



## Abstract

### **TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS IN ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES: A comparative analysis of the mining conflicts in Intag, Ecuador and Mount Ida, Turkey".**

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This study analyses transformative politics in local environmental struggles. It advances an understanding of local environmental struggles as spaces that contain possibilities for the transformation of political subjectivities of those social actors that participate in them, and sets out to examine the factors and processes that facilitate or hinder such transformation. The study pursues this analysis by comparing two local struggles around large-scale mining development in the Intag valley of Ecuador and the Mount Ida region of Turkey, which differ with respect to how transformative they have been.

To understand the differences between the two struggles and explain those differences, the study builds upon a Gramscian reading of state-society relations and social struggles. Deploying the Gramscian perspective, the analysis looks at, one, the historical state-society relations within which the peasant subjectivities have been moulded; and, two, the actual dynamics of the struggles themselves, i.e. what has actually happened in the course of these struggles, emphasizing the relationships between the relevant movement actors. The study uses a comparative approach as a methodological entry point to identify the processes within state-society relations, and the building of the struggles that shape the political subjectivities of those peasants participating in them.

The research is based on field studies conducted intermittently over ten months from October 2007 to July 2008 and during three full months from June to August 2012 in Mount Ida, and over eight months from September 2011 to April 2012 in Intag, with further occasional visits to the study areas. The methodology combines internal, in-depth analysis of each case with external analysis of patterns of similarities and differences, always in relation to the state-society relations within which they are embedded. In the field studies, qualitative research methods were used, combining interviews (44 in Intag and 68 in Mount Ida), group discussions, informal talks, direct observation of daily life, and direct observation in meetings of communities and organizations.

Focusing on the contrasts between the two cases, the study argues that the peasants in Intag articulated more critical understandings of development-environment-justice than those in Mount Ida. It demonstrates that in Intag, a vision of alternative local development model based on the ethical values such as dignity, community well being, community empowerment was built; new environmental subjectivities were nurtured; and rights-based notions of justice were cultivated. Whereas, in Mount Ida, the dominant understanding of development as economic growth and material prosperity was reproduced, and environmental and justice concerns were framed in a limited way, the former as the defence of the local environment from outsiders, the latter as the defence of particularistic material interests.

As the study endeavours to explain these differences, it demonstrates, first, how hegemonic discourses and practices of the state mould the subjectivities of social actors, and constrain the possibilities for their transformation. On the basis of the Mount Ida case, the study shows how, by instituting its presence in and regulating the everyday lives of social actors, and representing and signifying those through the discourse of development, the state cultivates subjects who think about societal relations and their own lives in terms of a self-evidently legitimate and desirable process of development. The study posits that the

recent process of state building in Ecuador and its emerging effects in Intag also support this argument on the importance of state hegemonic practices in (re)configuring subjectivities.

Second, the study illustrates how transformative political action is enabled by the creation of political spaces for collective reflection and action around alternative ways of organizing social and environmental relations. Through the Intag case, the study shows how a social struggle that has engendered concrete changes in material practices and forms of sociality towards the establishment of more equal, just, democratic and sustainable social and environmental relations has influenced the peasants' conceptions of their lives and themselves, empowering them to assert their rights to decide and construct the future of their lives and territories. It also discusses how the hegemonic practices of the state undermine those civil society spaces and efforts, thus constraining the critical subjectivities in making in those spaces.

The study argues that the importance for transformative politics of creating political spaces to reflect and act upon the everyday lived experiences of social actors is further corroborated by the experience of the struggle in Mount Ida. The study shows that in Mount Ida in the dearth of such political spaces, the peasants, for the most part, could not go beyond defending their particularistic interests. Thus, the study argues, it is to the extent that actors in the sphere of civil society can make a difference to the everyday experiences, and rework the meanings through which these are lived, that they can enact transformative politics.