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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LIKE A DOG IN THE MANGER: MOBILIZATIONS IN TIMES OF EXTRACTIVE CAPITALISM

The cases of Romania and the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT: In the middle of the heated debate on how to reverse climate change, some countries in Eastern Europe are returning to extractive industries and the exploitation of natural resources to finance their national budgets. The paper looks at mobilization in one locality in Romania and the Czech Republic and investigates the radically different pattern of mobilization in these two otherwise similar areas. Whereas in many Romanian cities affected by this economic “transformation,” citizens have protested against it, as in Cămpeni with regard to the Roșia Montană gold mining project, in the Czech Republic, however, the extension of coal extraction was hardly opposed by the general population, with the exception of environmental groups. Using critical political economy approach, the paper explores the interaction between the economic changes, politics, and citizens' reactions and argues that the difference in outcome can be explained by the configuration of the economic organization, and the dominant “social blocks” that sustain it, in each of the areas considered.

KEYWORDS: accumulation by dispossession, extractivism, natural resources, social movements, urban mobilizations

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1. Introduction

In the middle of the heated debate on how to reverse climate change and global warming, some countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America are returning to extractive industries and the exploitation of natural resources (coal and gold mining, gas extraction, and timber growing and harvesting, in particular) to finance their national and regional budgets. These industries and the economic interests behind them have an essential impact on the lives, environment, and politics of the areas in which they are located. The aim of this paper is to analyze the effect of these changes on the national economic model in two different areas, and examine the attendant strategies in relation to local politics and urban–rural conflicts. It looks at two localities in two Eastern European countries, Romania and the Czech Republic, which recently returned to the extraction of natural resources as means to finance public investment and government budgets. The paper investigates the interaction between the economic changes, politics, and citizens’ reactions. Whereas in many Romanian cities affected by this economic “transformation” citizens have protested strongly against it, as in Câmpeni with regard to the Roșia Montană gold mining project, in the Czech Republic, the extension of extraction and the lifespan of mines were not met with a great deal of opposition from the general public, with the exception of environmental groups.

What were the effects of the return to extractive industries on local politics and urban–rural conflicts in these two areas? More notably, why were there mobilizations opposing such changes in one case and not the other? This paper deals with two localities in two countries with similar macroeconomic conditions but different outcomes. Whereas in Romania the extractivist turn of the government was opposed firmly by large-scale protests staged in many cities, in the Czech Republic the opposition was minor and focused only on the affected localities. Given the similar starting conditions and the similar threat to natural and urban habitats, the question the paper asks is: what accounts for the different magnitude of the responses?

This paper combines theories of social movements with critical political economy. Concretely, it uses the framework developed by Cini et al. (2017), which links the distinct process of accumulation in the economy with the type of social movements that can potentially arise from such a process. The paper aims to continue the debate by focusing on how the transformation processes of social and economic structures have shaped the opening (or closure) of political opportunities and affected the societal resonance of movement frames, the expansion (or compression) of networks, and the mobilization (or not) of resources. It argues that the different configuration of

the economic organization in the two countries, and the dominant actors or “social blocks” that sustain this, can shed light on the diverse development of contentious politics in the European periphery.

Specifically, in the case of the Czech Republic, the more coordinated organization of the economy allowed for institutional accommodation of some of the protestors’ claims (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Vráblíková and Císař 2014; Hall and Soskice 2001), and limited the protest frame to a local issue of ecology that does not resonate so well with Czech society. On the other hand, in Romania, the lack of coordination in the foreign direct investment-led (FDI) economy and a closed (captured) political system pushed citizens to exert extra-parliamentary pressure on political actors (Burean and Badescu 2014). Thus, the perception of a closed economic and political system in Romania led to a more vocal and radical response from citizens. According to Worldwide Governance Indicators collected by the World Bank, Romania has a higher risk of corruption than the Czech Republic.¹ The protests in Roșia Montană succeeded mainly because the protest was not framed exclusively as an ecological issue, but also as opposition to a corrupt government influenced strongly by multinational companies.

First, this paper contributes to the current debate about the “strange disappearance” of capitalism from social movement studies (Della Porta 2015; Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Krinsky 2013; Cini et al. 2017) by applying political economy and the concept of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003) to social movements in two specific cases of natural resources exploitation and resistance to this. Second, it deals with the puzzle of countries with similar starting macroeconomic conditions achieving different outcomes from contentious politics and contributes, in this way, to connecting the political economy macro-conditions with the local reality of protest.

This paper uses a comparative case study of two instances of resistance to extractive industries, the case study examples being located in Romania and the Czech Republic, and aims to apply a similar research design to each one. Both are post-communist countries with a weak civil society and a current unstable political system (Parau 2009). Their economies receive a lot of FDI and are substantially based on the automotive industry. The information and data were gathered first through media analysis, and then by frame analysis of the newspaper articles found, some secondary literature, and documents issued by protesters, environmental organizations, the government, and mining companies for the period 2011–2015. Short periods of fieldwork were undertaken in Romania in September 2017 and in the Czech Republic in February 2017,

¹ According to Control of Corruption Indicators in 2011 and 2016 Romania ranks below the Czech Republic (52.61 and 58 points out of 100 compared to 67.77 points in both years).

during which the author consulted few participants mostly academics, who had provided additional insights in addition to the documents and the media.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses concepts of extractivism, accumulation by dispossession, and the social movement frames; the third section deals with the argument that the different outcomes and protest dynamics can be explained by the different configurations of the political economy and the different ways in which the protests were framed in the two countries; the following section presents the two case studies in Romania and the Czech Republic; and the final section concludes by summarizing the findings and suggesting ideas for possible future research.

2. Mobilizations in times of extractive capitalism

Protests and movements concerning territory, such as anti-mining protests, local environmental movements and, most recently, anti-tourism protests are on the rise, drawing the attention of scholars. In 2013, thousands of citizens in the larger cities of Romania gathered to protest against the re-opening of a gold mine in a depressed rural area of Roșia Montană by a Canadian multinational company, Gabriel Resources. This project divided the local community, who were torn between wishing to welcome employment and wanting to preserve natural habitat. What started as a small series of protests against the mine became part of a larger manifestation of dissatisfaction with the government after the transition from Communism to democracy (referred to hereafter as “the transition”) and a larger series of anti-government and anti-corruption protests resulted, forcing several prominent politicians out of office (Burean and Badescu 2014). After several huge rallies, the new Social Democratic government suspended the Roșia Montană gold mining project.

At about the same time, in 2013, the president of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, re-opened the debate on the future of coal mining when he publicly defended the abolition of restrictions on brown coal mining in the northern part of the country. Territorial limits for brown coal mining in northern Bohemia had been established in 1991 to protect the environment in general and, specifically, to protect towns and houses from demolition due to coal extraction. Further exploitation would threaten residential areas and the cultural and natural heritage. However, despite the magnitude of possible consequences, only a minority of citizens mobilized both in favor and against the possible extension of mining. In 2015, the Social Democratic coalition government decided to selectively ease the restrictions, retaining them only where

drilling directly threatened the village of Horní Jiřetín. How can the difference in intensity and scale of the opposition to these two extractive projects be explained?

For some, similar mobilizations seem like a specter of the past, hardly fitting in among the examples of new post-materialist movements. Others see them as a link between economic crisis and the organization of national economic models (Diani and Císař 2014). Della Porta has argued that social movement studies have developed a useful kit of concepts and theories that are well adapted for understanding social movements in core capitalist countries at the peak of the growth of the welfare state. However, they seem to be insufficient for making sense of the global contentious politics aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis (Della Porta 2015;2017). Della Porta maintains that political opportunity structures and material resources, traditional factors explaining the rise of contentious politics, were closed or unwelcoming, or missing, respectively, for the majority of protesters who flooded the streets during and after the crisis. According to her, the traditional allies, such as left-wing parties and unions, turned into opponents, implementing and supporting harsh austerity (Roberts 2014; Della Porta 2015).

As a result, numerous scholars reintroduced capitalism to political science and social movements' research. A growing body of academics turned their attention back to the political economy and argued that bringing critical political economy and Marxism back to social movements research might provide useful precisely when current theories were losing their explanatory potential (Barker et al. 2013; Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Cini et al. 2017). According to them, the prevailing theories paid little attention to how and to what extent the long-term dynamics of capitalism influenced the emergence and decline of mobilizations (Cini et al. 2017; Navrátil and Císař 2015). Indeed, by excluding capitalism and class cleavages as something obsolete and outdated in the post-materialist age, these theories had misinterpreted several class-based movements and failed to account for the new ones. For example, by focusing on the emergence of mostly urban-based social actors, the mainstream literature ignored the impact of globalization and liberalization on the life of peasants and on rural communities (Desmarais 2002; Veltmeyer and Petras 2002).

Cini et al. (2017) propose a framework that could complement current social movement theories linking the macro-structural changes of capitalist society (produced by the processes of accumulation in production and accumulation by dispossession) with the emergence of contentious politics and movements. They note a link between the type of accumulation process and the type of social movement that can potentially arise from such a process, and distinguish between movements that derive from accumulation in production and those that derive from accumulation by dispossession.

The movements triggered by the process of accumulation in production are associated with the struggles against the various phases of the capital cycle (production, labor, circulation, and consumption) within a specific capitalist model. Examples of research dealing with movements opposing the various phases of the capital cycle along with the social institutions involved in such processes can be found in Crouch (2004) or Streeck (2013)². By contrast, according to Cini et al. 2017,³ the movements emerging from the process of accumulation by dispossession are

mostly relative to the struggles against the creation of new capital investment opportunities; struggles that appear during the crisis of an existing model of capital accumulation and in the transition towards a new one. These movements emerge in terrains (both social and natural) where capital finds new opportunities for its accumulation and (re)valorization.

Using this theoretical approach, the turn to extractivism in the European periphery and the rise of resistance to it can be better understood. Although extractive industries are not the dominant economic pillar in most of the Eastern European countries, they are still an essential complement to their FDI-dependent economies (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Bohle 2009). Due to the global economic crisis, the rising fiscal vulnerabilities of some states, and the volatile prices of commodities, many countries are now turning to natural resources as a source of wealth (Jessop 2011; Mezzadra and Gago 2017). The extractivist model is, according to Svampa, based on the appropriation and exploitation of the commons, it “emerges from the idea of ‘economic opportunities’ or ‘comparative advantages’ that would procure relatively easy money due to rising international prices and demand for consumer goods” (Svampa 2015b, 67). In other words, the rising prices of gold and rare earth minerals have made natural

² Examples are the redistributive struggles, promoted by leftist parties, such as those for the creation of a public pension, healthcare, and education systems, the pillars of the welfare state.

³ Key examples of these movements are the “new” social movements of the 1970s and 1980s: the urban and student movements (Castells 1997; Cini and Guzman-Concha 2017; Harvey 2012); and the environmental and communitarian movements (O’Connor 1997). The feminist movement constitutes a particular case that could be considered as belonging to both types: first in the domain of production struggling for equal wage and labor conditions; but also, as Silvia Federici (2004) masterly explains, as part of the framework of accumulation by dispossession pushing the capitalist frontier to include spheres of domesticity. If, with the new economic model, more women join the labor market, other women have to step in and deal with the housework and the provision of care for children and/or elderly relatives.

resources attractive for exploitation at a time when domestic consumer demand has slumped.

The model of analyzing extractive industries from the viewpoint of the logic of accumulation by dispossession entails a deepening of the dynamic of expropriation of land, natural resources, and territory while producing new and dangerous forms of dependency and domination between and within countries (Svampa 2015). The extractive industries generate high environmental costs, labor-intensive but low-skilled jobs, international privatization of the exploitation, and a tendency to less economic diversification in the areas concerned, creating “sacrificial areas.” Frequently, these projects are imposed without the consent of local communities. This process can generate divisions between urban centers, which need energy, timber, revenues, or work in factories, and the rural areas where the extraction is taking place. In Svampa’s words, extractivism establishes a “vertical dynamic that occupies the territories and de-structures regional economies, destroys biodiversity, deepens the process of social and economic backwardness evicting or displacing rural communities, and violates local processes of citizen decision-making” (Svampa 2015b, 70–71).

One of the consequences of the contemporary rise of extractive industries is the explosion of socio-environmental conflicts within the communities where the new extraction is taking place (Vesalon and Crețan 2015; Harvey 2005, 19). At the center of the conflicts lie different understandings of territory and development and, ultimately, of the type of self-government (Tsavdaroglou, Petrakos, and Makrygianni 2017). These conflicts could, therefore, be characterized as movements set in motion by dynamics of dispossession. They challenge the creation of new capital investment models based on natural resources extraction. Generally speaking, these movements deploy “new forms of mobilization and citizen participation, centered on the defense of natural goods, biodiversity and the environment” (Svampa 2015a, 53). In both cases studied here, citizens opposed projects that had been imposed from the top down and claimed the right to alternative economic development that would be compatible with local community life.

3. Dispossession, social movements, and economic models theories

Returning to the initial puzzle about how the different magnitude of the protests in the two countries can be explained, the accumulation of dispossession framework and extractivism seem, however, an incomplete solution. In other words, if, in both localities, the dynamics of accumulation through dispossession are in place, then what

accounts for their difference in the contentious politics challenging these processes? Moreover, in both the countries in question, other factors deemed relevant in the literature do not differ substantially. In Romania and the Czech Republic, the Social Democratic coalition governments⁴ prompted the extraction policies and were in office when protests unfolded. In both cases the unions were in favor of extractive projects. Post-communist legacies are present, and their economies are driven mainly by FDI (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Vesalon and Crețan 2015).

In addition, the literature considers both countries as having a weak civil society and a protest culture (Mercea 2014; Tatar 2015). The traditional support structures were not in place or were secondary. As Tatar explains with regard to the Romanian case, demonstrations began to take place without there being any notable pre-existing movement organizations and they had no direct and consistent support from traditional mobilizing agents such as unions, professional associations, or civil society organizations (Tatar 2015). In fact, structures such as unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were weakened and lost widespread support in both countries. Finally, material resources were also scarce as the austerity policies cut deep into the welfare state (Císař and Navrátil 2017).

Cini et al.'s (2017) framework gives only a partial answer to these concerns. They recognize that the dynamics of capitalist transformations, prompted by the process of accumulation, affect the meso- and micro-structures of the political context in which social movements are embedded. Although this proposition is an important stepping stone, the authors remain vague and abstract as to how the different components of political context interact. To bridge this gap, I suggest looking at each country's model of production, and the dominant social blocks that sustain each one's organization to account for their potential differences and outcomes with regard to mobilization (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016).

In other words, building on Cini et al. (2017), this paper argues that recent capitalist dynamics (economic crisis, extractivism, and FDI economic development) certainly have an impact on the type of movements, but one has to add other specific factors to the mix that influence the way social mobilizations arise. This paper argues that the different configuration of each country's model of production and differences in the dominant actors that sustain each one's organization can shed light on the distinct development of contentious politics in the European periphery (Císař and Navrátil

⁴ The ruling Social Democratic parties in both countries (PSD in Romania and ČSSD in the Czech Republic) could be distinguished from the traditional left-wing parties in Western Europe as they were even more prone to implementing neoliberal and anti-austerity policies in both countries (Havlík and Voda 2016).

2017). Specifically, I suggest that the patterns of intermediation between interest groups and the executive branch, and mechanisms of demand aggregation, such as procedures for building effective policy coalitions, have shaped the opening (or closure) of political opportunities and affected the societal resonance of movement frames, the expansion (or compression) of networks, and the mobilization (or not) of resources.

In this sense, a more coordinated political economy can accommodate economic concerns and claims within the formalized structure of representation, whereas a more fragmented and, at times, closed system is unable to channel citizens' demands via institutions (closed opportunities). The fact that opportunities are closed might push citizens, unions, or other actors to pursue protest politics. Protests, in this sense, are employed as an alternative to influencing public authorities through traditional institutions (Cini 2017). This was the case with regard to the Romanian protests. Based on this, it could be expected that when a government has more fragmented relations with its citizens and offers them only closed opportunities, then these provoke more disruptive repertoires of action than when a government has more coordinated relations with the general public and offers them genuine opportunities for engagement.

In the economic model dependent on FDI and international companies with low-skilled workforces making labor-intensive products with a fluctuating price, companies are more eager to limit workers' influence in politics (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016). Together with the weak political system, the lack of independent administration makes the state even more vulnerable to being dominated by powerful economic interests, while at the same time closing the political opportunity for citizens to influence these matters via institutional channels. Additionally, citizens have little trust in and a low level of satisfaction with political systems in which the power distance between them and the political institutions is considerable (Hofstede 2001). Under these conditions, it can be expected that broader frames challenging this power asymmetry and distance will resonate well with the population and contribute to the spread of protests and broader sympathies. Last, the resource and support networks tend to be influenced by this setting.

In the Czech case, this article claims that a more coordinated economy and a lower perception of institutional domination by economic interests allowed for institutional accommodation of some of the protestors' claims and limited the protest frame to a local issue of ecology, a topic that does not resonate so well with Czech society. In the Czech Republic, socio-economic concerns constituted the main party line in the new democratic field of party politics soon after 1989 and have remained relevant ever

since (Mansfeldová 2007; Kroupa et al. 2004).⁵ As a consequence, the Czech Republic has a more coordinated economic system and traditional socio-economic cleavages that still incorporate the conventional partners. Socio-economic interests have mainly been articulated by way of institutionalized politics. In this way, economic demands find their way into politics via institutionalized means and do not enter the protest field (Císař 2017; Císař and Navrátil 2017). Although protesters framed their action inclusively under the slogan “We are the limits,” the main frame was ecological and concerned with cultural heritage. These themes were used by professional NGOs; however, the broader population in the Czech Republic are far more concerned with wages and reducing corruption than with preserving the environment and their cultural heritage (Vráblíková and Císař 2014).

By contrast, in Romania, protesters in the “Save Roșia Montană” campaign succeeded in framing the protest also as opposition to a corrupt political elite influenced strongly by multinational companies. The closed (captured) and volatile political system pushed citizens to exert extra-parliamentary pressure on political actors (Tatar 2015). Low state capacity and a volatile political system that has suffered periodic crises since the transition have limited the possibility of coherent economic planning and reforms, as well as the inclusion and coordination of relevant social actors and employers (Bohle and Greskovits 2012).⁶ As a result, multinational companies or local oligarchs, who obtained their fortunes during the transition, frequently dominated the administration or colluded with the government (Mungiu-Pippidi 2005; Dragoman 2011). This imbalance between actors increased when the Romanian government decided to use its natural resources as a base for the country’s economic recovery but offered their exploitation to large multinational companies. The perception of closed opportunities, unscrupulous companies, and the corrupt political system was prevalent, especially among urban inhabitants (Velicu 2012).

Demonstrations involving tens of thousands of participants in dozens of locations across the nation were, on the face of it, about environmental safeguarding but, underneath, they were mostly about respecting the will of local communities, and corrupt decision-making (Goussev et al. 2014). According to media reports uncovered by the research, these protests in the major Romanian cities were directed mainly

⁵ According to Císař and Navrátil (2017), this so-called embedded neoliberalism has been based on relatively generous welfare programs and, in general, “the search for compromises between market transformation and social cohesion.”

⁶ Although weak, Romanian unions organized frequent protests; yet, as the only means of reacting to the legislative process they are excluded from most of the negotiations (Bohle and Greskovits 2012).

against the political establishment (Rammelt 2017). The anti-corruption frame was the common thread, and it proved to be an effective mobilization framework because it is broad enough to leave ample room for the subjective sensitivities of a large part of Romanian society. The most visible protests were staged by young, formerly politically-detached people, who were manifesting a growing orientation toward law and order and demanding to have their share in the political process (Rammelt 2017; AFP 2016). The campaign also resonated with a general skepticism about the legitimate role of business in society and the use of natural resources (Burean and Badescu 2014).

4. “Save Roșia Montană” in Romania and “We are the limits” in the Czech Republic

The economic crisis, along with fluctuating prices of commodities and international competition from the emerging markets, pushed many countries to reconsidering their natural resources as a source of income. The coal and rare minerals (lithium) in the Czech Republic and the gold, oil, timber, and gas in Romania are seen as wealth that might sustain the national economy in the uncertain times ahead while helping to provide work for economically depressed areas. Citizens who live in areas where houses are threatened opposed this economic model and the urban middle classes and ecological associations feared the impact of these industries on the natural habitat.

5. Roșia Montană, a little village that sits on top of a gold mine

After the transition, Romania remained economically weak for a long time. Severely affected by the global economic crisis, its GDP fell more than 7% in 2009, forcing the Romanian government to request a \$26 billion IMF emergency assistance package. Following this, the Romanian government adopted drastic austerity measures, resulting in a further reduction in GDP of 1.3% in 2010. Although the economy has grown quickly since then, Romania still lags behind its more affluent European counterparts and has the highest inequality in the EU. The rising investments only partially placate its citizens’ demands for better public services, new infrastructure, and higher wages. In a context of rising prices of gold and rare metals, Romania seemed to find an alternative source of income in its abundant natural resources—petroleum, timber, natural gas, coal, iron, and gold. Likewise, the Australian mining boom has

spared the country from the economic downturn. Romanian natural resources were supposed to help kick-start a broader economic recovery.

Perhaps the largest of these extraction projects for both its scope and the reaction it provoked from the Romanian population was the proposed re-opening of a gold mine in the hills of Roșia Montană. Canadian company Gabriel Resources negotiated with the Romanian government and won the right to extract gold from an old mine in Roșia Montană using cyanide. According to the investors and the government, the project was expected to realize a profit of 7.5 billion, and several billion euro for the state in taxes, create jobs in the longtime depressed local economy, and provide future funding for local communities (McDonald-Gibson 2013). In 2013, a significant part of Romanian civil society protested against this project, the protest becoming the largest mobilization since the fall of Communism.

Apart from the company's optimistic prognostics for profit and revenues for the state, there were also voices who argued that Romania would benefit little. The initial deal granted the government a royalty rate of 6% and increased its stake to 25%, but potentially implied enormous costs to cover environmental cleanup (Balcaninsight.com 2013). Moreover, the mine would mean destroying four forested mountains and the potential contamination of local rivers and fragile ecosystems. If the mine opened, the company would have to force the relocation of residents from three villages, which would be razed to the ground, to extract 350 tons of gold and 1500 tons of silver. For this purpose, the company created a shared venture with the state called the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) (Balcaninsight.com 2013).

Despite the problems outlined, the economic incentives for the extraction and investors' pressure on the government were high. This is showed by a radical shift in the stance of the governing party. At first, the Social Democratic Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, was a vehement opponent of the project, but he changed his mind after he became Prime Minister in 2013 (Bayerle and Olteanu 2016). He argued that not going ahead with the project "would be a catastrophe for Romania" as it "would be a negative signal to foreign investors." Shortly after, the government declared the project to be of national interest and quickly proposed new legislation that would allow RMGC to unilaterally force land buyouts (HotNewsRo 2013). Victor Ponta declared that "if Parliament decides not to support this project, Romania would give the message that we are against foreign investors, against the exploitation of our potential, and this would be a disaster for Romania (HotNewsRo 2013)." He said in English at the Eastern Europe Investment Summit, organized by Reuters, that Roșia Montană was a critical project, symbolizing what was to come, "We must take advantage of our natural resources, of course respecting all environmental standards, but if they are respected,

we should be in favor of exploration” (HotNewsRo 2013). Romania’s Prime Minister acknowledged that the Roșia Montană project was a controversial one, but urged his supporters in parliament “to prove once again that Romania does not deny its right to development” (HotNewsRo 2013). This shift in government position shows the existence of the commodities consensus and of extractivism in Romania and the vulnerability of political elite to global pressures exerted by companies and investors.

Likewise, the local political and administrative elites were supportive of the RMGC project because it would harness economic resources and bring jobs to the severely economically deprived area. According to reports by activists, local authorities complied fully with RMGC’s demands and produced and very quickly approved urban plans that permitted the conversion of the rural area into an industrial zone (Marica 2013; Bayerle and Olteanu 2016). However, such prioritization of one economic sector made any alternative financial strategies virtually impossible. Many local citizens highlighted conflicts of interest as some of the councilors or their family members were allegedly on RMGC’s payroll (Boros and Barr 2013). In this way, the same kind of economic dependence is reproduced at local levels, where large and controlling companies in small communities frequently use their structural power to dominate the government and impose their private interests (Mares, Muntean, and Petrova 2016).

From a local campaign to a nationwide protest

The Roșia Montană project prompted a myriad of social conflicts and protests. The local people were confronted by a dilemma. The project planned to create several hundred jobs, a considerable attraction in an impoverished mining region where few other alternatives existed (Bayerle and Olteanu 2016). Some residents sold their property to RMGC, either willingly or under duress, and moved to modern new settlements provided by the company on the outskirts of the largest nearby city, Alba Iulia. Pressure was then put on those who were unwilling to leave. Over 100 citizens stayed and mounted resistance. As a result, the community began to fracture, and whole families fell out over their differences as to whether to stay or relocate (Bayerle and Olteanu 2016). Two movements emerged, locals and miners who were in favor of instigating the mining, and those against, who wanted more ecologically sustainable development. Those already working in the industry supported the extension of mining activities by referring to Câmpeni as a historic mining town and to RMGC as the only investor and job provider in a local economy with high unemployment.

Those who refused to sell their properties formed a group and received support from the Open Society Foundations and the university in Cluj-Napoca to spread the

protests across the country and to the Western media. Under the banner “Save Roșia Montană,” a large number of residents of Câmpeni (one of the towns threatened by the mine) gathered in the town center to protest (Dale-Harris 2013). The activists claimed that the project would cause an environmental disaster and threaten the ancient Roman archeological sites. They also maintained that it would return all assets and profits to the Canadian company, whereas Romania would bear all the ecological damage (Preda 2016; Velicu and Kaika 2017).

Nevertheless, the protests started to gather pace after 2013, when Ponta’s government was prepared to pass a piece of legislation that would give RMGC the preferential right to issue compulsory purchase orders to the residents who refused to sell their houses and lands. The draft law also set time limits for the state authorities to grant all permits, regardless of potential infringements of national legislation or court rulings (Dale-Harris 2013; Bayerle and Olteanu 2016). The protests quickly spread from Cluj-Napoca to towns and cities across the country, recruiting thousands of people in Bucharest and in Cluj-Napoca itself. The “Save Roșia Montană” campaign became at that time the largest social movement in Romania since the 1989 revolution. In 2013, several thousands of protesters marched across the largest cities, including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, and Brașov. The protesters marched holding signs with slogans such as, “Save Roșia Montană,” “The corporation doesn’t make the legislation,” and “Corruption equals Cyanide,” and called for the government to withdraw the new legislation (Bayerle and Olteanu 2016; Preda 2016).

Although all social strata were present, a vast majority of the protesters were young educated professionals (Poenu 2013). Whereas the environmental claim was strongest within civil rights groups, the young urban classes concentrated more on opposing the corrupt government and administration, which could easily be bought by the interests of large national and multinational companies (UBB academic 2017). This wider frame also appeared in the media. “We do not want to sell our country for free to foreigners. We have a corrupted government that is not listening to our opinions,” declared several protestors to the Western media (Dunlop 2012; The Economist 2013), and the comment below appeared in the national and international media:

Our government has used its position to exploit and not care for its citizens. This is not an issue the majority of people agree with. A private company is being given power in a way that is unheard of through a private contract between the state and this company. (Wong 2013)

My interview in Bucharest (Former opposition politician 2017) confirmed that the anti-corruption dimension further magnified the scope of the protests, attracting more

adherents, who had paid little if any attention to ecology before this. For these protesters, the whole case was symptomatic of a corrupt political class who colluded with economic interests.

On 14 June 2014, parliament bowed to public pressure and rejected the RMGC bill. In 2016, the Minister of Culture vowed to put an end to gold mining using cyanide and declared Roşia Montană to be a historic site of national interest, thereby prohibiting all drilling in the area. He also urged the National Anticorruption Directorate to investigate the entire RMGC deal. However, as Europe struggles with slow economic growth, Romania is not the only country considering turning to its natural resources to try and boost income. Greece is facing a similar battle over a gold mine and both Italy and Spain have approved controversial oil extraction projects. In addition, the Czech Republic is deciding what energy policies should be pursued in the future and has initiated a discussion about the future of coal supplies and certain rare materials.

6. Czech Republic: Horní Jiřetín, like a dog in the manger

In 2013, President Miloš Zeman and the Minister of Industry publicly suggested the abolition of the ecological limits for brown coal mining established in 1991 in the north of the country (Lukáš 2015; lidovky.cz 2013). These limits guaranteed that residential areas would not be demolished due to mining. As impermeable boundaries, they needed to protect both nature and the transport infrastructure of the North Bohemian brown coal basin. Mining companies, however, have never given up wishing to extract coal from under the residential communities here. As far back as 1994, Mostecká uhelná (Most Coal Group) prepared a study of the demolition of Horní Jiřetín and Černice, villages that were sitting on 280 million tons of brown coal. Despite several protests against the mining, the Social government decided in 2015 to abolish the limits but to spare the village of Horní Jiřetín, which would be immediately threatened by the mining operation. The reasons given were mostly economic.

The traumatic practice of population displacement due to the extraction of natural resources is nothing new in Czech history. Since 1955, more than 80 municipalities, including the medieval city of Most that has monuments dating from the 13th century, have been razed to the ground or moved due to coal extraction. In the early 1990s, the last victim of the mining activity was the town of Libkovice. After the fall of the Communist regime, successive governments tried to balance the plans of mining companies and corporations on the one hand with the interests of local people and the environment on the other. In 1991, the government established the mining limits with

the purposes of guaranteeing safety to local communities and allowing for alternative economic development. During the financial crisis, the government several times opened up the possibility of breaching the limits.

In 2015, the Social Democratic coalition government proposed breaching the limits of brown coal mining in North Bohemia, which at the worst would have meant the demolition of the villages of Horní Jiřetín and Černice. The government's original project counted on breaking limits in two mines: Bílina (owned by a national company, ČEZ) and ČSA, which was privatized and in the hands of a Czech millionaire and *Mostecká uhelná společnost*⁷ (Most Coal Group). If the limits were to be exceeded at the ČSA mine, Horní Jiřetín would have to be demolished.⁸ There would also be a significant threat to some parts of the town of Litvínov, where the extraction would encroach on houses at a distance of 500 m. In addition, the new boundary of the mine would be very near the city of Most. Some experts argued, however, that the coal reserves under Horní Jiřetín were not worthy of such costs (iDNES.cz 2015c).

The Czech government adopted a positive but cautious stance on the issue of mining limits. The Czech government was not unanimously inclined to support the drilling. Some ministers expressed publicly their reservations (Horák 2015). Already, in 2012, the previous government had decided to amend the Mining Laws and remove the expropriation paragraphs facilitating expropriation in favor of mining companies. On the contrary, the government wanted to retain control of this strategic natural resource (iDNES.cz 2014; Rovenský 2015). Its main concerns were the economic situation and the development of commodity and energy prices on the global market. The Prime Minister reported in the media that economic reasons weighed heavily and that supporting employment was an important issue during the decision-making process. The government was especially concerned with energetic autonomy and economic losses on the part of the mine owners and, of course, large job losses in the city of Most (a city with a high unemployment rate of 13% in a country with a rate of less than 5%) (Novinky.cz 2015). The government feared that according to analyses of ČEZ (a partly state-owned energy and electric company), which predicted that coal supply for small consumers and heating plants would be compromised by 2022.

Coal mining in the area also had vociferous supporters, especially among the unions, mining companies, and miners, who cited the economic benefits for the region and the

⁷ *Mostecká uhelná společnost* or Most Coal Group company is private mining and electric company.

⁸ If Černice and Horní Jiřetín were demolished, the mining companies would acquire another approximately 255 million tons of brown coal and the mines would absorb an additional 25 km² of land.

jobs that the revival of mining would bring to a region with high unemployment. As in Roşia Montană, the pro-mining camp, which was composed of unions and miners, also staged protests in the local area and before the government, in which they argued for the right to maintain their employment and underlined the lack of alternatives in the region. Their banners carried slogans such as “Coal employs and heats” and “Coal warms up a million households” (Mikulka 2015; ČTK 2015a).

Moreover, the local chamber of industry and commerce sided with the miners. The president of the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Jaroslav Hanák, said to the media (Lidovky.cz 2015; ČTK 2015b),

The Government does not have the political courage to say clearly and honestly to citizens who currently live on the reserves of strategic raw materials that these people should move because [coal] is part of the national wealth. We think that we should use our national wealth and not sit on it like a dog in the manger.

Jaroslav Hanák also called for a swift, positive decision on the limits, “As a federation of industry, we support the Ministry of Industry’s proposal that the decision should be reached as soon as possible” (Lidovky.cz 2015). According to the ČEZ’s spokesmen, the mines were supplying cheap heat for four million people in the Czech Republic. The end of coal from the ČSA mine might mean the end of affordable heat for half of Prague and other towns and businesses (Novinky.cz 2015; iDNES.cz 2015b).

Not surprisingly, local associations, Greenpeace, and local political parties had a different view. The head of the Greenpeace energy campaign (Greenpeace.org 2015) declared in a public statement:

The debate about the limits is absurd. The government has been deciding whether to destroy one city and to move a thousand people so that we can remain the third largest exporter of electricity in Europe. We are exporting more electricity than all the Czech households put together consume at home.

The mayor of Horní Jiřetín argued for the need to think about an alternative economic model for the region:

The development of this territory cannot constantly be subordinated to the economy of mining companies. We cannot solve the employment of northern Bohemia by prolonging the life of the quarries but by restructuring the existing heavy industry and supporting economic activities with higher added value. (Greenpeace.org 2015)

Local communities and fading resistance

Horní Jiřetín and Černice are relatively large villages, each having about 2000 inhabitants. As in Câmpeni, the community is against the proposed mining. In 2005, Horní Jiřetín organized a referendum in which large majority of the population supported the existence of limits and did not want to move out or sell their land (iDNES.cz 2015a). However, since then, the situation has changed and the economic pressure from the mining company with regard to purchasing houses, the uncertainty that negatively affects the local economy, and lack of state investment have slowly eroded the local feeling of unity in the village. As a result, many locals have moved out (iDNES.cz 2015a). The city of Most, a mining community with 70,000 inhabitants near to Horní Jiřetín and with the highest unemployment rate in the country, wants both mines to remain open. The mayor of Most, Jan Paparega, said in the media (Gordíková 2015), “We are disappointed with the government’s approach. The members of the current government visited the city of Most, and they saw that we need a solution for the economic situation of the city. Coal is a strategic resource.” The Green Party, Greenpeace and environmental organizations, on the other hand, helped the local community to organize events, information campaigns, and protests (iDNES.cz 2015b). Despite the general support of the Czech population, the issue has remained a problem of ecology (Trachtová 2014).

Compared to the “Save Roșia Montană” mobilization, in the Czech Republic, the protests were only episodic. The most active segments were academic institutions (the Academy of Science, for example) and environmental organizations that organized several events and protest actions. However, they failed to attract broader support across Czech society. According to reports in the media, around 3000 people participated in the nationwide “We are the limits” campaign. Several direct actions, sit-ins, and protests took place in 22 cities, some with less than 100 participants (Česká televize 2015). In 2015, the government decided on an extension of the mining limits that would spare (at least for now) the village of Horní Jiřetín and maintain extraction in the Bílina mine. After five years, the future of Horní Jiřetín can be considered again (Mikulka 2015).

7. Discussion and conclusion

First, this paper aimed to investigate protests against extractive industries in two localities in two countries, Câmpeni and Horní Jiřetín, in Romania and the Czech Republic, respectively, which have recently reconsidered applying extraction politics to their natural resources. In so doing, the paper has applied the framework developed by Cini et al. (2017) that links the processes of accumulation and capitalist transformation with the emergence of movements. By linking the accumulation dynamics and mobilization processes, these protests can be interpreted as being the result of new modes of accumulation by dispossession. This characterization of the protests seems to better account for their timing, diverse claims, composition, and their juxtaposition with traditional labor movements and unions. These protests attracted participants from environmental and social movements, workers, and people from both the rural and urban population. In addition, their claims shared a common concern that illustrates the cross-over between the defense of the local community and its environment, and alternative economic development and the commons.

Second, this paper has examined how other contextual factors contribute to shaping the conditions from which the mobilization processes emerge. Whereas in the Czech case a more coordinated organization of the economy allowed accommodation of some of the claims through institutional means, in the case of Romania, the high risk of the government being dominated by the economic interests of large multinational companies produced the broad framing of these protests, including an anti-corruption frame that resonated well with Romanian society, helping the movement to spread more widely and resulting in its becoming a greater threat to the government.

Third, an interesting finding emerging from following the new framework is that both types of movements—those emerging from the process of accumulation by dispossession and those derived from the process of accumulation in production—can be present simultaneously. Moreover, they can also be opposed to each other, for example in the case of miners and unions supporting industrial development at the same time as they were confronting the local movements that were opposing extraction in their area. This finding adds more nuances to the research on anti-austerity movements by showing that where the economic models are adjusting or are in crisis, several types of social movements can emerge.

Finally, although the protest campaign in Romania could be considered as successful, this type of mobilization can also have adverse consequences. It can create a dynamic of scandals and protests that are not reflected in participation by the electorate or in the final policies adopted by the government. Likewise, movements calling for the

alternative economic use of land can push extraction to new frontiers and impose new ways of dispossession. Future research on extractivism could, therefore, focus on the relationship between extraction and movements against dispossession in more general terms. One of the promising avenues for research in this field could be the processes of gentrification and extraction of value from urban spaces (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017).

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