

RESISTING EXTRACTIVISM

Minho-Barroso-Porto

Interview by activists against mining in Portugal with Alexander Dunlap



English version – Uncutted – Unedited
Direct transcription out of 33 minutes of audio

January 2021

1,

Knowing that an open pit mining strategy is already set up and running in a large part of our country, a promotional campaign has been underway for months, what ways do we have to fight effectively against this lobby?

Greetings. Thank you everyone for having me here being interested in hearing what I have to say about some of this stuff. I am speaking in English because it is going to be better than in my Spanish and my Portuguese doesn't exist at this point.

So, yeah, thank you. And the first question is really good. It's ultimately an issue that a lot of regions in a lot of places all over the world have to confront and will be facing in the immediate future, especially with the new enthusiasm from the European Union, which pushing through their new critical raw material laws in the name of the green economy and renewable energy. So getting to the question, the first step is to really begin organizing in every way shape or form where you are and with each other the best you can and this means working immediately in the grassroots to begin information campaigns. This means doing information and talk nights in different social centers, in town halls and different areas; make leaflets and pamphlets and to distribute them in every town and place that you can; to begin this conversation and by drawing on researchers, like myself and others who have worked more specifically with lithium and the other kind of resources.

They are going to be trying to mine in this area, which necessitates actually putting out the facts about the kind of water use and ecological degradation that will take place. So really initiating a pretty comprehensive grassroots campaign in a decentralized way, but also while being networked at the same time to begin putting this information out there. Again, information nights, leaflets, stickers, posters and engagement on social media, but more importantly making sure that there is actually a material kind of presence on the streets and creating spaces to talk about these things. This is a lot of work. It takes some resources. I hope that people can do this in a kind of self-managed and self-funded way, but also maybe there is NGOs in the areas that can be supportive of these activities (unconditionally).

So that's the grassroots approach and this means also extending to different academics and NGOs. This means confronting the mining in various ways: writing letters, sending different information pamphlets generated through research to local politicians to different lobbyists, different small businesses to let them know the impacts and what might be happening. Mining conflict with tourism and different kind of agricultural practices in these areas. The idea of jobs is going to be something that is flaunted by the companies, but a lot of this is going to be either temporary or little.

So just about every social sector in these areas is going to have an interest in for

rejecting these things, despite a lot of the public relations material from the mining companies to claims otherwise.

But so yeah just to kind of summarize; begin from the bottom up and organizing in every way through various different mediums: stickers, posters, public talks, information nights, demonstrations, and then also moving from there to speak with other people and political power or in different NGO's or points of influence. Then taking action based on the conditions created. I highly recommend not putting hope into different leaders or organizations, but to appeal to them and try to organize with them in a decentralized way to spread the struggle and actions as wide as possible. None of this is easy. It is a difficult interview. It's a difficult thing to fight when these mining projects come in, but it's important that people understand the need for diversity of tactics and fighting these different projects and reaching out and trying to have a relative common understanding of stopping these projects and using various means to do this.

2,

Political partidarian interests always end up undermining any movement of contestation, does it make sense to outline strategies of resistance that are openly anti-political? What is your experience on this subject?

This is a great question.

Yeah political parties in my experience are a big problem and a serious liability. Yeah, it's been my experience as well that political parties will take interest in different struggles to gain political power and then they will often betray or use that political power to negotiate better positions or more money or more resources. This includes negotiating better positions in government are things like this and it seems that you are very well aware of this. So I think that it's important to always be extremely skeptical and critical, keeping a sharp eye on politicians and political parties in general. There is always the concern of recuperation and political parties are trying to mine the energy and the power of different kind of social mobilizations. This means decentralized approaches centered on promoting autonomous action must take priority, employing a general network for promoting various different kind of actions and things like this forum.

I think if people want to win against these projects, it really needs everyone and the idea of having power centralized or concentrated is a liability. Creating leaders in general or even spokespeople can create big problems or vulnerabilities, allowing a gateway to divide movements by serving as a kind of mechanisms to try to control these different movements and political tensions. So I would say that this general approach is the best, but this is also a lot of work and as an outsider. I am not

immersed in this area and I am not doing the work on the ground here, but as someone extremely interested in it and supporting it: this is what I would suggest and I am open to talking more about creating propaganda.

But really I think it's these politicians that have to prove themselves systematically and constantly to the movements and struggle against these mines. So talk to them, don't necessarily be across the board anti-politician, but always have very little trusts and make sure that they're actually working for the movement and the movement is not working for the politicians and that they are actively pronounced and being against the mining project and that they are actually giving space to social struggle.

Moreover, I mean there is different levels of politicians. You know, there are the mayor's in town halls who should have a big interest in being against mining, but also money has a way of making them to be interested in working with the mining projects. Money is a very big risk, but whether it is local mayors or other officials they should be actively giving a kind of space on walls to put up posters and to not cleaning off anti-mining graffiti.

The mayors should be opening up town halls or kind of communal or cultural centers to allow discussions and presentations from people who are struggling against the mines and their there needs to be active participation on the part of the town halls. This means supporting these things and organizing, then on the kind of macro or meso level there is going to be different political party representatives, they need to be making proper denunciations against the mind. They need to be supporting the spread of information through their networks, which also means fighting the myth of renewable energy, fighting the myth of digitalization and this push for more extraction, more consumption and more digital development, which is all extremely taxing on the environment. Yet mining in Europe is being marketed in the name of renewable energy. So this is a big point to challenge...

But I'm speaking a bit long here. But the idea is to as you're very well aware of, to watch closely the political parties and demand their support, and to, yeah, to hold them accountable and to encourage decentralize things and to be very cautious of all politicians and the formations of spokespeople and things like that, but I'm happy to speak more in this.

3,

Don't you think that the question of asking for support from the political forces of local power, which is often unreliable, is limiting, when we can demand, through a kind of agreement of honor from the mayors towards the population and the movements, the support with means of an effective and coordinated struggle between the municipalities and the political sphere?

I regretted it immediately when I use the word demand when speaking about politicians or political parties, I think it's more accurate to think of how people are going to be able to take from them or take back what is rightfully yours. It is more complicated than that because a lot of this is very specific kind of tactical and strategic conversation, about approaching communication and disseminating a certain idea and information. So obviously one can demand, but to demand is to be very passive in a lot of ways, if anything is a kind of hopeful waiting: its waiting on politicians and representation to do the work for you. And really I think the idea is to figure out ways to actually organize local people and power to create pressure and to do everything they can to *take* these spaces and affirm their desires and to shatter this kind of representational and mediated model of democracy, which is ultimately efficient at organizing consent and pacifying people to allow mining projects to take over entire environment. So I think the idea is really to ask how can you actually take back these political spaces? How can people organize themselves in unmediated ways, to acquire the space, to spread these messages? While I am extremely sympathetic and ultimately agree with the different anarchist and autonomous tensions to immediately exclude political parties and refuse any engagement by politicians, sometimes it takes more to actually find the people who might still have some semblance of a connection and a care for the environment.

Sometimes there are people in political parties demonstrating real support and real care that they should be worked with and not completely alienated from the movement. But again, as I said above, this is all very difficult and a Sharpe eye should be keep on the actions of representational power whether they are politicians, "do-gooder" party members or even NGOs in terms of how they are actually moving to divide different movements or divide or make spokespeople out of other different people or usurp the power of movements. So the ideal is to take and not demand from any kind of political structures and it is to be extremely cautious of them, but to watch closely to see if there is any kind of institutional support that will help people. But again, the political traps and the political science of trying to control populations and to divide movements is pretty serious. And that's what I've dedicated a lot of my work to using counterinsurgency as a lens to understand how movements are divided and the different kind of political traps that are set again and again and again. Traps that seem to work if people are not prepared or anticipating them.

4,

How do you see the acceleration of the digitalisation process in the context of the coronavirus, and how can we dismantle the growing legitimization of techno-science?

This is a great question. It is definitely the hardest and maybe saddest question so far. The Coronavirus has been extremely effective at instilling fear and accelerating the digitalization process. Government regulation and policy have been able to further reconfigure life further into digitalized and mediatized structures, which is extremely concerning.

It is within dystopia at this point in terms of what has gone through and what has happened. Yeah, this is obvious in a lot of ways, but what's scary about this is how coronavirus is dividing a lot of people, you know? A lot of people in autonomous and Anarchist movements as well people who are very much at war with the system and fighting mining companies, the state, the police and things like this have now effectively been divided in ways that many didn't expect, and are adhering to government regulation out of the fear of what the Coronavirus could do or is doing? I have my own opinions on this. I am highly influenced by Chinese and Eastern medicine, which I find to be a lot more effective in understanding or fighting any kind of viruses and things like this as opposed to biomedicine that already has a very rude entry and an incomplete understanding of how to stop a common cold.

So ultimately the issue of Corona and digitalization is that people are becoming afraid of each other. A situation is created where people's mentalities are afraid to even hug each other, people are afraid to talk to each other—they have to wear masks. It gets particularly difficult with the elderly, but is further isolating people and digital technology really a pathway to healing and combating a virus?

But to stay on topic, with the technologies there has been a kind of coup d'etat of social relationships, which is enforced through digital technologies. This is sad and how to resist this and how to deconstruct is difficult. But I think it begins with acknowledging the problem as you do with the question, but also really doing everything people can to fight the fear of the Coronavirus and to come up with health strategies and confidence where people know and will feel that they can be okay and can plan for these things. And yeah, this is behind this entire conversation on mining. Moreover, the ideology of technological and scientific progress, which we are told is saving the world and creating new medicines, propels both mining, social control and health regimes. The ideology of technological progress deserves closer examination and deconstruction.

I am struggling with how to confront or stop this. How to resist the mediatization of life through digital infrastructure. Work places are central to enforcing these

ideologies and infrastructural participation. At this point I think it is about coming up with strategies to undermine these narratives and organizing against them and stopping the spread of fear within ourselves, but also in the place that we live.

5,

We know that these struggles are complicated and above all done without gain, balancing it with professional and personal life. How to get more people to the front of the struggles?

Hi. Thanks so much for the question.

Yeah, I mean, it is a timeless question and struggle. But I think the big thing is to really try, and I guess I am saying this really abstract and cliché way, is to really begin organizing spaces of joy and making sure that we are rooting our struggles and fights out of joy, out of love. Because these can get lost through the (movement) bureaucracy, through the repression and through a lot of the different kind of internal fights with friends and things that are can often fueled by ego. This means also kind of having a lots of patience and learning where to draw the line with having patience.

But I mean it all depends on the context, but let's pretend you are trying to organize in a small town. This means trying to have more fun events, having potlucks, organizing more kinds of communal gatherings where people are actually hanging out with each other speaking over food and you know, doing different information events and talks but doing things around food, organizing things that are fun, enjoyable and interesting. Expanding each other's imaginations with forms of organization, creating communal relationships and getting to know each other and to see where people are at, but really working to expand the imagination in general in terms of how people can engage in subversive strategies to raise awareness in different places. Theater events, talks, having I guess what you call potlucks and inviting people to bring food, to talk, making different kind of music events, gatherings, these also tie up with kind of manifestations or different actions nature hikes, but there's so many ways.

There are so many different graffiti or art projects that can play a role in captivating people. Also new information, but I think the idea is kind of trying to keep things fun, to have a nice kind of social relationship, to have something more than just information or fighting but to have kind of supportive communal aspect. Because it is about learning how to take joy in learning about mining, communicating that message and taking direct action against these things, which can be very stressful. So how to do this in a fun way, how to create spaces of care, how to learn from each other, how to learn about each other. So there are a lot of different ways to intervene and organize, but I think the most important part is to find at least one two or three people nearby that you have a relative level of trust. Then from there start coming up with

plans about how you're going to have fun on the weekends, and try to include other people, and raise issues that you think are really important then hopefully from there be able to either take actions individually or as a group or both.

6,

How can we best keep the momentum going, after long months or even years of resistance, when fatigue sets in and small differences of opinion between activists start to become gaping fractures inside or between the movements?

Teresa, okay, these are these are the good questions. These are the ones that really matter and are extremely difficult.

Yeah, it's not easy. And I think this relates to the kind of the last answer, but it's always about how one can be balanced in their life. And in their struggle, I think maybe to get a bit philosophical, is that industrial systems are really designed on making us into being cogs, into being specialized so that we are narrowly focused on one thing, and I think that means we get a bit obsessive, it gets wound up in our identities and it inflames our egos and this can lead to us getting at each other's throats. We become a little too personally invested, which can lead to lots of different types of infighting, than at the same time some infighting is extremely important and I think I guess laying some groundwork is really important about this. It really comes back to the earlier questions of politicians and different things like this and making sure that everything is decentralized, aiming for uncontrollability with the common purpose of stopping the mines and protecting water and trees. But even on a personal level, the idea is how to prevent movements from suffocating and exhausting people. People are dragged down by endless discussions and assemblies, when really I think the idea is clear: stop the mine. People need to live their lives, but how can one live fully and in resistance? The objective is how to stay positive and support a diversity of action that will be taken against it and to encourage this and to continue to create a kind of spaces of positivity of happiness with cool events of social events. And I think this means making sure that one's kind of balanced in their life.

I mean, personally I have to do certain types of meditation. I practice a lot of different chi gong I have to do a lot of things to actually stay in to ensure my mental health, and different kind of health practices face in different struggles and under a lot of different types of stresses, some of them political, some of them work related, and so on and so forth. But so I think trying to again related to the last question, keep kind of a fun social event of things, try to kind of maintain practices of personal mental health, and to also just a balance, to make sure that you're spending time gardening, spending time with kids, taking walks, and making sure that you have space for yourself while also not trying to exert too much control over struggles. And for me one of the big issues to encourage is to have a generational connection to support

the young people who are ready to be more aggressive and to struggle against these things and to make sure that people aren't going to be divided, by different kind of psychological propaganda and even repressive strategies, or what I would call counter-insurgency strategies, to divide people, to prevent the people from actually taking physical and material action to stop things, and to still be supportive - that can be just making food, even smiling, being happy into to allow those things.

But yeah, I mean, I think a lot of it what's in this question. Is it creating spaces of care coming up with a kind of practices and ideas for mental health in terms of how to stay strong, try not to become too invested in take things too. Seriously making sure that the liver is healthy and working functioning, and it can really go in this kind of deep direction of of kind of health, and this will come from different epistemologies and how one kind of relates to land and health things like this, but it's it's not easy. These are struggles that involve our lives and families and things like this and it's how to how to keep it fun how to keep it rooted in, enjoy. How to not exert too much control and personal relationships but also over movements and also how to make sure that one is has a practice to kind of stay calm, decompressed, and to try to let go certain things while at the same time I think rules or protocols of creating to be very skeptical of politicians or even kind of movement politicians, of people trying to control things too much—take credit—when things need to be fun, decentralized and I guess for a lack of a better word, combative and imaginative to stop these projects. But again, I'm happy to go into some of these things because it's it is pretty deep and serious stuff. That is extremely personal and I can maybe go in this in some ways, but yeah. Thanks so much for the question.

7,

The territorial issue means that the defense of this territory is carried out in the first place by the people directly affected by a given project. But when several projects come together, or are related as here in the north of Portugal (8-9 mining concession areas that the state intends to authorize), how do you defend constantly, in solidarity and in the most equal way possible all the different territories?

What is the hypothesis that certain territories "fall" and that the movements do not have the capacity to counter, and consequently desolidarize?

Thank you. I mean, first, one of the big myths about all of this is that mining companies tell that mining doesn't affect everyone, because it does... you're going to have some areas just affected more at a higher intensity than others and people downstream from rivers will have different kind of pollution in their water supply. There's going to be different kinds of dust in the air. I mean, the fact is that every type of industrial sevelopment mine or kind of industrial disaster or social disaster will have rippling effects in many places across the world. It's just a difference of across

the world, but also country and also our region... also between towns so it's a question of actually just intensity of where people are being affected.

There's been a progressive kind of degradation of people's genes mentality, and bring you on different thicknesses. I mean I obviously to prove that some of these things are very contested matter in terms of the way that of the long-term changes that are happening to people and their bodies in their health or generations from ultimately industrial development, which mining is at the center of so, this is a big issue of how there's a slow violence that is systemic, that people will no longer see or that is difficult to see for a lot of people which relates to the lack of reactivity and lack of connection to where we actually live.

What matters to people in their lives and the way that people are trading things into, either touches have jobs or to make sure that they have television directly to be better integrated into a computational society. That is extremely capitalistic that is based on kind of short-term reward that's based on ecological degradation.

So there's this social issues about the levels of violence that have been normalized and about actually how to real bill, them to undermine them, and to really get people to feel again, to care again to see the value in the different rivers, in the mountains and the trees, and actually how we were were part of them. But instead there's this kind of self suicidal kind of push if people were to ignore it where they're marginalized through work and life and kids, and just really trying to survive.

But that's kind of just the first part of the question is to recognize that everyone is affected by these things in some ways, and there's a generational ripple, in terms of the impacts that they'll have, and it's their building on top of each other, from the colonial era to times of kind of ancient civilizations. It's a continuum...

But how to defend the territories? so yeah, so one, recognize it, everyone's going to be affected. There's going to be a cost, and these things despite the public relations by the mining companies,

Companies are going to spread and some spread way worse than others, but they're always going to spread their always gonna have an impact. It's always going to be going to be doing things, too.

Yeah, into the second question...

They're going to keep taking it... there's always going to be more mines. There's always going to be more natural resource extraction to take. I mean, there's just been such an insane intensification of literally trying to grab anything that is being revalued and is marketable, to kind of a capitalist project but also just for

technological development and control so there's the kind of the flip the theme of kind of state and capital control and profiteering.

But I think the thing is in terms of these struggles reflecting on military manuals are important to not only understand what police and military are doing, and political science books to understand the kind of manipulative diplomatic techniques are being used to divide people. But they understand that a most of of struggles or most of war, some people say are 90% psychological, in terms of how you can get into people's heads. And the things I want to stress here is that to demoralize people, to get into their heads, to break them, to divide them, to make them think that it's pointless, to demoralize them, to make them not want to fight, to make them be disappointed and and that's the thing. So if a territory or part of a territory is lost, it's important to not... they're going to take more territory, so it's not to be demoralized, but it's to learn from those things, to have low expectations in people and things around you, and to just do the best you can, to have fun and most importantly to stay positive and more than that, is to be decided about your positions in these struggles, about what matters to you, if you have a commitment towards the rivers, if you have a commitment towards the trees, if you have a commitment towards the mountains, and to your friends and your family and the cats, for the animals, and I can go on all day.... then your're rooting that struggle in yourself, you're doing these things for yourself and for the things that you care about, and that the creatures around you, then you have to become decided about how you're going to approach these things, how you're going to move and how you're going to stop them.

Maybe it's not worth it. Maybe the commitment or the connections is not that strong But overall, it's about not becoming demoralize. It's about continuing. It's about taking joy and destroying the things that are destroying what you care for... and to, for the stress and the trouble troubles that people have, and a lot of these again as I say, I'm speaking about these things kind of at a distance, in the sense of it's a lot of kind of hard political work, i t's a lot of shitty conversations, it's a lot of confrontations. It's a lot of these things, but it's about how one can find joy, and find play and actually undermining mining projects and undermining the horrible political kind of maneuvers that are being used to kind of buy and sell people's minds, which can be depressing but it can also be fun. They can also be laughable. We are often faced with choices where we either have to laugh or cry. It's best to laugh and to come up with a new strategy to make this theater more fun more entertaining and more in the interest of actually stopping projects, but it's not easy, but it's about how to have fun. It's not become demoralized because that is ultimately the goal of, it's not just about demoralizing you. It's also about making you addicted, to be enchanted, to believe in different myths about green polluting less, and these different ways even though a lot of times, almost every time there's spillovers from the kind of the waste pools, and I think many of the people on here know the story, about what happens with mines, pipelines and the reality of these things.

But it's about how to have fun with it and to not be demoralized.

CONCLUSION

Thanks so much for being there, and these are really great and difficult and really being a lot of important questions.

Happy to be in conversation. I really appreciate and hopefully yeah, they're useful in some way, and maybe I will come back to this region again and hope to meet you all one day. Thank you for being there, obrigado.

{TELEGRAM TRANSCRIPTION}

Boa tarde a tod@s, podem começar a postar as vossas questões em texto ou audio e às 21h serão traduzidas e respondidas via audio aqui, junto com mais algumas perguntas e respostas. Não hesitem em convidar gente interessada para a entrevista.

Sabendo que neste momento já está montada e em execução uma estratégia de mineração a céu aberto, numa grande parte do nosso país, inclusive está em curso há meses uma campanha promocional, que formas temos de luta eficaz contra esse lobby?

[E.C.] (obrigado)

Vamos começar dentro de momentos a responder a perguntas enviadas. Estaremos até às 22h !

Pergunta: os interesses político-partidarios acabam sempre por minar qualquer movimento de contestação, faz sentido traçar estratégias de resistência assumidamente anti-políticas? Qual é a tua experiência sobre este tema?

Como vês o acelerar do processo de digitação no contexto do coronavirus, e como desmontar a crescente legitimação da tecno-ciencia?

Sabemos que estas lutas são complicadas e acima de tudo feita sem ganhos, equilibrando-a com a vida profissional e pessoal. Como conseguir mais pessoas para a frente das lutas?

Vou perguntar eu uma questão, em relação ao respondido na ultima intervenção do Alexander:

Não pensas que a questão de pedir (demand) apoio às forças politicas do poder local, muitas vezes pouco fiável, é limitativo, quando podemos exigir, pelo meio de uma especie de acordo de honra

dos autarcas para com a população e os movimentos,
o suporte de meios de uma luta eficaz e coordenada entre os municipais e a esfera política?

How can we best keep the momentum going, after long months or even years of resistance, when fatigue sets in and small differences of opinion between activists start to become gaping fractures inside or between the movements?

Recebido, vamos responder a esta - tivemos uma falha de internet

Passamos a esta pergunta, da [C]

Agora seguimos para a questão da [T]

Vou fazer mais uma [R]

A questão territorial faz com que a defesa deste território seja levada a cabo em primeiro lugar pela gente directamente afectada por determinado projecto.

Mas quando várias projectos se juntam, ou estão relacionados como aqui no norte de Portugal (8-9 zonas de concessão mineira que o estado pretende autorgar), como se defende de forma constante, solidária e da forma mais igual possível todos os diversos territórios? Qual a hipótese que certos territórios "caiam" e os movimentos não tenham a capacidade de contrariar, e por consequência se dessolidarizem?

Temos 15 minutos de tolerância caso queiram colocar mais alguma questão

Senão temos 8 perguntas e respostas que serão disponibilizadas assim que estiverem traduzidas, ou que poderão ser enviadas aos e às participantes que assim quiserem.

Entretanto obrigado pela vossa participação e perguntas pertinentes...esperemos vemo-nos na(s) serra(s)! Força a todos.

Obrigado a vocês

Obrigada.

Grato a todos! Vemo-nos na serra sim!

Quem quiser que lhe os audios basta dizer.

Muito grato a todos, e aqui vai um adeus final do Alexander

Um abraço e força para as lutas na ilha da tartaruga!

Obrigada!