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BOOK REVIEW

Mines, Communities, and States: The Local Politics of Natural Resource Extraction in Africa

By Jessica Steinberg

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 282 pp., £75 (hardback), ISBN: 9781108476935

In *Mines, Communities, and States*, Jessica Steinberg sets out to develop and test a generalisable theory to explain why some regions of natural resource extraction in Africa experience protest and conflict while others do not, and what forces shape how governments respond. Through this ambitious undertaking, Steinberg offers an original and methodologically innovative contribution to the development studies literature on the political economy of the extractive industries. Adopting a rationalist approach, the book's main theoretical argument is that 'the local characteristics of the extractive environment, the revenue and political imperative of the state, and the firm's revenue demand shape whether firms engage in local goods provision, whether local populations engage in resistance, and whether the government represses this resistance' (p. 29). The development and testing of this theory is structured in three parts.

In the first part of the book (Chapters 2–3), Steinberg draws on game theoretic modelling to theorise the strategic interactions between mining firms, host states and local communities in and around natural resource extraction. She develops a formal model, which provides a set of conditional arguments about when we should expect to see firms providing local goods transfers to communities, when communities might mobilise against the firm, and how the government might respond. The model includes a welcome emphasis on local communities. Steinberg discusses how local actors with agency shape their own collective futures by imposing significant costs on firms and states through protest; an element all too often lacking in other accounts.

In the second part (Chapters 4–7), Steinberg qualitatively tests the internal validity of her theory by tracing the various casual mechanisms it specifies through a comparative case analysis of industrial mining projects in Mozambique, Zambia and the DR Congo. Through visits to these countries' extractive regions in 2012 and 2015, Steinberg presents evidence (collected through interviews and archival research) in support of her model's mechanisms, and in particular, 'how and when beliefs of the firm, government, and local population about each other are important for understanding the comparative outcomes' (p. 129).

In the third part and final (Chapters 8–11), Steinberg turns to a quantitative test of the external validity of her model beyond these three countries, based on an econometric analysis of geospatial data covering 2,497 mines in operation across the continent between 1990 and 2014. Here, Steinberg presents evidence that lends general support to the conclusion that her formal model travels beyond the cases of Zambia, DR Congo and Mozambique 'to the rest of the continent' (p. 177). In support of this claim, she uses an extensive range of different

specifications to demonstrate the robustness and statistical significance of her results (including a 70- page appendix of robustness tests).

A curiosity of this final part of the book is that while it is the most methodologically elaborate, it is also the least persuasive. This is due to the regularity with which causal extrapolations are drawn from somewhat dubious proxy variables. For example, Steinberg uses measurements of government leadership tenure uncertainty to proxy for the political costs of government repression (based on the problematic assumption that uncertain leader tenure will make repression less likely). Yet this national-level proxy is unable to speak to subnational dynamics and the political relevance of a particular mining community or region. Similarly, the yearly average commodity price is used to proxy the economic value to the government of the resource extracted at an industrial mine. Here, we are asked to accept that a mine producing 200 USD million of gold annually and nearing exhaustion holds the same value to a host government as a new mine producing two billion dollars annually. The use of questionable proxy variables accumulates throughout the section, casting doubt over the validity of the findings presented.

Steinberg might have done more in the introduction to historicise the current juncture of foreign corporate-led industrial mining and the associated governance logic of corporate social responsibility upon which her formal model is based. As it stands, the book implies that Africa's current extractive landscape is the natural order of things when, of course, this is far from the case. The near total omission of labour and artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) from the formal model is questionable, given that labour disputes and ASM displacement by incoming industrial miners are documented to have sown the seeds of future protest and conflict, both in Africa and elsewhere (Geenen, 2014; Hilson, 2002).

Despite these shortcomings, at its best, the logical coherence and persuasiveness of Steinberg's writing recalls J. K. Galbraith's observation on the back of Albert Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*: 'I have read it with enormous interest and admiration, and the further pleasure that one has in being with an author who can think things through.' In *Mines, Communities, and States*, Steinberg has proposed a generalisable theory to explain if and when natural resource exploitation in Africa will coincide with conflict and low socio-economic development. The book will appeal to development studies students and scholars working in this area, as well as to policymakers and practitioners engaged on issues related to the local-level community impact of extractive projects.

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