggles in the north. People from both the US and El Salvador called this type of solidarity work "accompaniment" both for the horizontal nature of the approach and for the literal, physical process of standing alongside one another through challenges.

Several groups formed to work toward an alternate US-El Salvador relationship. In 1981, members of the Salvadoran diaspora and US activists formed the Salvadoran Aid, Research and Education Foundation (SHARE) and New El Salvador Today (NEST) in Washington D.C. and San Francisco, respectively.[36] Both organizations had strong national offices and fundraising. In 1983, a third international solidarity network, U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities (Sister Cities) formed from people from the Salvadoran diaspora and from people in the United States who had negative experiences with national organizations during the anti-Vietnam War movement and wanted to participate in a decentralized, national organization.[37] To do this, communities in the United States partnered with–or "sistered"–repopulated communities in El Salvador. According to a report from Sister Cities, people in the United States joined the network for three reasons, all related to an alternative vision of organizing:

> The first was that it had a small national staff that did practically no fundraising yet provided logistical support to all its committees. The second was that decisions were made at the local level rather than being mandated by a national office. The third was it was an alternative to simply protesting US policy. People were drawn to the idea that we could create an alternative policy towards another country. While our government was bombing El Salvador, we were helping to build an alternative political vision amongst the communities we supported that emphasized the positive concepts we believe in.[38]

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[36] "History," SHARE-El Salvador, accessed April 12, 2022, http://www.share-elsalvador.org/history.html.
[37] Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice.*
[38] "US-El Salvador Sister Cities in the Context of Solidarity," 2002, Box USESSC, Folder "About the History of Sister Cities/CRIPDES," Project Solidarity Archive.

Salvadorans catalyzed the accompaniment process in the United States, mirroring their own organizing efforts that they practiced in the refugee camps for years. In 1984, in the midst of the armed conflict, four hundred displaced Salvadoran families met and formed CRIPDES. According to CRIPDES, the original purpose was to promote repopulation and relocation, coordinate aid to these communities, and raise awareness about challenges facing them.[39] Sister Cities began to work in partnership with CRIPDES as displaced Salvadoran communities tried to return home toward the end of the 1980s.

Like other organizing strategies, international solidarity had to adapt to changing contexts. During the war years, the US side of the solidarity movement had clear direction from its Salvadoran partners on what participants needed to do. After the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, however, the transnational social movement had to rework its plan to keep momentum moving toward the rebuilding that communities still needed to accomplish. According to a Sister Cities report from 2001, "As the war began to come to an end, the solidarity groups, with our Salvadoran partners, began to envision what role we could play in a post-war environment. The Salvadorans were very clear that they would need our continued support and so Sister Cities looked at how it could further formalize its structural existence." The report went on to explain that the early nineties were a time of record low funding and staffing for the organization.[40]

For the US-El Salvador solidarity relationship, the postwar years marked a time of transition and redirecting organizing energy. The work of this partnership shifted from having clear objectives of supporting the repopulation movement and opposing US government

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[39] CRIPDES, "Historia," accessed March 5, 2024, https://cripdes.net/quienes-somos/historia/.
[40] "US-El Salvador Sister Cities in the Context of Solidarity," 2002, Box USESSC, Folder "About the History of Sister Cities/CRIPDES," Project Solidarity Archive.

intervention to imagining what a peaceful El Salvador might look like and making it reality. The social movement worked toward redistribution of land, public health and education, and access to water. Following the example of Salvadoran leadership, Sister Cities' work focused more on accompanying specific issues and projects that CRIPDES was implementing in sistered communities. This led to opposing neoliberal free trade policies in the late-1990s and early 2000s and organizing around issues like migration, climate change, and mining.

La Mesa held national and international campaigns to bring attention to its movement. In 2007, La Mesa held a meeting with nine organizations, including CRIPDPES and SHARE, to discuss different strategies to organize against mining. These strategies included conferences, meetings, and specific conversations the group planned to have as part of education and mobilization. One strategy focused on leveraging international support through Sister Cities and SHARE. La Mesa would call on US activists to do legislative work and lobby Congress with the support of allied organizations in Washington D.C. "Generally," La Mesa's meeting minutes explained, "we look for a representative office to sponsor the [dear colleague] letter and convince other representatives to sign it."[41]

The plan was effective in that members of Sister Cities did manage to convince US elected officials to acknowledge the mining situation in El Salvador. In 2007, twenty-four US congresspeople wrote a letter to the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly, warning them that mining would go against the purpose of the funds placed for the Cuenta del Reto del Milenio (Millennium Challenge Account in English, part of the Millennium Fund) because it would not

[41] Meeting minutes, "Memoria de Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería," c. 2007, FESPAD, Box D, Folder 6, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

contribute to sustainable growth and development. “Through communities in some of our jurisdictions who are connected with some of the affected Salvadoran communities, we as congresspeople are conscious that the local population is worried about these impacts and have made clear their strong opinion against possible mining projects in their communities.” The letter then listed “negative impacts” of mining including deforestation and contamination of water.[42]

Communities in the United States who were sistered with Salvadoran communities saw their connection to the struggle as beyond simply writing to their congresspeople. They saw their struggle in the US as tied to and the same as the struggle of their Salvadoran partners. Based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Commerce Group operated the San Sebastian mine from 1985 until 2006. In 2006, the community of San Sebastian complained to the government about acid drainage from the mine contaminating its water source. In response, the Ministry of the Environment ordered Commerce Group to provide an environmental remediation plan. Commerce Group sued El Salvador in local courts for $100 million.[43] This sparked a public outcry across Wisconsin, especially in Madison, which was sistered with the Salvadoran community of Arcatao. Sister Cities members from Madison, along with other Wisconsin activists, pressured Commerce Group to drop its lawsuit.[44] When Commerce Group refused, Wisconsin activists joined a delegation from El Salvador and went to the steps of Commerce

[42] Tammy Baldwin, et. al. letter to the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly, c. August 2007, Box D, Folder 6, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.
[43] Pedro Cabezas, “The Dilemma of Artisanal Miners After the Mining Prohibition in El Salvador,” *Allies,* May 7, 2018, www.stopesmining.org/news/commerce-groups.
[44] Catie Mungia, interview by Jacey Anderson, phone call, April 24, 2019.

Group. They dumped French salad dressing on the steps of the building to symbolize the San Sebastian mine's acid drainage, that had turned the river orange.[45]

Similar solidarity work occurred in other sistered communities as well. When Cambridge, Massachusetts sent a delegation to its sistered community of San José Las Flores, Chalatenango, Cambridge delegates collected some of the survey markers that a US mining company had left around the community. After sharing the anti-mining struggle with local Cambridge elected officials, the delegates sent the markers, along with a return to sender letter, to the board of the mining company. Jim Wallace, a member of the Cambridge group, noted that the letter essentially said, "[The markers] didn't belong in El Salvador, and they don't belong to us either. So we send them back to you." Wallace also shared the relationship between Cambridge and San José Las Flores worked two ways, "It always feels like [solidarity is] what Las Flores has offered us. Wow. They operate…as a community that knows what it wants and how to get it… that was illustrated in the whole anti-mining struggle."[46]

The parallels between the war era and the anti-mining campaign were evident through both organizing strategies and concern about foreign intervention in El Salvador. In 2015, a team of Salvadoran and US-American scholars generated a report that examined Salvadorans' perceived consequences of mining. The report noted that El Salvador was extra vulnerable to the effects of human caused and natural disasters because of its size and population density. The article hypothesized that, "Past exposure to such disasters–natural and manmade–have perhaps sensitized the population to the potential for extensive harm from future disasters." Furthermore,

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[45] Esty Dinur, "How El Salvador Won on Mining," *The Progressive*, April 1, 2018, https://progressive.org/magazine/how-el-salvador-won-on-mining/.
[46] Jim Wallace, interview by Molly Todd, May 26, 2017, Project Solidarity Archive.

the report stated, “Respondents pointed out many similarities between mining-related violence and the violence and trauma experienced by Salvadorans during their civil war.”[47] An article in *Diario Co Latino* pointed to a similar pattern, noting that organizers from both CRIPDES and La Mesa stated that the mining companies had armed personnel who acted similarly to the armed forces in Cabañas and Chalatenango. One organizer said these personnel were in Chalatenango with the intention of generating fear in communities and scaring them into selling their land.[48]

As argued earlier, El Salvador’s anti-mining campaign had to adapt to organizing at different scales to pass a national ban on mining. At the local level, communities organized referenda to vote on whether residents wanted to allow or ban mining in their municipalities. This was called a “consulta popular,” or “referendum.” The broader strategy was for enough communities to vote “no” on mining so that the movement would reach a national level. The referendum process was a byproduct of the negotiated solutions of the 1992 Peace Accords. Community leaders wrote these agreements into local government structures that included organizing referenda to create municipal ordinances.

Holding a consultation in a municipality was a five-step process. First, the community had to educate its residents on whether or not they wanted to hold a referendum. Then, volunteers had to collect at least forty percent of voters’ signatures in the municipality. In reality, the percentage of signatures was much higher because many people lived in the United States but maintained their Salvadoran citizenship and, by extension, their voter registration. After verifying the signatures, the town could pick a day to hold the consulta popular. In this case, the

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[47] Zakrison, et. al, 5.
[48] Daniel Trujillo, “Denuncian que Fuerza Armada brinda seguridad a empresa minera,” *Diario Co Latino,* May 15, 2007, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador.

only question on the ballot would be voting "yes" or "no" to allow mining in the municipal borders. After the results were counted, the local government would be required to make a municipal ordinance. The fifth and final step was to "guard and promote" the democratic process.[49]

Part of the referendum process in the anti-mining campaign included inviting international observers to polling sites in order to lend validity to the process. They watched to assure there were not any obvious intimidation factors and that voters were voting through their own volition–not through harassment or direct outside pressures. The foreign observers also watched the count to assure its accuracy for these legally binding votes.

Education and training were important components in the referendum process. To prepare for the observers, local governments created informational handouts and training manuals to define their roles. Each election observer received one of these manuals that detailed the hour-to-hour schedule of the day as well as the role of each election official. One of the handouts defined electoral observers as, "people who are not authorized to intervene at any level of the process, nor create any type of propaganda. They must not induce the vote of the electorate, offend, defame or slander the electoral authorities."[50] A similar handout included a list of "things observers should know" and stated the objectives of observers: "verify the timely and proper organization of the elections and the fulfillment of the functions inherent to the electoral bodies [...] the exercise of the vote without obstacles [...] respect for the entire electoral legal order," as well as what observers "should be": "impartial in the issuance of their judgment on the electoral

[49] Jacey Anderson, fieldnotes, November 2015.
[50] Informational handout, "Manual Básico: Consulta Popular San Isidro Labrador," November 23, 2014, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

process, neutral in their behavior during the electoral process; Be careful not to issue negative statements about electoral officials and organizations." The document concluded with a statement in bold that read, "In short, what it is about is observing the development of the electoral process, with the purpose of subsequently presenting a small report on the development of the electoral day to the Municipal Council."[51]

Part of the broader strategy of organizing the referenda included beginning in municipalities where mining was the least popular. These communities were all in Chalatenango. They were among the first to leverage international solidarity to repopulate El Salvador during the war era, and the legacy of strong organizational and mobilization skills continued in the following decades. As predicted, the results of the first four referenda were a resounding "no" to mining. The first municipality to hold the referendum was San José Las Flores on September 14, 2014. Ninety-nine percent of voters voted "no." Two months later, San Isidro Labrador held its vote and over ninety-eight percent voted "no." On March 25, 2015, over ninety-nine percent of Nueva Trinidad residents voted "no," and on November 8 the same year, over ninety-nine percent of residents in Arcatao voted "no." These first four communities built momentum for others to follow.

In addition to accompaniment and advocacy, one of the main roles international solidarity played in El Salvador's anti-mining campaign was sending international delegations to El Salvador to observe community mining referenda. Catie Johnston, a Sister Cities coordinator from 2012 to 2016, said this was Sister Cities' largest role in the campaign. She worked directly

[51] "Cosas que debe saber como observador," c. 2014, CRIPDES archive, San Salvador, El Salvador.

with Pedro Cabezas of La Mesa and Bernardo Belloso of CRIPDES to organize international delegations to travel to El Salvador and serve as observers and reporters for the community referenda. During her three years at Sister Cities, Johnston, with the help of Cabezas, Belloso, and others, organized several international referendum observation delegations. Johnston recalled the first delegation having over seven countries from Europe and the Americas represented. She described the importance of international observer presence:

> [International observers] gave some gravity to what [Salvadoran communities] were doing. That's a big part of what international solidarity does–bring some gravity. A lot of times it's the little guys paying attention to what's going on. Bringing people from other countries: professors, activists, First Nations representatives, journalists, that presence made what the communities and CRIPDES were doing known and brought international eyes to what was happening. This made leaders in El Salvador pay attention to what was going on. It also was a safety net for if companies said the referenda were fraudulent. We could come back and say, "We were there, this really happened." It also made the local people recognize the gravity of it: What we're doing is really important and other people are paying attention. These actions matter.[52]

Zulma Tobar (from the introduction of this chapter) became Sister Cities co-coordinator in 2016. She agreed that international presence made the referenda feel more powerful to the Salvadoran people and encouraged them to participate. She also highlighted the importance of international delegations to educate people in the United States:

> We've seen in different delegations this is a way to educate people in the U.S. to see the strength of the popular movement. For example, El Salvador is a small, poor country, but managed to ban mining. They can see this big message of popular struggle for life. So, it's also a way to educate people in the U.S. that it's worth it to be in solidarity with people in the struggle for social justice. In the fight to ban mining, international solidarity was important to achieve this goal.[53]

[52] Catie (Johnston) Mungia, interview by Jacey Anderson, April 24, 2019.
[53] Zulma Tobar, interview by Jacey Anderson, April 24, 2019.

While communities were busy organizing and realizing the referenda, the lawsuits continued working their way through court. The International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, a faction of the World Bank, oversaw the cases and created a tribunal to oversee trade disputes. The social movement criticized the arrangement due to the World Bank's advocacy for neoliberal policies. The case ran from 2009 to 2016 when, to most people's surprise, the tribunal dismissed the case and ordered OceanaGold to pay eight million dollars to cover the case's legal fees. This ruling was the final catalyst in the anti-mining ban. Salvadorans continued to mobilize at the local, national, and international levels, pressuring the Salvadoran government to ban mining and continuing to educate the population of the threats mining posed on the Salvador landscape. On March 29, 2017, El Salvador's Legislative Assembly voted to ban all metal mining exploration and exploitation throughout the entire country, a first for the world.

Conclusion

Although the role of international solidarity was crucial to El Salvador's anti-mining movement, it came with its own challenges. After "successes" in solidarity work, motivation and participation waned. After the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords that ended the twelve-year civil war, Sister Cities had record low funding. Similarly, when El Salvador became the first country to ban mining, leaders in CRIPDES and La Mesa warned the struggle was far from over. Despite challenges in maintaining motivation after victory, CRIPDES organizers continued to adapt strategies and organize on different levels, putting their energy toward what was available.

International solidarity worked in this project because it was part of a long-term struggle toward justice, in which people in both hemispheres of the globe found mutual benefit in partnering together. Both Johnston and Tobar agreed the anti-mining movement would have

struggled without international support. Johnston said she did not know if the movement could have achieved what it did without international solidarity, "Obviously the people leading the movement in El Salvador are smart, strategic stakeholders in the issue," she explained, "but they had to get people that matter to listen to what they were saying. I think international accompaniment was a big part of being able to achieve that."[54] Tobar took an even stronger stance and stated without international solidarity the movement "would have been weak." She opined, "We maybe would still be in the struggle to get the law against mining passed."[55]

La Mesa's campaigns pressed for official closure of existing mines and a complete ban on new mining projects. Much of the group's work used popular education methodologies to empower community members to make decisions around mining. The education campaigns led to dozens of marches and demonstrations to keep the issue in local media. La Mesa organizers promoted regional dialogues for sustainable management of resources and built coalitions throughout Central America to learn and support one another. This was in large part due to the region sharing a watershed and policies affecting one another because of their geography. These coalitions were also possible because of the region's shared history and trade policies like CAFTA-DR. This case highlights how fighting for economic, social, and environmental justice are interwoven in Latin America. Although this awareness is more developed and prevalent in the "global south," it holds true in the "global north" as well, whether articulated or not. The core-periphery dynamic operates at different scales. The non-human environment as well as subaltern populations of people can be exploited but also fight back and challenge this

[54] Catie (Johnston) Mungia, interview by Jacey Anderson, April 24, 2019.
[55] Zulma Tobar, interview by Jacey Anderson, April 24, 2019.

relationship. These cases were part of a global pattern of increasing concern for the environment throughout the twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries.

CONCLUSION

ADVOCATES OF UNFORGETTING

"Listen," Clint McRae told me as we stood on a bluff overlooking the Rocker Six Cattle Co., the ranch his family had owned for four generations. I had been visiting for about an hour or two. He was driving me around for an informal tour, pointing out different species of grass, archaeological and historical sites, and areas where the Tongue River Railroad would have bisected his and his neighbors' properties. As we stood on a bluff overlooking the land, when he told me to "listen," I knew he meant "to the landscape." I listened. I heard a soft breeze on the grass, perhaps some birds. But I think what McRae wanted me to notice more was what we *didn't* hear. We didn't hear cars. We didn't hear generators. We didn't hear trains. We just heard the sounds from the land. "That," he emphasized, "is value."[1]

The resistance of coal development along the Tongue River and gold mining along the Río Lempa are stories of clashing value systems. The neoliberal era sharpened the contrast of competing values surrounding natural resources and treatment of the environment (including people, as defined in the Introduction). Stories from these two American river basins highlight how fighting for economic, social, and environmental justice are interwoven, not just in the so-called "global south" but in places where people establish roots and care for their land. In the case of the Tongue River, the Northern Cheyenne and white ranching families had established themselves through utilizing the land to raise cattle and grow crops. When outside interests sought to disrupt their way of life through coal development, the locals used their knowledge of

[1] Clint McRae in conversation with Jacey Anderson, June 14, 2022.

the land to argue the sodium rich coal was incompatible with the river's wellbeing and even to most coal markets. They formalized their organizing efforts by creating the NPRC, which allowed them to fight legal battles and recruit a variety of allies to grow their movement and amplify their voices. They prevented the construction of the Tongue River Railroad for over three decades, which was long enough that coal demand became obsolete and the project went bankrupt.

In the Río Lempa, organizers were exiting a war and transitioning to peace when mining interest from foreign companies accelerated throughout the country. Formalized during the war, CRIPDES was able to apply similar strategies it had developed during wartime, including educating and mobilizing campesinos and building local and international allies. The members knew from even before the war that their struggle would be long–they would have to continue organizing indefinitely toward their utopia. Like the people in southeastern Montana, CRIPDES focused its organizing efforts on mining through co-creating and joining La Mesa. Formalizing and focusing the work allowed them to pool resources, to craft a unified identity in legal cases, and to create name recognition as the movement grew.

Comparing two case studies shows how the core-periphery dynamic operated at different scales in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Placing case studies from the US West and Latin America in conversation with one another provides a better understanding of the extent human history from different regions is linked to destruction of the non-human environment. Studying the Americas as a region uncovers new links between producing regions and economically rich regions, extending beyond a dual comparison of nation-nation or city-country

to observing the pattern at different levels.[2] This process can help reconstruct our understanding of the region as a whole, as historian Felipe Fernandez Armesto advocated, "to trace common history that embraces all the Americas." This approach questions the global-North-versus-South dichotomy, showing how struggles in the Americas are connected and interdependent. US hegemony is a product of history and will not last forever. Studying the shifting power dynamics in the Americas can help us understand how unequal power dynamics in the Americas started and their temporality.[3]

Environments in the periphery are often exploited, but local people can also fight back and challenge or even overturn this relationship. Stories of decline are important for understanding how humans have altered the planet in a way no other species has done. However, Linda Nash worried that narratives of decline would lead back to the old nature-culture debate and advocated for more success stories and the "need for narratives of justice and freedom but grounded in the material environment."[4] As neoliberalism continues into the twenty-first century with climate change and human displacement as consequences, stories of success will be tools for communities as they organize and navigate new realities. As historian William Cronon noted, "Historical wisdom usually comes in the form of parables. By addressing the common humanity of distinct regions, people can see themselves in history."[5]

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[2] Richard P. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The U.S. and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
[3] Felipe Fernandez Armesto, *The Americas: A Hemispheric History* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2005).
[4] Paul S. Sutter, David Igler, Christof Mauch, Gregg Mitman, Linda Nash, Helen M. Rozadowski, and Bron Talyor, "State of the Field: American Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 100 (June 2013): 94-148.
[5] William Cronon, "The Uses of Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 3 (1993): 1-22.

The people who fought mining projects along the Tongue River and Río Lempa did not necessarily consider themselves to be environmentalists. They were driven by the need to make a living in the places they loved.[6] Their stories were not pure hero-versus-villain tales (though they sometimes told them that way to recruit allies and advocate change). Instead, they were stories of labor tied to landscape that motivated them to push back against more powerful people and institutions at the core. Companies and governments tried to sell democracy and development as intricately linked, but Salvadorans and Montanans called out false promises and hypocrisies; they knew these two ideals were incompatible.[7]

An early goal of this project was to uncover narratives from river basins in order to understand how story and belief influence the actions communities take to protect their land. Historical narratives are choices communities make and shape our beliefs in what the land is for us. In the United States–the US West in particular–mining can at times be glorified, a symbol of frontier, power, technology, and empire. This is a strategic construction. Deregulation becomes much easier when politicians and companies can tap into positive collective memory about mining.[8] In the case of El Salvador, memory of centuries of oppression and resistance galvanized campesinos to organize against mining. But this cannot be taken for granted. Salvadoran journalist Roberto Lovato argues that El Salvador is in a "state of amnesia," and the people are forgetting their past as evidenced by support for Nayib Bukele, a president who is serving an

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[6] Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), 2008.
[7] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[8] Andrew C. Isenberg, *"*Afterword: Mining, Memory, and History," in *Mining North America: An Environmental History Since 1522* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 398-412.

illegal second term and arresting thousands of people without due process, including members of the anti-mining campaign.[9] The Americas are an example of people under the "fugue state," which generates collective ignorance.[10] History and memory are antidotes to the process of forgetting.[11]

We were able to learn from these stories because both the NPRC and CRIPDES saw the benefit of keeping their documents and sharing their histories of resistance. They are advocates of unforgetting. They are revitalizing collective memory by formalizing their archives and encouraging historians like me to help tell their stories. This is a political act. By preserving their histories, the NPRC and CRIPDES are democratizing knowledge, history, and memory.[12] Those who manipulate power also manipulate the production of history. Present circumstances of social groups are determined by the past, so consciousness of their history is essential.[13] Their archives, like all archives, are incomplete reflections of the past. Yet they are also a way of leveraging peoplepower to continue the struggle of protecting their land and way of life.

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[9] Roberto Lovato, Unforgetting: *A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in the Americas* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2020).
[10] Mike Anastario, *Parcels: Memories of Salvadoran Migration* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019).
[11] Roberto Lovato.
[12] Kristen Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
[13] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

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K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana, Missoula

Arnold Bolle Papers. Manuscript Collection 600.
Cecil Garland Papers. Manuscript Collection 637.
Doris and Kelsey C. Milner Papers. Manuscript Collection 799.
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