

Our study may guide entrepreneurs to develop new food sectors, and it may make visible alternative systems of value that place cultural and familial practices on par with economic profits. For example, we found that many food entrepreneurs valued their work because it provided an income *and* because it contributed to their sense of self, whether they continued the traditions of their parents and grandparents, they raised public awareness and appreciation of Jokkmokk's wild foods, they created public spaces for people to meet and enjoy food, or they simply enjoyed working in the forests and on the lakes and mountains. Considering values beyond economic profit may

enable local officials to support projects and entrepreneurs that were previously considered inconceivable.

I do believe that food movements are providing a new space and discourse from which people such as the Sámi and allied food producers can mobilize. As Marisol de la Cadena (2010) has noted in her work, those who are against mining may have vastly different reasons; however, like the majority of Jokkmokk's food producers, they want the same thing: their voices, lands, and livelihoods to be valued. For the majority of producers who are opposed to a mine in Jokkmokk, the desire to work in a clean and natural food system offers an alternative language of development.

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TERRITORIES FREE OF MINING: THE FIGHT AGAINST GOLD MINING IN EL SALVADOR

By Rachel Nadelman
and Pedro Cabezas

During spring 2013, the authors Pedro Cabezas and Rachel Nadelman, first met in San Salvador, El Salvador. Pedro, a Salvadoran national who, as a teenager found refuge from El Salvador's brutal civil war in Canada, had recently moved back to his childhood home. He returned to join a Salvadoran-led movement against industrial gold mining, taking on a role that drew on both his Salvadoran and Canadian identities. He became the in-country representative for "International Allies," (IA) an informal network of transnational NGOs that mobilized to support El Salvador's grassroots National Roundtable Against Metallic Mining ("*La Mesa*.").¹ Rachel, a Ph.D. student, had come to El Salvador that spring to begin her dissertation research, exploring the factors that led three successive Salvadoran presidential administrations, from rival political parties, to abandon the pro-mining platforms of their predecessors by saying no to corporate gold mining. Her timing meant she could begin by



The Mayor of Arcatao Announcing Results of the Consultation

tagging along as an observer with an international delegation that Pedro, on behalf of IA and La Mesa, had organized to build international awareness of the extreme dangers metals mining poses to El Salvador, given the country's level of environmental degradation and limited water resources.

By the time of the 2013 international delegation, El Salvador's mining fight had been in the international spotlight for several years. Attention had come in waves. First in celebration of the country's groundbreaking 2007 (ICSID 2014) suspension of the metals-mining industry, a government action that matched

the will of the majority of Salvadorans living in gold territory (IUDOP 2007). Then in solidarity, following the grisly 2009 murders of anti-mining activists and the launch that same year of multi-million-dollar investor-state lawsuits against El Salvador by aggrieved mining companies (Reyes 2011). While having stopped foreign mining interests from advancing, the “de-facto” moratorium has always been precarious. The industry freeze only continues because of the will of the sitting president. The Salvadoran legislature has never held a vote on proposed bills to overhaul the nation’s governing mining law that, since its passage in 1996, has established regulations to allow for a mining industry. Lacking legal protections that would permanently prohibit metals mining, concerned communities, accompanied by social movement actors, have remained vigilant in their organizing efforts against industrial gold mining projects.

While *La Mesa* as a coalition has continued rigorous national and international mobilization on this issue, Pedro began working with *La Mesa* founding member CRIPDES and longtime Canadian solidarity organization SALVAIDE to pursue a new strategy: *Consulta popular* (public consultation). They relied on little known, never before tested provisions within El Salvador’s Municipal Code that allows for civic participation in local decision making processes. Under these regulations, municipalities are obliged to hold a poll on issues of local concern provided “40 percent of eligible voters in the municipality request in writing that a



Voting in Nueva Trinidad

popular consultation is called,” and the results are considered legally binding.

On September 21, 2014 in San José las Flores, a town nestled among the hills of the department of Chalatenango, citizens for the first time voted to determine the future of mining on their land. The *consulta popular* involved just one question that residents answered as independent international monitors looked on: “do you support the establishment of metals mining, exploration, and exploitation in San José las Flores?” Rachel traveled to San José las Flores to witness this first ever municipal referendum, an event she heard people call “historic.” The following day, September 22, San José las Flores Mayor José Felipe Tobar announced that 67 percent of those

community members listed in the official National Electoral Registry cast their vote; of those, 99 percent voted to ban mining in their territory. Tobar explained that the vote’s implications were clear: “we have been handed a mandate to draft a municipal ordinance to declare San José las Flores free of mining” (Cabezas 2014).

Since San José las Flores set the precedent as the country’s first legally declared territory free of mining, three more municipalities in Chalatenango—San Isidro Labrador, Nueva Trinidad, and Arcatao have held their own referenda. Each has garnered an average participation of over 60 percent of registered voters, yielding an overwhelming 99 percent support for a mining ban.



The Catholic Church Demonstrating Support during the Consulta, Arcatao



Counting the Votes in Nueva Trinidad

These four now-declared “Territories Free of Mining” represent only a fraction of El Salvador’s gold-territory, and the protections do not go beyond the boundaries of each distinct community. Yet, what these votes represent is far larger than the territory occupied by each community. The referenda have set a standard for other communities throughout the Chalatenango province and represent a call to all Salvadorans that local action can have national reverberations. Beyond the day of voting, this strategy has demonstrated new ways to reinvigorate local organizing, maintain the call for a mining ban in the public eye, add the voices of crucial, new participants (local governments) to national debates against mining, and keep international allies creatively engaged in the process. In El Salvador, citizens see these local referenda as not only mechanisms to protect communities but as well an important step in the advancement of their democracy. These four Salvadoran “Territories

free of Mining” are a part of a larger Central American phenomenon that first launched in Guatemala and now encompasses dozens of communities that are utilizing the levers of local democracy to protect their lands in ways their national governments have not. Yet, the horrific February 2016 murder of Berta Caceres, the internationally celebrated Honduran indigenous leader and environmental defender, shows the grave risks to environmental and human rights activists who openly challenge extractive interests and power. Just as the Lempa River carries the contamination produced by one country into the next as it flows southward, oblivious to man-made country borders, Berta’s assassination carries consequences for communities struggling to protect their water and land across Central America. In the words of Vidalina Morales (personal interview conducted by Pedro Cabezas, San Salvador, El Salvador, March 10, 2016), a longtime Salvadoran anti-mining activist, “These types of assassinations are meant to demoralize and demobilize active participation in social movements. That will not happen in Honduras...this will not happen in El Salvador...our struggle and resistance goes back many years and allows us to remain united and continue to struggle for our rights and ensure a better future for the next generations.”

Note

¹For more information on International Allies and the Salvadoran movement, please see www.stopesmining.org.

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