

Canadian Mining Investments in Argentina and the Construction of a Mining–Development Nexus

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This article explores the relations between Argentina and Canada through the mining sector during the political cycle of Kirchnerism (2003–2015). Mining has been a growing economic sector but also a source of social resistance capable of mobilizing a regulatory agenda that sets restrictions to this activity. State political agency has been central to managing these tensions. How has the state responded to the growth of the mining industry? What has been Canada's role in this process? The claim is that Kirchnerism's response to growing anti-mining resistance in a context of macroeconomic tensions has been to reframe transnational mining as consistent with a national development outlook. We explore this argument by looking at changes at the material, discursive, and institutional dimensions of the mining–development nexus.

El artículo explora las relaciones entre Argentina y Canadá en el sector minero durante el ciclo político del Kirchnerismo (2003–2015). El sector de la minería creció significativamente durante este periodo si bien también fue objeto de resistencias sociales que llevaron a reformas del contexto regulatorio de la minería introduciendo restricciones a la actividad. El papel del estado ha sido central en la gestión de estas tensiones. ¿Cómo ha respondido el estado al crecimiento de la industria minera? ¿Cuál ha sido el papel de Canadá en este proceso? Proponemos como hipótesis que el Kirchnerismo emprendió la redefinición del significado de la minería transnacional en términos de una visión de desarrollo nacional como respuesta ante la creciente resistencia anti-minera en un contexto de tensiones macroeconómicas. Para fundamentar esta hipótesis mostramos la construcción de un nexo entre minería y el desarrollo a partir de un cambio en sus dimensiones material, discursivo e institucional.

Key words: Argentina–Canada relations, mining, neo-extractivism, neo-structuralism, social-movement resistance

Introduction

The investments of Canadian mining corporations have played a leading role in the growth of large-scale metal mining in Argentina. This growth has its origins in the policies implemented by the Carlos Menem administration in the 1990s during the rise of neoliberalism. The political and economic

crisis that hit the country in 2001 prepared the ground for Kirchnerism, the political cycle that began with the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and continued with the Cristina Fernández administrations (2007–2011, and 2011–2015). Kirchnerism is a distinctive form of political economy based on economic nationalism, fiscal discipline, and stable macroeconomic policy (Wylde, 2011). The mining sector expanded tremendously during this cycle due to investments in exploration and exploitation, mainly in metal mining. Despite this growth, metal mining has remained largely absent from the national political debate, especially in relation to its implications for development.

An important part of the literature attributes the expansion of metal mining in post-neoliberal Argentina to the convergence of a series of factors, namely the continuity of the regulatory frameworks inherited from the 1990s¹ that are favorable toward mining, the increase in mineral prices on the international market due to demand from China, and the financialization of natural resources (Basualdo & Manzanelli, 2010; Gómez Sabaini, Jiménez, & Morán, 2015; Prado, 2005; Svampa, 2011). It is our understanding that such a diagnosis is based on a static view of the mining sector's growth process, in which the state is seen as a mere recipient of investments from foreign capital. This interpretation of the expansion of mining does not give due importance to the role of politics in ensuring the viability of mining activities. Political agency is crucial to create conditions of acceptance for this activity, particularly at a time when extractive industries have been a source of tensions between competing expectations about the role that natural resources or nature have in the development models of countries and in regional integration processes (Bebington, 2012; Gudynas, 2009, 2012; Haarstad, 2012; Hogenboom, 2012; Saguier, 2012a, 2014). Canada's political role in this process has not been analyzed sufficiently beyond its being an exporter of foreign direct investment in mining activities.

In this article, we raise the following questions. How has the state responded to the growth of the mining industry under Kirchnerism? What has been Canada's role in this process? The main claim is that the growth of mining under Kirchnerism demanded a transformation of the national government's strategy for dealing with the mining sector that was a response to growing social resistance to this activity in a context of macroeconomic tensions. It was done by redefining the place of mining in the country's growth strategy by placing its bets on the construction of a *mining-for-development* agenda. In this respect, we understand the Argentine mining regime as an open and ongoing process.

To explore this claim, in the first section we discuss the notion of the "internationalization of the state" as a concept to frame the ongoing processes of transformation taking place in Argentina and Canada in relation to mining. Changes in both countries are intertwined and reciprocally reinforcing, since the expansion of the mining sector in Argentina is related to the growing standing of Canada as a leading player in the global mining sector. Furthermore, mining in Argentina has been a source of social contestation that led to changes in the regulatory framework and introduced restrictions to mining. In the second section we look at the role of social resistance and regulatory

reform processes in making mining a subject of national debate in ways that posed a challenge to the government's capacity to control the mining agenda.

The construction of a mining–development nexus was the government's response to a change of context that was increasingly adverse for this activity. In the remaining part of the article we explore the construction of this nexus in three dimensions. In the third section, we focus on the *material* dimension of this nexus by looking at the changes to the mining sector and the participation of Canadian investments in this process. In a context of anti-mining resistance and of a regulatory-reform agenda, the expansion of mining has also necessitated recreating new bases of legitimacy and consent. Kirchnerism's response was to reframe the meaning of mining as an activity that is consistent with a national-development outlook. This *discursive* dimension of the mining–development nexus is explored in the fourth section in relation to an emerging neostructuralist discourse of mining. The fifth section looks at the *institutional* dimension of the mining–development nexus. New institutional arrangements were set in place to articulate provincial, national, and transnational actors at a multi-scalar level that are relevant for the governance of mining.

The construction of the notion that transnational foreign capital in the mining sector can be consistent with a national-development framework has no doubt been a tension underlying Kirchnerism policies and strategies in this sector. This tension between nationalist and internationalist elements is a defining feature of Kirchnerism's political economy (Wylde, 2011), as is evidenced in the three dimensions of analysis that this article proposes.

Mining in Canada and Argentina's Internationalization Processes

Canada has been a key player in the transformation of the relation between mining and development in Argentina, but its role has not been strictly economic. In this section, we argue that the development of the Argentina–Canada relation on mining constitutes a process through which both countries establish new state configurations as part of the dynamics of international integration.

The concept of the “internationalization of the state” is useful for understanding the changes in the mining sector in Argentina and Canada. Originally, the concept was coined to refer to the political–institutional changes that states were undergoing as part of their integration into neoliberal globalization (Brand, 2007; Cox, 1996; Robinson, 2001). These changes consisted of prioritizing state agendas and bodies that managed policies aligned with the interests of economic groups linked to the global market—central banks, finance ministries, trade—so as to isolate them from the pressures of democratic processes and citizens' demands. The intention was also to share (if not delegate) the task of defining and managing policies with corporate actors, thereby legitimizing new forms of “private authority” (Hall & Biersteker, 2003). To effectuate these changes, hegemonic consensus had to be constructed through processes involving power struggles with social and political resistance movements and groups. We propose that the phase of growth of mining in Argentina during the past decade is embedded in the state-

transformation process, which is linked to the transformation of the Canadian state. In other words, both countries reconfigured their state structures as part of a political–commercial relation centered on mining.

The process of internationalizing the state in Canada is associated with the strengthening of the country's mining corporations, especially during Stephen Harper's conservative government (2006–2015). The promotion of the interests of the mining sector is understood as a Canadian foreign-policy objective (Engler, 2012; Heidrich & McDonald, 2014; Klassen, 2014). Support for the sector included the mobilization of public resources via the Department of Foreign Affairs, the International Trade and the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Export Development Canada (EDC), as well as the creation of a lax regulatory and legal framework in the sector's favor, which has turned Canada into a true "legal and financial haven" for mining (Deneault & Sacher, 2012).

The regulatory framework for mining in Canada is characterized by the government's adoption of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda as a strategy for responding to the increase in questioning of the participation of Canadian corporations in human-rights violations of communities resisting mining operations in foreign countries (CCSRC, 2009; Grupo de Trabajo sobre Minería y Derechos Humanos en América Latina, 2014).² As a model based on voluntary self-regulation, CSR has proven to be notoriously limited as a viable option for regulating the activities of corporations (McCarthy & Morling, 2015; Saguier, 2012b). Even so, Canada gives priority to this model over the option of creating a binding legal framework with extraterritorial scope and the capacity to regulate the activities of mining corporations in other countries. An opposition coalition in the parliament promoted this option unsuccessfully.

Canada's federal environmental laws have also been affected by the efforts to build an institutional structure that favors the interests of the mining sector. A recent report demonstrated that during the Harper administration, environmental laws in Canada were weakened as the result of concessions granted to industrial sectors, including mining (Johnston, 2015). Another indication of the imbrication of mining interests with the state is the fact that the Canadian Pension Plan is an important institutional investor with a considerable amount of resources invested in the shares of mining corporations listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange—the main financial market for mining corporations in the world. The primacy of Canadian investments in the international mining market is also reflected in the recent importance attributed to Latin America in Canada's international relations. In the past, Canada had not maintained substantial political or economic ties with the region.

Argentina's mining-based relationship with Canada is also part of a state transformation process. The crisis of the neoliberal state in Argentina in 2001–2003 paved the way for the establishment of a neo-extractivist state founded through efforts to stimulate export-oriented growth of the natural resource sectors and redistributive policies funded by the fiscal surpluses (Gudynas, 2009, 2012). This growth of mining during Kirchnerism took place under the federal regulatory–institutional framework dating back to the 1990s, which awards the provinces control over natural resources and creates

a royalties system and a law on investment in mining. Kirchnerism introduced significant changes to the national government's policies and its relation with the provinces. The literature on mining highlights the continuities of the Argentine mining regime in a post-neoliberal context without analyzing its contradictions and adaptations to the political and economic demands of the new national and international context. We understand the Argentine mining regime as an open, ongoing process that entails changes to the regime's material, institutional, and discursive bases to ensure the viability of the mining sector in light of growing social resistance to this activity and macroeconomic tensions. In other words, the changes to the state during Kirchnerism in relation to mining, and to the Canadian mining industry in particular, were marked by the political efforts to administer these tensions.

One element connecting the internationalization processes of both countries is the creation of governance networks for mining that articulate public and private actors around the coordination and management of mining issues at different levels of government and jurisdictions—provincial, national, and international. Understood as “international state apparatuses” (Brand, 2007), these governance networks consist of a constellation of actors and interests that make up an asymmetric field for the management of mining issues, where mining is understood as a vehicle for promoting Argentina's international integration in connection with Canada. They constitute “assemblages of territory” where processes of globalization, even though they are localized in national or even subnational settings, are oriented toward global agendas and systems. As Sassen (2006) defines them, they are “multisided, transboundary networks and formations which can include normative orders; they connect subnational or ‘national’ processes, institutions and actors, but not necessarily through the formal interstate system” (p. 3). The creation of this governance network redefines federal relations on mining in Argentina and serves as a space for transnational coordination with Canadian corporations and public authorities.

Social Resistance to Large-Scale Metal Mining as a National Issue

The politics of large-scale mining under Kirchnerism in Argentina has been shaped by the social resistances of local communities. Organized grassroots opposition to mining projects, mainly to Canadian investments, was a driver of a process of regulatory change that set restrictions to mining at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. In this section, we discuss the interplay of social resistances and regulatory changes as a set of related processes that led to the positioning of mining as a national issue for the first time. Such a change in the political context of mining required the national government to adopt a different role with respect to the promotion of this activity.

In 2002, community opposition to a project of the Canadian-based Meridian Gold in the Patagonian city of Esquel, in the province of Chubut, was the symbolic birthmark of a grassroots anti-mining movement, the Union of Citizen Assemblies (UAC, Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas). A mobilized community at Esquel managed to have local authorities call a plebiscite in 2003 to decide over the approval of Meridian Gold's project. The overall majority of

voters (82%) voted against large-scale mining (*No a la mina*, 2003). It resulted not only in the halting of the project but also in the passing of a city bylaw that forbids large-scale mining and the use of cyanide (often used in the separation of gold from rocks).

The experience of Esquel inspired the surge of other anti-mining community assemblies throughout the country that were later articulated in UAC. UAC's demand is to have the state comply with the right of indigenous peoples and communities to free, prior, and informed consent, in accordance with the commitments Argentina assumed under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. UAC also played a critical role in the town of Famatina, in the province of La Rioja, where resistance also stopped mining projects of Canadian companies, such as Barrick Gold in 2007, and Osisko Mining in 2012.

In many cases, the resistance struggles led to reforms to provincial legislation in addition to municipal bylaws to ban open-pit mining with the use of toxic substances. The majority of provincial laws were adopted between 2003 and 2011 (Christel, 2013; Delamata, 2013).³ These conflicts and reforms were considered issues of a local or provincial nature, devoid of anything that would suggest the need for a national response, so the national government did not explicitly take a position on this phenomenon, nor did it try to stop it or promote it by adopting national regulation to homogenize criteria. The provinces had to "resolve" the growing unrest, which included the repression of the social conflicts (Berardi, 2013).

Beyond the municipal and provincial scales, the mining issue made it on the national scene in a political and legislative process surrounding the approval of a glacier-protection act that took place between 2008 and 2010. The expansion of mining activities posed a great risk to glaciers, and hence to the availability of fresh water on which various ecosystems and populations depend. Awareness of the effects of mining on glaciers came from the advocacy work against the Pascua Lama binational project (Argentina–Chile) of the Canadian company Barrick Gold. The first draft bill was approved in 2008 with the endorsement of pro-government legislators, only to be vetoed later by the executive branch. The veto revealed the national government's lack of preparation and failure to define a policy to address the growing demand for mining regulations based on environmental protection criteria. Also, it evidenced the extent to which the national government was aligned with Barrick Gold in becoming a key player in mining sector (Grinspun, 2014).

In 2010, a federal law was finally approved on the basis of two proposed bills, one of which was presented by a senator of the governing Front for Victory alliance. This unprecedented glacier protection law affected the prospects of current and future mining investments that would not be permitted to take place on the grounds that they damaged glaciers and peri-glacier areas. Notwithstanding the novelty of this legislation and potential to reshape the terms of mining politics in Argentina, the glacier protection law is a fragile instrument in terms of implementation and long-term political support behind it. Glacier concerns are not in the agenda's main political forces or part of solid consensus between

political forces (Ryan, 2014), but it became clear that the general public was largely favorable to a law to protect the many glaciers in the country. It raised the government's political costs of not having a favorable stand on environmental protection, yet it did not prevent the subsequent judicialization of the law application in some provinces. The resurgence of community protests in the town of Famatina in 2012, in opposition to a project of the Osisko Mining, once again revived the debate on mining, drawing public and media attention nationally.

These events show that mining had become an issue capable of entering the national attention in terms of public awareness and legislative process. Anti-mining movements and political allies portrayed mining in negative terms, as a form of extractivism and dependence, a form of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2004) insofar as the growth of the mining sector comes at the expense of undermining rights of peoples and nature (Svampa, 2011). Likewise, the anti-mining protests, and the regulatory reform process it had enabled, suggested that the hegemonic consent that had favored mining since the 1990s had been eroded. Such consent had understood that mining was consistent with the "local development" of provinces.

The management of the mining conflicts and policies had overpassed the provincial spheres and control, exposing the vulnerability of the mining regulatory frameworks to the contestation between social actors, mining corporations, and provincial and national governments. It also exposed the lack of preparedness of the national government to cope with the nationalization of the mining issue, as is seen in the case of the glacier and the resort to a veto regarded as a reactive, unpopular measure. It demonstrated that the state had no clear policy on the issue, or at least not one that could be defended publicly.

It becomes a turning point in the country's mining policy. The national state took the lead in an area that until then was of provincial jurisdiction and responsibility. In an attempt to regain its leadership, the national government established a new relationship with the provinces and metal mining. A new "common sense" on mining had to be constructed to build legitimacy for this activity. In the effort to "compensate" for the clearly extractive nature of large-scale mining, the national government's response was to invest in the construction of a nexus between *mining* and *development*. In the remainder of the article we analyze the construction of the mining–development nexus in terms of its material, discursive, and institutional dimensions. Such new articulation constitutes a feature of the internationalization of the Argentine state through its mining sector.

Canada as an Investor in Metal Mega-Mining in Argentina

The politicization of mining as a national issue and related changes in the regulatory context that were discussed in the previous section took place at the height of a phenomenal growth of the mining sector. In this section we look at the main characteristics of this sector to highlight the weight of Canadian investments in it. Likewise, we show where Argentina—and the Latin American region—features in the internationalization strategies of Canadian transnational corporations at the regional and global scales.

The phenomenal growth of the mining sector is one of the distinctive features of the processes of state transformation under Kirchnerism. Between 2002 and 2011, investment in mining increased 1,587%, from U.S.\$160 million to U.S.\$2.7 billion. In the same period, the sector's production expanded 841%, from U.S.\$3.3 billion to U.S.\$31.6 billion tons, and the number of mining projects increased 3,311%, from 18 to 6,147 (Ministerio de Planificación Federal, Inversión Pública y Servicios, n.d.). An important part of the growth of this sector is attributed to Canadian investments.

The participation of Canadian corporations as the main investors in large-scale metal mining is responsible for an important part of the sector's expansion (Basualdo & Manzanelli, 2010). Of the total mining corporations active in Argentina, 46% are Canadian and 17% are Argentinean; this number includes exploration and exploitation companies and company partnerships in metal and non-metal mining projects (Rojas & Asociados, 2010). Canadian firms are distributed mainly among (and in some cases associated with) six projects (see Table 1). In addition to the mines that are currently operational, we can add those of Osisko Mining in Famatina (La Rioja), and the binational Pascua-Lama project (San Juan, Argentina, and Chile), both halted for the moment, as well as the Glencore project in Cerro Negro (Santa Cruz).

Canadian investments are concentrated in precious metals, namely gold, and to a lesser extent, silver (OETEC-ID, 2014). Between 1998 and 2009, six Canadian companies controlled 43% of the sales of all metal-mining corporations among the 1,000 companies with the highest sales in Argentina (Basualdo & Manzanelli, 2010).

Latin America is a priority in the internationalization strategies of the Canadian mining sector. Currently, the majority of Canadian investments in mining are in the projects of large and medium-sized companies operating in foreign countries, mainly in precious metals. More than half of Canadian mining corporations' assets are invested in Latin America (Keenan, 2010). In

Table 1. The Main Canadian Mining Corporations in Argentina and Their Extractive Profile (2006–2012)

Project	Province	Corporation (% of shares)	Mineral (% of earnings)
Manantial Espejo	Santa Cruz	Pan American Silver (100%)	Silver (56%) Gold (44%)
Pirquitas	Jujuy	Silver Standards Resources (100%)	Silver (99%) Zinc (1%)
San José	Santa Cruz	McEwen Mining* (49%)	Silver (60%) Gold (40%)
Veladero	San Juan	Barrick Gold (100%)	Gold (95%) Silver (5%)
Bajo de la Alumbrera	Catamarca	Goldcorp** (37%) Yamana Gold** (13%)	Gold (81%) Copper (19%)
Gualcamayo	San Juan	Yamana Gold (100%)	Gold (100%)

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CIDPNSI (n.d.).

2012, 35% of the projects of Canadian mining companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange had investments in Latin America, which shows the region's relative importance, especially when compared to the distribution of Canadian investments in other regions—28% in the United States, 15% in Africa, 8% in Australia, 7% in Asia, and 7% in Europe (Grupo de Trabajo sobre Minería y Derechos Humanos en América Latina, 2014, p. 9).

Argentina is an important country for the global expansion of Canadian mining corporations. According to Natural Resources Canada (2014) data available on the distribution of Canadian mining investment in Latin America in 2012,⁴ Argentina comes in third on the list of host countries (see Figure 1). Similarly, Argentina provides an important part of Canadian mining corporations' total mining revenues, coming in third place behind Chile, Mexico, and Peru (see Figure 2).

In sum, the growth of the mining sector during Kirchnerism was consolidated with the high concentration of Canadian investments, particularly in gold mining. Argentina's relation with Canada on mining represents a mode of international insertion that links the state transformation processes of both countries. In the following section, we analyze these changes to the discourse to frame mining as an activity that contributes to national development.

Neoliberalism: Constructing the Discourse on Mining for National Development

The growth of the mining sector was a source of contention for anti-mining resistance movements. Socioenvironmental conflicts and the politicization of mining caused a shift in discourse aimed at altering the view on mining, from a purely extractive and ecologically predatory activity to one able to contribute to the country's development. Neoliberalism emerged as a new discursive space aimed at changing the meaning of mining from a foreign-controlled, export-oriented, socio-environmentally destructive activity to one

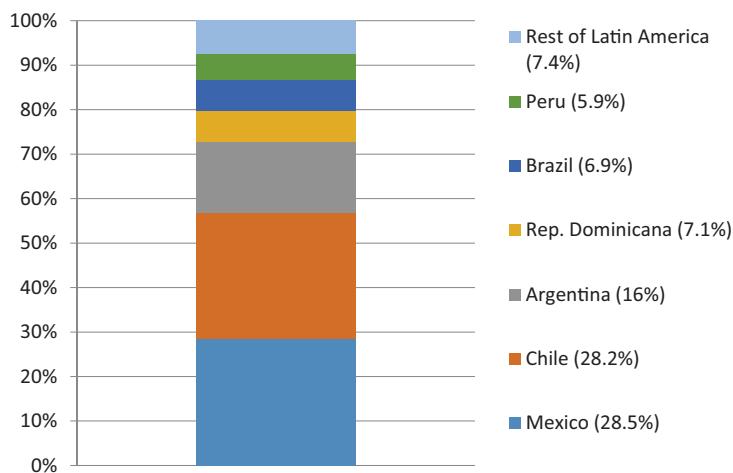


Figure 1. Distribution of Canadian Investment in Latin America, 2012
Source: Authors' elaboration, based on Natural Resources Canada (2014).

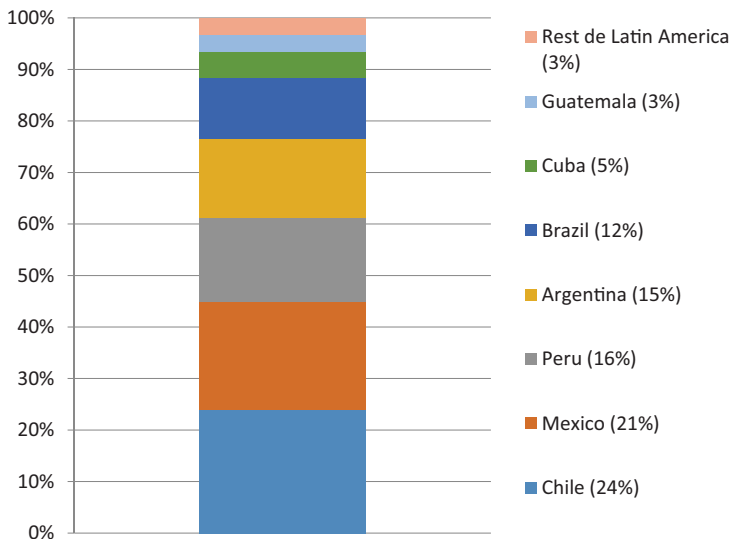


Figure 2. Distribution of Canadian Revenues in Latin America, 2006–2012

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CIDPNSI (n.d.).

that can generate benefits in terms of employment, as well as environmental responsibility. In this section, we analyze the characteristics of this discourse while focusing on the changes to and continuities in the meaning of mining inherited from the 1990s. The importance of Kirchnerism's new discourse on mining lies in its use as a strategy to build a new hegemonic meaning to lend legitimacy to this activity.

The increase in the questioning of and social resistance to large-scale mining and the appearance on the national scene of the resistance brought to light the national government's lack of symbolic resources for the framing and legitimization of policies for the sector. The association between mining and national development was inexistent (Svampa & Antonelli, 2009), unlike in the oil sector, which has historically been embedded in a vision of national development, containing concepts such as economic and energy sovereignty, state planning, and strategic natural resources. The same holds true for agriculture, which is one of the traditional sectors in the myths about Argentina's origin as the "granary of the world." Svampa affirms that with no tradition in mining—that is, with no imaginary available—dispossession appears brutally, with all its virulence and without developmentalist disguises (2011, pp. 207–208).

In the 1990s, the significance of mining was defined in material terms—as an activity that generates economic growth without taking into consideration its social, environmental, or distributive aspects (IDESIA, 2011; IERAL de Fundación Mediterránea, 2011; Jordán et al., 2004; Jerez & Nielson, 2012). This orthodox vision—typical of the neoliberal consensus of that period—legitimized the creation of a regulatory framework for the sector and the first mining investments from Canada, such as the Veladero and Bajo la

Alumbrera projects. Mining was seen as a matter of “local development,” which was coherent with a vision that promoted the decentralization of the state and the federalization of natural resources as part of a wager on specializing production based on comparative advantages for further integration into the global market. This vision on mining came into crisis. Kirchnerism offered no alternative discourse that could address and resignify mining in line with a post-neoliberal narrative centered on a national development vision.

Kirchnerism’s political response was to place its bets on building a new view of mining that portrayed it as a sector that contributes to the country’s development. The neostructuralist ideas promoted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) offer an interpretive framework for the inclusion of mining in a developmentalist repertoire. The ECLAC presents the exploitation of natural resources, and mining in particular, as one of the “opportunities and challenges” for the socioeconomic development of Latin American countries in the international context of the commodity boom (Gómez Sabaíni et al., 2015). In Argentina, these ideas resonated with authors such as Casalis and Trinelli (2013), Prado (2005), Moori Koenig (2000), and Moori Koenig and Blanco (2003). According to this perspective, industrialization continues to be one of the axes of development but is no longer linked to a commitment to internal-market and import-substitution goals. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the promotion of natural resource exports with the highest value-added possible. The challenge consists in transforming successfully the growth in mineral exports without value-added into a source for the creation of quality, well-paid jobs. In other words, development is understood as a qualitative change at the economic and social level that brings positive changes to the labor market.

In the neostructuralist discourse on mining, the state intervenes in the sector as a meta-regulatory agent to generate macroeconomic conditions and regulatory frameworks that are consistent with strategic development planning. Some authors propose that the state should collect the surplus or income from mining and redistribute it to foster the expansion of other economic sectors that are not necessarily connected to the industry (horizontal integration) (Pérez, 2010). Others argue that the state should strengthen the production and supply chains within the mining sector (vertical integration). These are the main variations in neo-structuralist thought, as there is no discussion on the basic conditions in which transnational mining corporations are to develop, nor are there proposals for the state to participate directly in production and extraction or trade.

The neostructuralist discourse does not make a clean break with the orthodox concept of mining; instead, it is a synthesis in which new elements coexist with elements of continuity (Wylde, 2011). The mining sector is considered a homogenous field, which means that no difference is made between the “winners and losers,” between large and medium-size investors, foreign and national investors, or private and public ones. Reference is made simply to “mining” and not to certain productive profiles, scales, or types of ventures, and much less to the oligopolistic and transnational nature of capital. This description of the sector does not allow for a more in-depth examination of

the differences between minerals in terms of their type, conditions for their production, potential industrial use, or ecological vulnerability caused by their extraction, and other aspects.⁵

Another element of continuity in the orthodox vision is the absence of a redefined role for society in development policies. Viewed from a gender perspective attentive to the functioning of patriarchal structures in social reproduction, the neostructuralist discourse feminizes society in relation to mining. Society is presented as the passive and dependent recipient of the benefits or "social advances" that mining may bring, which consist of job creation. Society is passive and dependent, since the neostructuralist discourse does not contain elements on other (current or potential) socio-productive alternatives that could coexist with, compete with, or even replace transnational mining. In symbolic terms, the promise of jobs legitimizes hierarchical and unequal relations in which the development of the mining sector is masculinized and presented as an agent of change that intervenes "from above" in a receptive, feminized society that awaits its liberation from neglect and abandonment. With no apparent alternatives in terms of discourse, mining jobs serve as a kind of developmentalist paternalism of transnational corporations.

Finally, another element of continuity in the neostructuralist discourse, with its orthodox approaches rooted in neoliberalism, is the notion of sustainability linked to development. The reference to "sustainable development" to which mining can contribute appears. The economic notion of "weak sustainability" prevails (Martínez Alier, 2004b). According to this concept, mining is sustainable when the reduction of natural capital (minerals) is compensated by a growth rate equal to that of total capital (natural capital plus manufactured capital plus human capital). Thus, sustainability is seen as the capacity to take advantage of the surplus generated by mining to allocate it to infrastructure works (human-made capital), investment in education (human capital), and the development of "backward" linkages as sources for the creation of high-productivity jobs (supposedly with higher wages). The environmental aspect is eliminated, and sustainability is reduced to a merely economic and social issue. In the words of former President Cristina Fernández, "What we need to take care of are the jobs that this activity [mining] creates, because if we don't, we will have the environment, but no jobs. There will be another kind of contamination" (Página/12, 2014). References to this purely economic concept of the sustainability of mining reveal the deployment of the productivist "language of valuation" (Martínez Alier, 2004a), in which minerals are seen only as economic resources, and the emphasis is placed on their potential to stimulate other productive sectors.

Besides promoting the potential of mining to stimulate other economic sectors as part of a development strategy, the discourse on mining does not state explicitly what other businesses and productive activities could be generated. According to the federal mining Secretary Jorge Mayoral, "Minerals will run out, and to maintain the sustainability of the region resources from mining revenues must serve to develop infrastructure for productive activities that replace mining when it ends" (Ministerio de Planificación Federal, Inversión Pública y Servicios, 2012). The fact that mining is an activity based on non-renewable resources requires an industrialization strategy that shows

explicitly how mining can contribute to the development of other areas of production that will eventually cease to depend on mining, but the neostructuralist discourse on mining does not present a clear strategy. On the contrary, the emphasis is on obtaining surpluses without any medium- or long-term considerations or taking into account environmental liabilities that could hinder the development of post-mining productive activities.

The incorporation of the adjective “sustainable” to the incipient relation between mining and development in discourse appears to be linked to regulatory considerations regarding the mining corporations operating in Argentina. The discussion on sustainability is tied to the promotion of a CSR model of business self-regulation (Utting, 2008). Canada’s actions to promote CSR are worth highlighting, particularly in fostering a vision of “responsible mining” through the establishment of networks between the private sector, the government, and civil society groups. The Embassy of Canada in Argentina organizes events to foster dialogue between universities, companies, and civil society organizations on the theme of “responsible mining” framed as CSR practices.

Other organizations that promote CSR in mining include the Argentine–Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCAC, *Cámara de Comercio Argentino-Canadiense*), the Foundation for the Development of Argentina Mining (FUNDAMIN, *Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Minería Argentina*), and the Argentine Chamber of Mining Companies (CAEM, *Cámara Argentina de Empresarios Mineros*). Canadian mining corporations are predominant in these business-representation organizations and sector-governance processes. Finally, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Foundation for Democratic Change (*Fundación Cambio Democrático*) coordinates the “Mining, Democracy and Sustainable Development” platform as a space of dialogue for managing socioenvironmental conflicts. It is geared toward establishing agreements between public, business, and social actors in the area of mining, as well as policies. In other words, it uses CSR as a model of social dialogue that aims to generate consensus on mining activities, which is expressed in the form of the so-called “social licenses.” The Embassy of Canada appears as one of this NGO’s members (*Fundación Cambio Democrático, n.d.*).

Neostructuralism is the proposed discourse of Kirchnerism to articulate a view of mining that is consistent with a national-development ideational frame. The particular synthesis of orthodox and developmental elements of this emerging discourse gives importance to the so-called development “opportunities” of natural resource exploitation for the global market in terms of employment generation. There are no references in this discourse to the need to prepare transitions for post-mining development, considering the non-renewability of mining resources. Likewise, references to sustainability are absent in this discourse. Here is where the Canadian state, corporations, and other organizations from the business and educational and civil-society sectors advocate for a CSR model to invest in the notion that “responsible mining” is possible. In this respect, Canada and Argentina aligned their discourse on regulatory issues. In the following section, we analyze the institutional changes associated with the mining–development nexus.

New Institutional Arrangements for Mining and Development

The changes in relation to mining and development during the period of analysis were also made evident by the emergence of new institutional arrangements that redefine the role of the central state in relation to the provinces. These changes are the institutional response to tensions from the socio-environmental conflicts related to mining and the macroeconomic pressure on the country. This response is a meta-regulator state that coordinates all aspects of the implementation of a national mining policy, including relations with the provinces with mining interests and the corporations.

In 2011–2012, there was a relative break in the period of continuity from the 1990s. In the presidential election process of 2011, Cristina Fernández responded to criticism from opposition sectors on the supposed inexistence of a macroeconomic model by proposing a “fine tuning” of the government administration. This “fine tuning” included, among other issues, the need to reconfigure the existing subsidy system, which involved subsidized gas, electricity, and water tariffs for mining mega-projects. Also in 2011, the government began to introduce gradually measures to curb the flow of foreign currencies out of the country, which was beginning to put the reserves accumulated by the Central Bank at risk. These measures were recognition of the tensions brewing due to the external restrictions. In late 2011, the government issued Decree 1.722 (2011), which reinstated the obligation to settle all foreign currency obtained from mining exports in Argentina as a way of increasing the international reserves in the hands of the Central Bank. This complex macroeconomic scenario forced the federal government to redefine elements of its mining policy, namely, those restricting imports that could be substituted by national products.

In this context, the National Mining Secretary created the Mining Homologation Board (*Mesa de Homologación Minera*) as a space for dialogue between the national government and business and trade union organizations involved in the mining sector,⁶ as well as national secretariats, ministries, and universities, among others. The purpose of this space was to promote an agenda of import substitution of some goods and services that are produced nationally but which are imported by the mining companies that dominate the sector. The Mining Homologation Board sought to rebalance the composition of a foreign and transnational activity such as mining with some participation of national production, in particular to negotiate with mining companies and other actors in the mining sector the contracting of locally supplied services and parts for the prospection, exploration, construction, and production phases of the mining operations. Tax records of mining corporations, their suppliers, and the holders of exploration permits were created to lend transparency to the criteria used for hiring suppliers for the mining industry (Diario Jujuy, 2014). In April 2012, the Ministry of Industry set up the National Board for the Integration of the Mining Sector (*Mesa de Integración Nacional Sectorial Minera*) with the same purpose.⁷ The government proposed to mining companies the substitution of U.S.\$200 million in imports as a target (Fortuna, 2012).

The most-important institutional innovation was the creation of the Federal Organization of Mining States (OFEMI, *Organización Federal de Estados*

Mineros) in March 2012. OFEMI is an inter-jurisdictional advisory body for the formulation and implementation of the national mining policy, which originally integrated 10 provinces with mining potential.⁸ Its objectives are to reaffirm the development of mining in an environmental and social sustainability framework; implement mechanisms favoring the incorporation of industrial value added; coordinate actions geared toward substituting the importation of mining goods, supplies, parts and services; develop new ways to use minerals for industrial purposes and energy; and elaborate policies conducive to human resources development. Furthermore, OFEMI has the power to create public mining enterprises at the provincial level, establish trusts for basic infrastructure works, and set up local development agencies.⁹ The relation between OFEMI and the federal government regarding the federal mining policy is framed by the Federal Mining Agreement (Delinteriorpunto.com, n.d.).

OFEMI appears as a space for coordinating and defining mining policies with the characteristics of what Brand (2007) defines as “international state apparatuses,” and Sassen (2006) as “assemblages of territory.” In other words, it is a multilevel governance network on mining that articulates formal and informal relations between provincial governments and the national government via the Mining Secretariat and the Ministry of Planning, the business chambers of the mining industry (FUNDAMIN, CASEMI, ADIMRA, and CAEM), trade unions and other labor entities (AOMA), universities, and other civil-society actors. At the international level, OFEMI also liaises with the Latin American Mining Organization (OLAMI) and the Inter-American Society of Mining (SIM). In addition to the direct dialogue with Canadian corporations or participation in the business chambers linked to the sector, Canada and OFEMI’s relation is channeled through the CCAC and Canada’s diplomatic representatives in the country (El Tribuno, 2012). As a constellation of public and private actors, OFEMI serves as a network to facilitate relations between Argentina and Canada on mining within a federal framework that structures the international policy arena of both countries.

The purpose of the OFEMI is to undertake actions to advance import substitution with the goal of promoting the industrialization of the mining sector. It is also to provide incentives for the creation of productive clusters and strategic associations of small- and medium-sized mining enterprises so as to improve their competitiveness and integrate them into the productive and commercial development of mining.

In addition to its productive objectives, OFEMI is also to be a space for resolving social conflicts involving mining. It aims to establish “conflict resolution mechanisms so that prospecting, exploration and/or productive mining activities are ensured social licenses” by committing itself to “developing strategies for building social dialogue between different actors interested in mining issues (civil organizations, indigenous peoples, universities, professional colleges, chambers, etc.)” (OFEMI, n.d.). According to OFEMI (n.d.), social and public participation can contribute to “*re-establishing* the mining sector as a *productive sector in the country*, with a high level of local and regional *cohesion* that generates a *collective consciousness* with local roots and commitment to interacting to resolve issues linked to mining” (our emphasis). To do so, it seeks to “promote

policies designed to obtain *social licenses* for the development of mining activities" (Delinteriorpuntocom, n.d.). It is clear that OFEMI is also a political response to the mining sector's vulnerability brought on by the growing social unrest in various provinces of the country. The social dialogue mechanism is given priority over citizens' demands on the right to prior and informed consent.

With regards to the environment, OFEMI proposes in its statutes to develop "joint actions aimed at *establishing a minimum of environmental and economic requirements*, with clear rules that provide legal security and favor investment, the sustainable development of the communities, effective control over the activity and the protection of the environment." It reaffirms "the development of mining operations in an environmental and social sustainability framework, while verifying effective compliance with the principles and instruments for the management of both mining and the environment. . . ." To achieve this end, it commits itself to "coordinating actions that are conducive to *harmonizing and integrating legal environmental standards with corporate social responsibility criteria*" (our emphasis) (OFEMI, n.d.).

There is no reference to the National Glacier Protection Act. The act's implementation is still pending today, as the national inventory on glaciers and periglacial zones—a key instrument for the act's implementation foreseen in the law—has not yet been produced. The absence of any reference to this act suggests that OFEMI plans to propose new minimal environmental protection standards based on the harmonization of the most-lenient provincial laws. What is more, the reference to CSR suggests that this corporate model of voluntary self-regulation will be prioritized in the definition of new regulatory frameworks, which will presumably be used as part of an attempt to overturn the bans on mining operations currently in effect in certain provinces and municipalities.

In this section, we examined changes to the institutional arrangements introduced in 2011–2012. The national government assumed an active role as a meta-regulator on mining issues. Mining became an issue for federal policy-making. The creation of the homologation boards and OFEMI introduced mechanisms for pursuing an import-substitution policy in collaboration with the provinces and other actors involved in mining production. These new institutional arrangements seek a new balance between a globally oriented transnational mining sector and a nationally oriented development strategy. The possibility of establishing public mining enterprises also remained open, which would allow the government to generate revenues without having to modify the current royalties scheme. The weaknesses of these new institutional arrangements in terms of environmental protection and, to a lesser extent, social participation, suggest that OFEMI could contribute to the erosion of the already frail glacier act by proposing instead new terms for the establishment of an institutional arrangement on environmental protection based on "responsible mining" criteria within a CSR framework.

Conclusions

The analysis in this article enables us to draw some preliminary conclusions. First, the growth of the mining sector under Kirchnerism is not merely

the result of continuities in the institutional framework for mining inherited from neoliberalism in a context of increasing international demand for minerals and prices. We argue that the federal government intervened actively to recreate viable conditions for the expansion of mining in response to the advances of reforms to ban mega-mining and social resistance that succeeded in halting mining projects and capturing public attention outside of the areas where the conflicts arose. When the escalation of conflict reached the national level and exposed contradictions within the government's own political space, the government response was to resume a leadership role by framing mining as an activity that contributes to national development. This shift accompanied the structural needs exerting pressure on the Argentine economy and turned import substitution into a viable political response in the construction of "mining for development."

Second, the changes in policies for the mining sector are part of what we call the internationalization of the state process. The changes to the institutional strategies and discourse were made with the goal of managing the international integration of provinces with mining potential into the global mining market. The redefinition of mining as part of a repertoire on national development seeks to give it a positive image in light of the growing criticism of its predatory nature and as a generator of dependency. Also, the changes were adopted to control the flight of capital and generate employment by pursuing import substitution in sectors that provide supplies to the mining industry. In other words, the internationalization of the state process related to mining was guided by the need to compensate the purely extractive nature of this activity by clearing—but not consolidating—a path for negotiating the participation of local companies in the mining corporations' value chains. This process is connected to changes in Canada related to its own internationalization process. Canada's relationship with mining in Argentina is coherent with the support that Canada provides the sector, which is part of its international integration strategy to position itself as a leader in the global mining market.

The third point, which is linked to the previous one, is that relations with Canada are not merely economic, as a source of foreign investment in mining. Canada has played a prominent role in the generation of new conditions for mining during the 1990s and since the beginning of Kirchnerism in 2003. In the 1990s, Canada lobbied for the signing of a binational agreement between Argentina and Chile and years later intervened in the process around the glacier protection act and the elaboration of provincial regulatory frameworks for mining (Grinspun, 2014). Its efforts to promote CSR in business, diplomatic, and civil-society spheres also constitute policy-relevant practices, as they are part of the process to define a regulatory framework for investments that creates friction with other ongoing processes. For Canada, its relation with mining in Argentina is important not only for the economic return it generates but also in terms of its incidence in the structuring of the mining sector at the global level. The Argentina–Chile binational agreement on mining generates an unprecedented and controversial model for the governance of mining exploration in border zones that can be replicated in other countries. The same holds true about Canada's interventions in the definition of regulatory

frameworks at the federal or provincial level in Argentina. The political nature of Canada's relation with Argentina is derived from its geo-economic implications for Canada's position as a global leader of the mining sector and a key agent in the generation of rules that structure the sector at the global level.

This situation leaves us with more questions than answers. It would appear that Argentina's bet on mining for development overestimates the state's capacity and room to maneuver to negotiate agreements with transnational mining corporations so as to obtain a substantial level of participation in their global value chains, which is beyond just a few services or supplies that local companies can provide. In other words, it is not clear that other sectors that are not linked to mining can be integrated effectively into these productive chains as part of the industrial development process. Lithium is perhaps an exceptional case in this sense. The way that the relation between mining and development is in Argentina today, it is impossible to subject mining operations to a sustainable development agenda. Moreover, the prospect of a reloaded extractivist agenda becoming a centerpiece of the newly elected rightist government in Argentina with President Mauricio Macri would appear to complicate things further. The attempt to seek some balance—albeit ineffective—between a national development agenda and transnational mining is likely to be abandoned altogether, in line with making mining a part of the new government international integration strategy.

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This article is part of the research project entitled "From Minor Player to Major Actor: Canada's Role in Latin America," funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and coordinated by Carleton University, Ottawa. We would like to thank Maristella Svampa, Marisa von Büllow, Pablo Heidrich, María Pilar Bueno, Laura Alvarez and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

Notes

¹The regulatory framework on mining consists of the regime of provincial ownership of natural resources created by the 1994 constitutional reform, the 1993 Mining Code, the Mining Investment Law, and the 2004 National Mining Plan.

²The initiatives "Building the Canadian Advantage: A CSR Strategy for the Canadian International Extractive Sector," and "Doing Business the Canadian Way: A Strategy to Advance CSR in Canada's Extractive Sector Abroad" (Global Affairs Canada, 2009, 2014).

³Chubut (March 2003); Río Negro (July 2005); La Rioja and Tucumán (March 2007); Mendoza (June 2007); La Pampa (September 2007); Córdoba (September 2008); San Luis (October 2008), and Tierra del Fuego (August 2011). Some provinces lifted the bans on mega-mining, such as La Rioja (September 2008), and Río Negro (January 2012).

⁴Since 2012 the Canadian government has not released this information to the public.

⁵An exception is the declaration of lithium as a “strategic” mineral for industrialization; we will not explore this case further, as it is not related to metal mining, which is the focus of this article.

⁶The Argentine Chamber of Mining Services (CASEMI, Cámara Argentina de Servicios Mineros), the Argentine Chamber of Mining Companies (CAEM, Cámara Argentina de Empresarios Mineros), and the Argentine Association of Mining Workers (AOMA, Asociación Obrera Minera Argentina).

⁷CAEM, members of the chamber of metallurgical industries (ADIMRA, CAMIMA), uniform producers, and the National Institute on Industrial Technology (INTI, Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Industrial) participate on this board.

⁸These ten provinces are Jujuy, Catamarca, La Rioja, San Juan, Mendoza, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, and Salta. Tierra del Fuego and the Province of Buenos Aires joined in 2015.

⁹Statutes of the OFEMI (OFEMI, n.d.).

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