

Confronting extractivism – the role of local struggles in the (un)making of place

Confronting
extractivism

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the politics involved in local struggles against forestry extractivism. The forestry sector is dependent on vast areas of land for tree plantations. This creates deep-rooted conflicts between global corporations that seek access to natural resources and locals whose way of life requires the use of the same land.

Design/methodology/approach – This study draws on a political ontology frame of reference and storytelling methodology to build on testimonies of three small-scale farmers who actively seek to resist forestry plantations next to their land in rural Uruguay. The stories reveal the impossibilities they face when raising claims in the public political sphere and how they lack the means to organise strong collective resistance.

Findings – One of the testimonies reveals how the farmers engage in a form of “politics of place” (Escobar, 2001, 2008) to counter the power of the proponents of forestry and the further expansion of plantations. This form of politics strengthens and politicises the ontological difference between extractive and non-extractive worlds. The farmers seek to build new imaginations of rural living and sustainable futures without the presence of extractive corporations. They fulfil this aim by designing community projects that aim to revitalise ancient indigenous legends, set up agro-ecological farms, and teach schoolchildren about the environment.

Originality/value – The struggles of the farmers indicate the territorial transformations involved in (un)making (non)extractive places and the need to expand the analysis of the politics involved in struggles against extractivism beyond social struggles.

Keywords Resistance, Storytelling, Social movements, Forestry extractivism, Political ontology, Politics of place, Uruguay

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

The intensification of natural resource extraction for global markets and the increased visibility of local mobilisations against these types of projects have inspired an emergent literature on the organising and politics involved in struggles over natural resources (Banerjee, 2011, 2018; Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2016; Kraemer *et al.*, 2013; Misoczky and Böhm, 2015; Misoczky, 2011; Pal, 2016). These studies have suggested that local actors can play a fundamental role in shaping the politics of extractivism[1] by forcing a debate on who has the right to access and engage with land (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2016; Misoczky and Böhm, 2015; Misoczky, 2011). Such findings also point to the deep-rooted conflicts that exist between different modes of existence, where the meaning of land is at stake when locals defend their worlds against extractive operations (Blaser, 2013a).

Previous research on resistance against extractive operations has demonstrated how movements build successful national and international coalitions of support to halt the threat of destruction in their communities (Kraemer *et al.*, 2013; McAteer and Pulver, 2009). Nevertheless, most mobilisations against extractive operations do not extend beyond the local sphere. Smart (2018) has noted that almost all the organisations against mining in Chile were formed at the local level without the capacity to extend their capabilities beyond their immediate area of involvement. In line with these findings, Gerber (2011) has pointed out that many struggles against industrial tree plantations across the globe never go beyond locally restricted “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott, 1989) This suggests that most of the political struggles against extractivism are place based and are not necessarily visible in the public sphere. However, the current research has undertheorised the dynamics between people and places affect the politics of the struggles.

Understanding the politics of place is not only relevant for the emergent literature on the organisation of movements against extractive operations but also important for the wider debate on the political role of corporations in a globalised world. This debate has also been framed as political corporate social responsibility (PCSR), which examines the politics of the governance of global corporations through corporate engagement with civil society in the form of stakeholder deliberations (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Scherer *et al.*, 2016). This debate has mostly focused on the politics involved in setting global standards through multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) (Levy *et al.*, 2016; Mena and Palazzo, 2012; Moog *et al.*, 2015). However, recently scholars have also pointed at “the political nature of CSR [. . .] in local and regional governance” (Scherer *et al.*, 2016, p. 276), suggesting that there is a need to address political processes in the local context.

In this paper, I seek to expand ways of thought about the politics of local struggles against extractivism. The politics involved in this context is not just about visible mobilisations, contestations, or deliberations but struggles embodied by the ontological politics in place, in which alternative non-extractive worlds are (un)made. In the analysis, I rely on documented and narrated experiences of the arrival of forestry operations in Uruguay. In recent years, multinational corporations have invested heavily in the forestry sector with the support of the Uruguayan state. Currently, over 1 million hectares out of the country’s 17 million hectares of land are planted with pine and eucalyptus trees that are destined for the country’s two foreign-owned large-scale pulp mills[2]. The Uruguayan forestry sector has not been targeted by many visible domestic protests (Balch, 2018), unlike the strong and visible mobilisations against similar developments in nearby countries such as Chile and Brazil. This lack of visible conflict is what sparked my interest in understanding how those adversely affected by forestry development confront, resist, or take action against extractive operations that threaten their way of living.

This study draws on political ontology as a framework and storytelling as a method (Blaser, 2010; 2013a, 2013b; de la Cadena, 2016) and has a twofold aim. First, this paper seeks to deliberately intervene in the narrative of forestry development in Uruguay by telling the stories of three affected farmers whose voices remain excluded from the public debate. These stories give voice to otherwise absent perspectives and weave a different configuration of reality (Blaser, 2013a) that enables a conversation over the politics enacted across multiple (non-) extractive worlds. Second, this paper analyses the place-based dynamics of these farmers' struggles through examination of their stories and documented material from previous research; personal interviews; and corporate, state, and media narratives. This analysis focuses on the relations and entangled practices of humans and other-than-humans; it is through these relations and practices that (non)extractive worlds come to be (Stensrud, 2016).

It may seem counterintuitive to draw on experiences from forestry when discussing the politics of struggles against extractivism. The sector is often portrayed as a central part of the "bioeconomy" and is thus disassociated with other sectors that are dependent on nonrenewable natural resources such as mining and oil. This portrayal suggests that the activities contribute to "sustainable development and green growth based on biological and renewable materials, in degraded environments such as marginal and rural areas" (Marchetti *et al.*, 2015, p. 62). However, research has repeatedly highlighted the adverse effects that forestry operations have on the ecosystem and local communities (Böhm and Brei, 2008; Gerber, 2011; Kröger, 2014; Labarca, 2008). In fact, recent discussions have proposed that extractivism(s) should be used in plural (Acosta, 2017; Gudynas, 2015), which suggests that the term is not associated with particular natural resources, but that its applicability depends on the impact that the operations have on host nations and local communities. Still, it is important to be mindful of the differences between local struggles against different extractive sectors when analysing the politics of struggles against extractivism.

The findings suggest that the farmers' struggles against tree plantations revolve around not only issues about access to and control over land or natural resources but also considerations of the definition of the things that are at stake and the territorially dependent practices that contribute to these definitions. In fact, the strategies used by the farmers and the corporations point at the territorial transformations involved in making (non)extractive places and demonstrate the need to expand the analysis of movement organisations beyond just social struggles.

Theoretical frame

To study the politics and organisation against extractivism in rural communities in the Global South is a challenge. Many local struggles emerge from distinct onto-epistemic locations to that of the researcher (Misoczky, 2011) and cannot be explained through theories based on realities, histories and knowledges in the modern world (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2016). In fact, many of the existing research on the organizing from below tend to rely heavily on Western theories of social movements organizations (SMO) in Europe and North America (Misoczky *et al.*, 2017) to explain how different organizations, private and voluntary, in the Global North and Global South, to influence states and corporations (de Bakker *et al.*, 2013). For example, SMO theories that explain movements' resource mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) and political opportunity structures (McAdam *et al.*, 2001; Tilly and Tarrow, 2006) deal primarily with questions of how, why and when people organise into powerful movements that use collective action to influence the politics of states and markets (de Bakker *et al.*, 2013). However, such focus offers a limited understanding of the situated

experiences of those whose voices are excluded from the public sphere (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2015, 2016) and whose political claims seek “to transcend established social orders, world views and values” (Misoczky *et al.*, 2017, p. 251).

Research on the strategies of anti-mining resistance movements suggests that locals can influence corporate actions by forming transnational, national and even “translocal” (Banerjee, 2011, 2018) networks. Such networks, when successful, have a boomerang effect on the policy making of the home country (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) and support movements to fight corporations in multiple political arenas and in translocal spaces at home and abroad (Kraemer *et al.*, 2013). However, all local struggles do not necessarily have access to supportive coalitions, or transcend the locality from where they emerge (Smart, 2018; Gerber, 2011).

On the other hand, the politics involved in the governance of global corporations discussed within the PCSR literature have tended to focus on the democratic procedures (Mena and Palazzo, 2012; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011) and different forms of discursive struggles (Joutsenvirta and Vaara, 2015; Levy *et al.*, 2016) that either sustain or contest the legitimacy of corporations. Critics of the deliberative framework have warned that defining politics based on consensus driven deliberations obscure and silence the dissent of marginalised actors (Banerjee, 2018; Edward and Willmott, 2013; Moog *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, the politics discussed both by proponents and critics of PCSR is limited to the institutional, political and economic structures of global corporations, while oblivious to the dynamics at play in the places where struggles against extractivism are enacted (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2016).

Many local struggles against extractivism emerge out of distinct local histories each with their own forms of organising (Misoczky, 2011). Such struggles also involve entities, practices and meanings that cannot be captured by procedures and discursive struggles in the public sphere (de la Cadena, 2016; de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018). To understand local struggle against extractivism, it is therefore important to build theory that seeks to transcend limited viewpoints about movement politics. Next, this paper introduces the concepts that are relevant to the ‘politics of place’ (Escobar, 2001, 2008) and draws on insights from the field of political ontology (de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018) to add an ontological and place-based component to the emerging debate on movements that organise against extractivism.

Politics of place and the political ontology of struggles against extractivism

Escobar (2008) has drawn on experiences of a river community in the Pacific region of Colombia to argue that activists have started to engage in a form of “politics of place” to construct (place-related) identities that informs their struggle against extractive operations in their communities. They engage in a form of politics that “take place and place-based consciousness as both the point of departure and goal of their political struggles” (2001, p. 153) against the processes of territorial transformations, globalisation and capitalist extractive projects that are brought about by the dominant culture of capitalism, modernity and development. Escobar has described the politics of place as “subaltern strategies of localization” or “subaltern practices of difference” that intend to create alternative socio-natural worlds:

The politics of place can be seen as an emergent form of politics, a novel political imaginary in that it asserts a logic of difference and possibility that builds on the multiplicity of actions at the level of everyday life (Escobar, 2008, p. 67).

Escobar has conceptualised places as sites of ‘co-productions between people and the environment’ (2008, p. 42). He has also suggested that the politics involved in these struggles pertain to the movement’s conscious engagement with these co-produced relations to strengthen forms of self-determination and autonomy. His underlying argument is that movements consciously construct territory[3] and politicise difference to capitalism and modernity from the place that they inhabit. They do so by consciously engaging in daily practices and by articulating collective memories and visions of the future that are tied to their own definitions of their lived realities. Thus, they consciously use narrative, histories, and daily practices linked to territory to point toward the construction of alternative life forms and society models that are beyond capitalist, modernist and developmentalist ways of organising life.

The kind of politics that these movements engage in are both place-based and ontological because they strategically change the meanings and practices tied to place. The engagement with place seeks to challenge or strengthen the ontological assumptions of what exists by strategically drawing on particular memories, narratives and daily practices that configure reality in a particular way (Escobar, 2008). Thus, understanding this type of politics of place as an ontological struggle requires an acknowledgment that there may be multiple entangled reals at play in one place. This requires an engagement with politics through a political ontology framework (Blaser, 2010; 2013a, 2013b; de la Cadena, 2016; de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018), where the ‘political’ not only is an outcome of human struggles over resources but also includes considerations of how material objects or other-than-human beings take part in world-making practices (Stensrud, 2016).

De la Cadena and Blaser (2018) have used the term ‘political ontology’ to build ‘an imaginary for a politics of reality’ (p. 6). They seek to open up a debate over how different worldings (or world-making practices) contribute to the existence of multiple realities. The authors focus on the dynamics at play when heterogenous worlds ‘defend their specific ways they make their lives and worlds against extractivist destruction’ (De la Cadena and Blaser, 2018, p. 4). Using political ontology as an analytical frame means acknowledging that the political struggles are about more than conflicts over access to land and resources – or cultural beliefs – and that the politics involve entire worlds that struggle to defend their existence. Ontological conflicts also challenge assumptions about what can exist in place and what is at stake (Blaser, 2013b) because there are multiple meanings of land that are dependent on the world-making practices of those involved in the making of place.

Political ontology rests on the assumption of multiple ontologies that are developed within science and technology studies (STS). This is in contrast to the ideas of a singular reality, which hold that what is “real” is a determinate of discoverable entities and processes in a world “out there”. Political ontology suggests that particular realities are constructed, overlap and interfere with one another through particular practices in a combination of people, things, techniques and natural phenomena (Mol, 2002; Law, 2004; Stensrud, 2016). Thus, “land” in the context of land struggles is always multiple and in-between persons, things, institutions and other-than-human beings that dynamically (dis)connect and reconnect (Stensrud, 2016). The politics involved in the ontological struggles against extractivism thereby include how combinations of different entities and the world-making practices of human and non-human actors contribute to the making of (non-) extractive places. Thus, the point is not to examine these practices ‘as they are’ but to understand *how they become* and connect human and other-than-human entities to make particular kind of worlds, or particular kinds of places in the context of this study (Stensrud, 2016).

Ontological politics at play in previous struggles against forestry

Previous research has demonstrated that rural populations affected by forestry extractivism have experienced the dire consequences of tree plantation in their communities without the mobilising power that could counter this development. Clapp (1998) has reported how local Chilean peasants ended up selling their land and moving to urban areas due to corporate coercive tactics such as exposing livestock, crops, and people to pesticides; isolating communities with plantations; and prohibiting people from exercising their rights to access land. Similarly, Kröger (2012) has reported how a few local farmers in Brazil were enticed into selling their land in the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their children in urban areas. This produced a domino effect where others also had to sell their farms because they became surrounded by walls of eucalyptus plantations and had fewer neighbours and public services (Kröger, 2012). Such accounts of the arrival of forestry suggest that the politics of place are not enacted in affected rural communities.

There has been a rise of resistance against the expansion of forestry projects in recent years that is embodied in movements such as the landless movement (Movimiento sin tierra, MST) in Brazil (Kröger, 2012, 2014) and the Mapuche indigenous movements in Chile (Kowalczyk, 2013; Labarca, 2008). These movements demonstrate that the affected rural populations actively oppose projects that threaten the basis of their existence. For example, MST has managed to build strong resistance in Brazil by interlinking territorial, social, and symbolic practices (Kröger, 2014). Kröger's findings also suggest that these strategies are ontological; they have allowed movement members to envisage alternative method of imagining and organising rural life. In these methods, land is not just associated with production and subsistence but is also imbued with meanings related to the divine qualities of nature that are expressed in the diversity of life, clean water and air (Kröger, 2014).

The rise of the Mapuche indigenous autonomy movement in Chile can be directly traced to the expansion of forest plantations on land that previously belonged to territories governed by Mapuche communities (Labarca, 2008). Although the Mapuche struggle is not a unified social movement[4], they have revitalised their strengths and political demands by relying on ancient memories of the landscape. These memories have been strategically used to reconstruct the Mapuche territorial identity (Labarca, 2008). The movements have also focused on the local struggles so that they can position themselves to defend their claims based on their culture and the rights tied to their territorial identities (Hale and Millaman cited in Labarca, 2008).

The movements have different origins, local histories and ideological underpinnings: MST is a rural peasant movement, and the Mapuche movement emerged out of indigenous claims for self-determination. Nonetheless, the mobilisations in Brazil and Chile share common features. They politicise their own ways of being in place to confront the expansion of tree plantations in their communities by changing and strengthening their own territorial identities and assigning new or ancient meanings and practices to the places they inhabit. This paper draws on experiences in Uruguay to argue that this kind of ontological politics contributes to the making of non-extractive places when actors consciously construct new alternatives and imaginations of rural life through their practices and embodied stories.

Methodology

This study follows a storytelling framework. Storytelling as a research genre has become increasingly important in the study of organisations (Boje, 2011; Gabriel, 1995; Rhodes and Brown, 2005) and in making visible competing narratives from the margins and shadow of an organisation (Tyler, 2011).

This research does not use storytelling to make accurate representations of the world of the marginalised. Instead, the stories form a dialogue with the silenced other regarding the phenomenon being studied (de la Cadena, 2016). The whole political ontology field of inquiry rest on the assumption that what can be observed is not detached from the observer (Blaser, 2010). Thus, the selected stories were 'suitable' not because of being representative of all experiences in communities affected by forestry but because they make visible the world-making practices and political struggles between the worlds of the farmers *vis a vis* corporations and the state. Other storied realities would have brought other relations to the fore. For examples, stories of those opposing the first pulp mill in the town of Fray Bentos would not have been possible to embark on an analysis of the (un)making of extractive worlds in the places where eucalyptus is grown.

These stories also draw from the experiences of the silenced to form new perspectives that are neither theirs nor mine but an outcome of our conversations (Blaser, 2005). De la Cadena has used the word "co-laboring" (p. 12) to describe how she works together with her interlocutors (in a manner that is respectful of the reality that they inhabit) to learn about their lives and to use their stories to think through the phenomenon she seeks to understand. Thus, I do not aim to explain and re-present the farmers' views of the world. Instead, I aim to engage with their struggle from a standpoint that emerges out of a relation with their views of the world (Blaser, 2010).

I refer to the stories told by the farmers as 'testimonies', which is a concept from feminist research, where storytelling has long been used to give visibility and meaning to otherwise ignored, marginalized, or oppressed voices (Gugelberger and Kearney, 1991; Smith, 2011). Testimony is a particular genre of storytelling that is used 'to give voice to the voiceless' (Smith, 2011, p. 27). In a political ontology frame, the purpose of narrating these testimonies is not about giving voice to the voiceless (which may have the opposite effect on the voiceless 'subaltern', see Spivak, 1988) but to make the absent present and to highlight particular worldmaking relations that without would otherwise remain obscure in the debate over the politics of extractivism (Blaser, 2005). The purpose of relying on farmers' testimonies is not meant to debunk other stories on the basis of claiming more accuracy in relation to a reality out there; rather these stories seek "to weave a different configuration of a reality that is in a state of permanent becoming, not least through the stories that are being told." (Blaser, 2013a, p. 24).

The testimonies were from farmers whose estates were located in areas that were threatened or overtaken by the arrival of eucalyptus plantations. The preliminary contacts with the farmers were established through a Finnish journalist who had visited Uruguay and a member of Guayubira, a Montevideo-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), which has been actively supporting the farmers in their struggle against the national forestry model. The meetings with the farmers took place in November 2012 in their homes or farms. The focus of our conversations was on their experiences of the arrival of the plantations and the strategies they used to make their voices heard while trying to defend themselves from the detrimental effects of forestry in their communities. The conversations were informal and lasted between one to three hours each.

The conversations were transcribed, translated into English, and re-written into a coherent text. The editorial intervention in this process followed Maloof's (1999) methodological approach to translating voices of resistance into coherent stories. This method involved:

- producing stories that can speak to a wider English-speaking audience;
- preserving the wording of the narrator and only eliminating repetitious phrases and stock expressions (e.g. 'you know', 'as I was saying'); and

- selecting the parts of the conversations that were relevant to the research topic (in all three cases this was the majority of the recorded text), (4) and rearranging the chronology of the stories so that fragments are unified into a coherent narrative (Maloo, 1999, p. 7).

This paper's analysis used insights from 'collective storytelling dynamics' (CSD) (Boje, 2011, p. 14). CSD assume that there is an interplay between different forms of narratives that makes visible the relationships between stories and multiple pasts, presents and futures (Mjølberg Jørgensen, 2011). This paper extends this method to the relations and entangled practices of humans and other-than-humans that give rise to the multiplicity and entanglement of worlds (Stensrud, 2016). The next section presents an account of how the arrival of forestry has been portrayed by media, state, and the corporate actors. This account makes visible the contrasts and relations between the storied world of the farmer, the state, and corporate actors.

The arrival of forestry in rural Uruguay

Over the past three decades, Uruguayan Governments have introduced a range of measures to stimulate investment and facilitate growth in the forestry sector. In 1987, the Forestry Law (Law 15,939) came into force and gave companies tax exemptions and financial subsidies for establishing forest plantations on land that was categorised as "forestry priority" (Piñeiro, 2012). Reforms in laws governing land rights, specifically regarding foreign ownership, and land use for forestry purposes further encouraged new investment in forestry (Piñeiro, 2012). At the turn of the millennium, the Uruguayan Government further encouraged investments in pulp production[5], which resulted in the construction of two large pulp mills: Finnish-owned UPM in Fray Bentos and Montes del Plata in Punta Pereira, which was a joint venture between Chilean Arauco and Finnish-Swedish Stora Enso.

The changes in the territorial regulations have resulted in a steady growth of planted trees in areas that have been designated as forestry priority. Currently, 1 million hectares are covered with pine and eucalyptus plantations that are mainly owned by foreign companies, and 4.1 million hectares of the country's 17.1 million hectares have been declared as forestry priority (Uruguay XXI, 2016). Furthermore, the foreign land purchases have also signified that many farms dedicated to food production have disappeared, and the surge in price of land has influenced what kind of crops can be produced profitably (Piñeiro, 2012).

Uruguay lacks the kind of visible domestic conflict that is common in other parts of the region. This can be in part explained by demography and geography (Balch, 2018). Uruguay is the least densely populated country in Latin America and has a very small population of native indigenous tribes. Approximately one third of the country's 3.3 million inhabitants live in the capital Montevideo, and 95 per cent live in urban areas (INE, 2013). This means that only 5 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. As the tree plantations are concentrated in certain regions that are designated as forestry priority, only a small minority of citizens are directly affected by the tree plantations.

How the forestry business has been portrayed in the domestic politics has also contributed to its social acceptance. Concerns that were initially raised about how large-scale tree plantations would affect nearby communities and their surrounding environment were met with what Carrere and Lohmann (1996) have called a "voluntary blindness" (p. 196). Government officials denied the existence of studies on the problems that monoculture plantations would create for nearby communities. Furthermore, the conflict that arose with Argentina during the construction of the first large foreign-owned pulp mill (then called Botnia, now called UPM) in the border town of Fray Bentos has dampened

domestic mobilisations. The media mostly framed the events as a form of political conflict between the national interests of Argentina and Uruguay (Pakkasvirta, 2008). Thus, opposition to these investments was framed as antipatriotic (personal interviews, Mercedes and Montevideo 2012). In parallel to the conflict, the left-wing opposition party, Frente Amplio, changed their initial opposition to these developments once they gained power in 2005 (personal interview, November 2012). The combined consequences of these events have impacted the possibilities for mobilising opposition to forestry expansion in the country.

At the national level, the political elite has taken a benevolent stand towards the investments. The elite stressed the importance of job creation and the sector's contribution to the economy. This is evident from a TV interview conducted by the Finnish broadcasting company YLE during president José Mujica's visit to Finland in September 2014:

[The pulp mills] have indirectly employed more than 10,000 people working for them permanently with better salaries than we had before and they also bring currency income. We are a small country that needs to import a lot, but this industry is now exporting pulp for the same amount as the meat industry, this year for approximately two billion dollars. This means that for us, under our circumstances, it is beneficial (José Mujica in YLE interview, September 2014).

The corporate communications about the benefits of the investments have also focused on the industry benefits to the country in terms of economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation (Table I).

The forestry corporations' active involvement in questions regarding sustainability has also contributed to the conflict-free image that the industry enjoys in Uruguay and abroad (Balch, 2018). Over 80 per cent of the plantations in Uruguay are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC, 2012), a multi-stakeholder initiative that promotes the responsible management of forests based on rules negotiated with a wide range of actors (owners, industry, and environmental and social NGOs (Mena and Palazzo, 2012; Moog *et al.*, 2015). According to an NGO representative and the testimonies presented in this study, these standards do not account for the lived experience of those affected by the plantations (personal interview Montevideo, 2012). Others have also identified similar shortcomings of the FSC certification processes (Moog *et al.*, 2015).

The companies that are heading the second pulp mill investment, which is named Montes del Plata (MDP) and is situated near the city of Colonia, engaged with the local community early on (personal interviews with company representatives, Helsinki June, 2012; Santiago, December, 2012; Stora Enso, 2011, p. 19) to reduce the risk of the kind of conflicts experienced during the construction of the first pulp mill (see social community benefits in Table I). However, these community engagements did not encourage discussions that may have conflicted with corporate interests in the affected communities (interviews with locals, November, 2012; Balch, 2018). Balch (2018) has suggested that the social investments in the local community were not mainly about attending to local needs but were instead used as a vehicle for wider legitimacy building among other more influential stakeholder groups (i.e. investors and state agents).

The main national media outlets have taken a positive stand towards forestry investments (interview with journalist, Montevideo, 2012). However, critical voices have started to emerge in recent debates over the installation of a third pulp mill in the interior of Uruguay. Some of these voices have raised concerns that more tree plantations will have increased needs that might have a negative impact on rural livelihoods (Chamorro, 2016). Despite these recent developments, the stories of affected farmers have not received much attention in the public debate (Ehrnström-Fuentes and Kröger, 2017, 2018). Therefore, the presentation of the testimonies in the next section should be understood as an attempt to

Table I.
Corporate texts on
forestry development
projects in Uruguay

Benefits/ Source	Economic	Social (employment)	Social (community)	Environment
Stora EnsoPress release, 18.11.2011	The construction and operation of the pulp mill will have significant economic and social impacts in the country ... The mill is forecast to have a positive impact on Uruguay's GDP of 0.8% during construction and 2% when it is operating	An average of 3,200 and a peak of 6,000 workers will be employed during construction and about 500 people is expected to work at the mill once it is operational	The project will also be of value for the economic and social development of Colonia and Conchillas, where the company is committed to an environmental performance of excellence and to working with the local authorities and the community	n/a
Stora Enso Sustainability Report, 2011	Montes del Plata will significantly boost the country's economy, especially after the pulp mill starts production. (p. 20)	Together with indirectly created jobs (including forestry activities around the country) the total employment impact of the mill should amount to more than 5,000 full-time jobs. During the construction phase over 6,000 jobs will be created, including 3,000 jobs for construction workers as well as many jobs for suppliers and service providers. (p. 20)	The mill construction involves several schemes designed to mitigate harmful impacts and find innovative ways for local communities to benefit ... Partnership with local farmers give them additional income from wood production. Montes del Plata is also engaged with local communities through various development programs. (p. 5)	Our joint venture in Uruguay, Montes del Plata, obtained FSC certification for more of its tree plantations, following a second audit carried out in August 2011
Stora Enso Stakeholder Magazine, 2011	The largest private investment in Uruguay's history also involves a lot of work guaranteeing local sustainability. (p. 22)	Montes del Plata has also established a programme to recruit local young people with the potential to be trained as technicians for the mill. (p. 25)	The basic principle is always to work together with local stakeholders. We're trying to create innovative long-term projects that will bring real added value to the community, not quick fixes. (p. 25)	n/a
Montes del Plata, Press Release, 14.09.2014	As a whole, the operations will increase Uruguay's annual GDP by 2%	The mill is the last link of a value chain that comprises over 5,000 full-time jobs (including direct, indirect and induced jobs)		When it comes to sustainability, Montes del Plata's goal is to set a benchmark in terms of stakeholder relations, land use and contribution to local development

(continued)

Benefits/ Source	Economic	Social (employment)	Social (community)	Environment
UPM, Press release, 16.09.6014	The current focus of discussions is on the development areas required for further industrial growth, notably the infrastructure for logistics and plantations as well as education to nurture versatile skills and expertise	In Uruguay, UPM has 550 direct employees and employs indirectly around 3,400 people. The value chain of UPM's Uruguay operations creates altogether 6,400 jobs	UPM's operations in Uruguay include . . . in cooperation with local organisations contributes to education, entrepreneurship and improving the quality of life through projects focusing on the rural areas where the company operates	All of UPM's forest plantations are certified to FSC® and PEFC™ standards

Table I.

weave a different configuration of reality (Blaser, 2013a) from what is currently available in the corporate, state, and media accounts of forestry investments in Uruguay.

Presentation of the testimonios of the farmers

First testimony: farmer in Cerro Alegre

This farmer lives some 10 km from the city of Mercedes, in the village of Cerro Alegre, a village that only 20 years ago still had many inhabitants and a small school filled with children. Today, many houses have been abandoned and the farmer's estate is to a large extent surrounded by eucalyptus plantations. The farmer has been participating in the resistance since the beginning of the 1990s and was also formerly affiliated to the 'Frente Amplio' party. However, he left the party once it came into government and, according to him, failed to fulfil its promises to the rural population. Today, as most of his neighbours have sold their farms, and there are almost no people left in the countryside who can work on his farm, this farmer is also considering his options for the future. Following is his testimony:

They arrived here with a lot of propaganda, and then some neighbours sold their land but we didn't pay much attention until more people started selling. They took advantage of a situation of crisis here, when people had to sell because they were experiencing financial difficulties. But, well, from that moment on we tried to learn for ourselves what was going on, and then we started to have a real awareness of things. We learned that these companies were looking for their advantages in the world, their corporate advantages, for where to make their investments. And we learned that the advantage that this territory had for them was on the one hand the climate; the climate makes it possible to harvest their trees in 10 years. And then they had the advantage that here in Uruguay, the countryside was relatively unpopulated and that was synonymous to less resistance.

But the most serious thing about all this is the permissiveness of the politicians, who made all the laws in line with the needs of the companies, something that is not being questioned but ethically it is very bad. With all these advantages they started to install themselves here and after four or five years our wells started drying up. Traditionally the neighbours here drank the water from the wells. We always had water, and then the water went down a lot, which meant that the people with few resources started to have problems with access to water. Because without water life here is impossible and it makes any kind of production more expensive, whether it is to water a plant or to give it to a cow or for ourselves.

When Frente Amplio won the elections there were a lot of people with expectations of change. This demobilized a lot of people.

We are now in a time of being relatively unorganized, because at one point we were very organized. This doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of people that have a clear understanding of things. But what makes it more serious is the tremendous disinformation of the people because everyone knows when Suarez and Forlán scored a goal, everybody knows. But they do not know that there are 150 families here that do not have water to drink. If they heard about that every day on the radio or on the TV, the people would become more aware. But really, there is a lot of disinformation because nobody likes it when they invade your home and our country is our home and there are people that aren't aware that they are invading us. And well, that is a bit about the big issues at stake.

I've been here for 38 years, and when I arrived there were many neighbours around. From here one could see five or six neighbours.

Today you do not see anyone and this landscape repeats itself for 15 kilometres. Over there, there are 20,000 hectares of eucalyptus; there are no people left, no people. [...] It doesn't make sense. Besides, they made a law, the forestry law, for the needs of these companies. But they do not even fulfil that because one of the clauses, of the forestry law, which I have here, says that land that isn't used for other things is to be declared forestry priority.

But here clearly the land did serve other purposes; for all of us who lived here, before there was eucalyptus, there were other things here better than this. So from the social and economic perspectives the land was better than this. So clearly they made a law, but not even they themselves fulfil that law because in the name of progress they transformed a place of work – with a lot of people working here – into a desert.

At any moment now I will have to leave, I feel very cornered here, for various reasons. To me, what happens is that I am very committed, stubborn. But in reality we are saying to ourselves that we have to leave, it is with a lot of pain that I say this but that is the reality because this model that they are forcing on us doesn't allow any space for this kind of production [...] I would like to grow old here, I like it here, I like it a lot. But one has to work under more or less decent conditions.

So what are the possibilities you have now to make your voice heard?

And well, here we think that we have some weaknesses and some strengths. Among the strengths we have is the nobility of the cause that we are defending. We are not defending anything more or anything less than our land, the natural resources, so that the people can live a better life. The thing is to make the people understand this in a time when the big companies buy the diffusion channels. Difficult I'd say, but that is our task, if not for anything else than to leave something to those coming after us.

In 2007, we got together from all departments (provinces) in Uruguay, all affected by the plantations, and I was assigned to go to Brazil to a global meeting. And there we were in contact with a lot of people, and I told them about our issues, representing Uruguay [...] and the only thing I asked for was that they would organise a good press conference, so that the people here could see what is going on. Because here, it seems like it is only my problem, and that it will be only my problem. The problem belongs to all of society. But there is no awareness that it is a problem for all of us. So that is our task now: to try to open the eyes of the people.

And how do you do that?

I would like to know, because I want to but I can't.

Second testimony: Former farmer living in Mercedes

This man used to have a farm in Cerro Alegre. He participated for a long time in the resistance against the eucalyptus plantations but due to health reasons and his economic situation he had to give in and sell his land. He now lives in a small house in the centre of the town of Mercedes. Following is his testimony:

I am telling you that more than 20 years back – and I am native of Cerro Alegre – forestation didn't exist. So we have evidence that this is real, what I am going to tell you is real, it isn't a lie. The water issue – we had a lot of water in Cerro Alegre. When I worked at the farm at that time we had wells made with only a shovel and a stick and we had a mill. When there was a strong wind I managed that mill and we could get out 2,500 litres per hour and sometimes we had wind for two to three days. That well, when the forestation started to increase, after 4-5 years, it ran out of water.

I first started working at different farms, and after that I bought a small farm for myself nearby. I used to have a good well but it started to dry up, so I had to make a deeper hole because underneath there was more water. But the forestation left us without water. And after that the predatory animals started to appear, all these animals that ate my corn. We were completely

abandoned with our worries about the water situation and the plagues [of predatory animals], and we had to cover the costs ourselves.

We organised ourselves and went out on the road. At that time we were protected by the 'Frente' which is today the government. We handed out fliers listing the problems we were starting to experience. But today they are in government and they continue with the same things. Even more, I think today one more pulp mill is being planned. It is sad because these people do not love the land, which is the richness that we have, foresting the land makes it unusable for life.

I wanted to continue living there but I came to the city because of problems with my health. Because of problems with my heart I had to sell. But if it was for me, I would continue living there.

I think really this has become political, we had meetings with Mujica here at the farms and he was against the forestation. Now he is in government and has forgot everything about our farms and that this is affecting the whole area, the schools, everything, now everything is forested. That is why this isn't coming out in the press. There is a lot of money in it, and for those of us who lived it, the reality passed over our heads. In the city they ignore the reality of things. Now, the food comes from the land but they do not value the land. They destroy the land. The animals are also badly fed. When Mujica became president he sent ministers to our meetings that had to convince us that planting forests is good. There is no help from the government.

These plantations are certified by FSC, did you participate in the stakeholder dialogues of the certifications?

'We participated in several meetings but we were the rural and they the technical. We participated to make our point but they wanted to change our mentality. They made us graphs saying that the forestation was profitable, that there was no prejudice in that, but we had already started to experience the problems. I mean, what they mentioned there was a big lie. They fooled the people with propaganda and money. Also the press came to see the people but with lies. Before, the local press used to write about this, after that they forgot us, as did the national press. Here we had various journalists that followed our story until they realised that the forestation just continued. Like I said, the current government was in opposition and they supported us, but when they became the government they did the same thing as the governments before them.

It is sad. I grew up in a time when my dad had pigs and cows to maintain us through the winter. Now all that farmland is covered with soy and a lot of chemicals. There aren't any natural plantations, no matter how much one would like to have them because the air is so contaminated. I never used chemicals, my products were all organic. Now all the water is polluted, and I am surprised by the doctors who give medicine to the chicken, those animals aren't natural, they have hormones. It is very different from the natural chicken that we used to eat. I have done my part, what hurts me is to think of the young and the children. It is sad.

Third testimony – farmer resistance through a proposal of alternatives

The following testimony is from a community of non-traditional farmers who have also been opposing the arrival of the second pulp mill in their region. Their farms are located outside Colonia and some 30 km from where the country's second pulp mill – Montes del Plata – was being built at the time of our meeting. This is Uruguay's most important region for dairy production and it is also an area that has yet to be affected by forestation (interview with local journalist, November 2012). The governmental categorisation of land use has until now prohibited the arrival of forest plantation in this area. However, the debate over reclassification of the land in this area has risen on the political agenda. In late 2011, a confidential document between the investors and the government was made public where the government had agreed to reclassify land and thus give the Montes del Plata pulp mill

access to land for a eucalyptus plantation within 200 km of the mill (Guayubira, 2011). The following story consists of the accounts of these three community members and how they built resistance towards the threat of the arrival of tree plantations in this area.

With Montes del Plata we only participated in the first public audience [...] But we quickly realised that we were few soldiers, and that we were going to be used in this parody that they were going to create, so we said, we are going to work underground instead and multiply our efforts. So that the people can return to look towards the countryside as a possible horizon in their dreams, so that the young guys can build their dreams here in the countryside.

Environmentalism in Uruguay is rather like being part of Al Qaida. The leaders have made it their job to demonize the environmentalists. That is not what we wanted and so we said: "what more can we do? We are few, we cannot challenge all this, where there is a government that is hijacked by the companies, who have more power than the state itself." The only thing we could do was to try to build an alternative and multiply it by working and showing that it is possible to produce well in the same places where they say it is only possible to plant eucalyptus or soy, showing that you can have a high productivity in small spaces, within reach for many people.

We have to work with the basics and work with the educational centres so that the children become aware of the planet they inhabit, of what ecosystem they belong to. A way of doing this is to spread the information. When we talk about education, we talk about all levels – higher, primary, and secondary. If we do not start with the children, when they arrive at the secondary level they already have an affective understanding of certain things which will obviously favour this consumption of superficial things.

In the schools we are creating a native forest (Montecito) and for every tree we pass on all the knowledge to the children through legends. We have recovered the legend as an educational method, it is fantastic because you enter the child's world, and the children from a very early age until the sixth grade, which is the primary school, and in the secondary also, you can imagine they pretend that they are big, but when you start telling them a legend they absorb the knowledge, the fantasy that unites and has values. Well, obviously we do not have legends about everything, so we investigate and create the legends. In all this that we are proposing, there is an acceptance in all the schools. We donate plants to them, and we return to repair the ecosystem with these species, which also produce fruit for the schools. We build it and the school teachers work on explaining the ecosystems, about the plant and animal life, which is the basics in education, just as with any animal that teaches their offspring how to survive. We also try to recover the native names of the plants.

We call this an ecosystem-based multi-production forest, or in other words, restoring the ecosystem, acknowledging it and living well from it. To live well does not mean that you can buy the latest model of pickup truck. It is to serve yourself with all the benefits, for example to wake up in the morning because there are many birds around [...] and to go out for a walk, to look forward to the evening without having all that technological equipment that will disturb you. What you see here, when we took it 7 years ago it was all destroyed rocks and land, its productivity capacity was very low, or in other words it could only be used to plant eucalyptus. This is the job we are doing now, documenting the whole process, profitability, and recovery of the resources.

Discussion

The presentation of the three testimonies above have fulfilled the first aim of this study: to make a deliberate intervention in how the politics of extractivism – and the story of forestry development in Uruguay – is narrated. These testimonies contribute to weave a different configuration of the 'real' (Blaser, 2013b) in terms of the implications that forestry has had on some affected rural communities. In addition, the stories of how the affected confront

extractivism contribute to an analysis of politics in the pluriverse, where many different world-making practices constantly interact and disrupt the making of place as a site of resource extraction. The remainder of the discussion addresses the second aim of the paper, which pertains to the ontological politics involved in the making of (non-)extractive places. These sections focus on the farmers' strategies and the relations and entangled practices of humans and other-than-humans that give rise to (non-)extractive worlds (Stensrud, 2016). The discussion ends by positioning the findings in relation to the literature on social movements and the debates within PCSR.

The limits of public politics – exclusion through produced absences

The two first farmers tried to resist selling their farms for many years by organising resistance against the spread of forestry plantations. In this sense, their strategy has been about challenging the current situation from within the political system, engaging deliberatively with the corporations, attending meetings and public hearings, mounting public protests, and voicing their concerns in the national media. As the first farmer's story reveals, they have also engaged in resistance by building transnational solidarity connections in hope that they could influence public awareness at home by making their situation known abroad. However, such political engagements have not been successful due to the farmers' exclusion from politics in the public sphere. The exclusion is produced in three interconnected ways that reinforce each other.

First, the first absence they confront is that their lived realities are excluded from national media outlets. For example, the first farmer gave an example of how everybody knows about football goals, but nobody knows about the farmers' suffering because it is not transmitted through the media. The first two farmers are mainly concerned with finding ways to overcome this exclusion from the public debate by organising protests and press-conferences that would make their stories visible to larger audiences. However, both the two other ways in which absences are produced further complicate their opportunities to engage in politics in the public.

Another interlinked absence emerges out of the ontological conflict between the meanings of well-being of the nations and the well-being in the situated context of the farmers. The well-being of the nation is worlded through the creation of industrial jobs, exports, and GDP growth (Table I, citation of Mújica above). The well-being of the farmers depends on the availability of drinking water, neighbours, local food production, and a pollution-free community environment (Testimonies 1 and 2). This creates an ontological conflict about the kind of 'common goods' that the two different worlds seek to create, which in turn has concrete implications for the making of place.

The world-making practices of the farmers do not contribute to national well-being in the same way as the foreign investments in largescale pulp mills do. However, the pulp mills' dependence on the continuous expansion of tree plantations destroys farmers' well-being and worlds. This kind of produced absence makes the destruction of the farmers' world possible because their concerns can be ignored in a political system where the common good is defined on parameters that do not consider their realities and ethical definitions or judgments. To build politics based on assumption that there is a consensus on what is 'the common good' (Scherer *et al.*, 2016), or even suggesting co-existence (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2016; Banerjee, 2018) cannot be possible when the existence of one world destroys the other in the places being disputed.

Third, the farmers' ways of being and knowing are also actively produced as absent because they are not representative of reality but are made nonexistent in relation to other ways of knowing and being (de Sousa Santos, 2013; Blaser, 2010). Some expressions of this

produced absence are evident from how the second farmer pointed out that what he told this researcher 'is real, it isn't a lie', and how in the meetings with the FSC certifiers, the farmers 'were the rural' and the certifiers were 'the technical'. The produced absence is what makes it impossible for the farmers to raise their concerns about the experienced problems because these problems do not exist, according to the facts and graphs presented by the experts (Testimony 2). This also highlights the onto-epistemic mechanisms in play when deliberative systems such as the FSC are used to guarantee responsible forestry practices. The standardisation process converts local grievances into certified practices by relying on particular expert knowledge and standards set by 'stakeholders' other than those actually affected by the operations (see also [Ehrnström-Fuentes and Kröger, 2017](#)).

Place-based ontological politics beyond human agents

In terms of the ontological politics that were enacted in place, the first two testimonies reveal how the farmers' world-making practices and worlds are affected by the drastic transformations that occur in place when tree plantations start to populate the landscape. Both stories suggest that the whole community gradually changed when monocultures of trees (examples of other-than-human actors) started to populate land that was previously used for food production.

The arrival of forestry also gradually changed other relations in place. Both farmers pointed out how the plantations transformed human practices and impacted life-sustaining relations within the community: there were no more local schools; no availability of farm workers; no nearby neighbors; and no more water to keep plants, animals, and people alive. The arrival of forestry also made it difficult for the farmers to sustain food production on their land, ultimately forcing them to sell their farms and move away. The arrival of tree plantations thus *unmade place* as "a place of work" and transformed it "into a desert" of trees (Testimony 1). Thus, the world-making practices tied to place are transformed while the connections between people, things, and institutions change ([Stensrud, 2016](#)), which creates new forestry realities while debilitating the realities tied to food production.

Politics of place as a strategic intervention

While the first two farmers were caught 'off guard' by the gradual transformation of their communities, the resettling farmers outside Colonia were aware of the threats of forestry arriving in their region. This threat motivated them to engage in an explicit strategy of the politics of place ([Escobar, 2008](#)). This group worked with a completely different set of assumptions underlying how they relate to the corporations, the state, and the land that they inhabit. The main difference to the former strategy is their strategic disengagement with any modes of politics that involve deliberation with the corporations or visible public protests. Their strategy was not primarily about raising awareness nationally or internationally to change public opinion about forestry in Uruguay. They have realised that they work from a position of absence and are delegitimised as terrorists in the public debate because 'environmentalism in Uruguay is like being part of Al Qaida' (Testimony 3).

The resettlers' place-making efforts focused on building alternatives to forestry extractivism by changing the practices and meanings tied to land. The farmers built local awareness of the alternatives and risks for forestry plantations. This awareness raising enabled them to engage in politics at the ontological level by constructing new meanings, practices, and significances that transform place from a site of resource extraction to a site of the re-creation of life between human and other-than-human beings. They thus engaged in a type of the politics of place that was previously used in the struggles over land in Chile and Brazil ([Labarca, 2008](#); [Kröger, 2014](#); see also [Escobar, 2008](#)). The farmers used farming

practices of 'an ecosystem-based multi-production forest' to restore land and recover native species. They did this not to increase the monetary value of land but 'to live well from it' (Testimony 3). The territorial transformations, or their relations to more-than-human beings in place, emerged from how they relate to and engage with land. These transformations are political in the sense that their existence in place challenges dominant assumptions about land use practices and about the value of land being unproductive and therefore suitable for tree plantation.

The resettlers turned to local schools instead of relying on the public sphere to build coalitions. The resettlers engaged with schoolchildren to become involved in *making a non-extractive place* where the young can "build their dreams" of a future that is not based on the consumption of things (consumption was noted to fuel the need for investments in forestry by president Mujica above) but is instead based on "the ecosystem they belong to".

The resettlers relied on lost Indigenous Charrúa legends to construct a territorial identity and local knowledge that contribute to alternative imaginations of the future (Testimony 3). The difference between the resettlers' situation and indigenous struggles is that in the former, the collectivity is not created on the basis of existing ancestral worldviews; instead, it is based on a strategic intervention of new legends that support alternative non-extractive worlds to come alive. Thus, the resettlers use place-based memories of the past and narratives of the future (Escobar, 2008) to challenge how worldings of the modern industrialised world are used to make sense of history and the future (Blaser, 2010). The educational projects of these farmers are a long-term strategy to politicise the ontological difference (Escobar, 2008) between the modern extractive world and the ways of being in the alternative world that have been proposed by the resettlers. This creates an ontological multiplicity that opens up the possibility for place-based ontological politics that question the foundations of reality as portrayed through the modern ontology.

Neither of the two strategies have been very successful in overturning the support that the forestry companies enjoy in Uruguay. When the farmers' voices of opposition are made visible in public, they are either ignored or accused of being anti-patriotic and backward minded (personal interview, Mercedes, November 2012). The third group of farmers are a highly marginalised group with values that are dramatically different from the predominantly urban population of Uruguay. How their efforts to educate the local school children are perceived by the rest of the local population has great significance for how they can build strong local collective identities. Strong identities will enable them to mobilise the whole community to resist selling land to forestry prospectors or to prevent those prospectors from planting trees on their land. However, their strategy is long-term. If that strategy is successful, they may be able to find resonance for their claims in the broader community by not only offering an alternative but also changing the community perception of large-scale development projects as appropriate.

The evolution of this type of local struggle cannot be controlled by local actors alone. Global political, economic, and ecological events influence how territorial relations and rural imaginations unfold. Global financial crises (as noted by the first farmer) can influence the economic realities on a farm. National politics over land-use policies restrict and enable different world-making practices in place, as did the implementation of forestry priority areas described by the first two testimonies. Climate and ecological change that is out of the hands of humans can affect the ecosystem and create long-term change in the viability of local farming and forestry practices.

This study has the following implications for the research on social movements and debates on PCSR.

In contexts where politics involve multiple worlds, or the pluriverse, it is important to acknowledge absences because they explain the limits of politics within one particular ontology. This also highlights the limits of politics as currently discussed within the SMO and PCSR literature. The farmers' incapacity to mobilise can be described by the lack of resources due to insufficient people and by the lack of political opportunities to make their voices heard within the political system; these opportunities are the result of limited access to media, party politics and international conflicts with Argentina. However, such explanations are insufficient considering the ontological limits faced by these farmers and their worlds. Neither do such theoretical frames explain the political action used by the resettlers. Instead, research on politics across multiple ontologies must start by questioning the limits of the political system. This line of questioning should examine the assumptions of what exists, what types of knowledge and ways of being count as real, and what kind of worlds are created and destroyed through particular ways of knowing and being.

Another important theme for the politics beyond the public sphere is the territorial and ontological dimension of the politics of the struggles. The effects that the concrete changes in the human and other-than-human relations of the community have on local mobilisations have often been overlooked in the social movement literature. Humans are not the only ones who influence the politics of local struggles. The ontological politics involved in these struggles also tend to be dynamic as relations between humans and between more-than-human continuously change. When neighbors sell and move away, there are very few people left in the community to take part in any form of resistance. The community's values and interests also change as new territorial relations are formed by the new forestry workers that move in to these communities (Carambula and Piñeiro, 2006).

Furthermore, once the trees have been planted in the community, there is very little (if any) room for locals to demand a plantation-free environment, no matter how severely affected they would be by these operations. Thus, the locals' capacity or willingness to mobilise against extractivism is structured from the outset by their practices, which evolve through the relations to other-than-human beings in place. As the third testimony revealed, it is also possible to change how locals relate to and defend the place they live in by strategically intervening in the world-making practices of community members.

These findings can be connected to the debate on the political role of corporations as discussed in the PCSR literature. It is important to note that the politics of place also have implications for the politics of PCSR. This paper highlights the challenges that deliberative systems and consensus-driven politics face when absences structure the possibilities of the political debate. It is also important to point out that locals who resist the arrival of extractivism are not the only ones who engage in the ontological politics of place. The forestry corporations also actively engage in the making of place through global standards that exclude local grievances and CSR or development projects that strengthen the corporate presence. These projects change the practices and meanings of place to the corporations' advantage. Future research should examine the effects of CSR and stakeholder deliberations on local struggles for alternative life projects. Such research could examine how the world-making practices of CSR and stakeholder deliberations change territorial relations and suppress the inherent ontological conflicts that exist between extractive and alternative worlds.

The focus of this research has been on the local struggles of three farmers confronting forestry extractivism on their land. This limited scope of events and places included in the study may occlude other world-making practices and human/nonhuman relations that contribute to the making of place. Place-(un)making is not only an outcome of local struggles, also the politics enacted through global institutions (i.e. World Bank, UN) and

state/corporate politics ([Ehrnström-Fuentes and Kröger, 2018](#)) have a direct impact on the lived realities on the ground. Political ontology can be useful when examining the politics of extractivism(s) at other scales to understand how particular world-making practices make extractive worlds come into being.

Concluding remarks

This paper seeks to expand ways of thinking about the politics of local struggles against extractivism. These struggles should not only be perceived as visible mobilisations and contestations; they should also be viewed as movements that are engaged in a particular kind of ontological politics of place, in which alternative non-extractive worlds are (un)made. This paper draws on political ontology as a framework and storytelling as a method ([Blaser, 2010; 2013a, 2013b; de la Cadena, 2016](#)) to deliberately intervene in how forestry in Uruguay is currently portrayed as conflict free and beneficial for the whole population. The farmers' stories weave a different reality of forestry and its alternatives in rural Uruguay. The first and second farmer have had to give up their lives at the farm (personal communication with Finnish journalist, January 2019) as a direct consequence of the expansion of plantations in their communities. The current debate on the construction of a third pulp mill in the inlands of the country places more pressure on converting farm lands to tree plantations. These stories are political in that they reveal the worlds that are sacrificed when states and markets continue to create well-being through economic growth and industrial development.

The testimonies in this paper reveal a sense of exclusion that the farmers faced and which did not give them any space to defend their world on equal terms in the public sphere. Actors engaged in social struggles must secure resonance for their claims among a wider audience if they are to pressure for change through collective action ([de Bakker et al., 2013](#)) or coalitions of support (see for example [Kraemer et al., 2013](#)). This resonance was not possible when most of the urban population were unconcerned with the reality of these few farmers. Opening up for the pluriverse and thereby also strengthening the politics of ontological multiplicity beyond the public sphere is one way to move beyond the limited focus of current theorising on social movements. This is a task for those excluded communities seeking to defend their worlds from destruction. However, it is also a task for researchers who have a responsibility to engage in these struggles and pay attention to the place-based and ontological politics that make new worlds come alive.

This study uses these stories to stimulate scholars to think of how they theorise and methodologically engage in the politics of struggles against extractivism. These are not struggles over legitimacy that can be studied based on how they are mediated in contemporary globalising societies ([Joutsenvirta and Vaara, 2015](#)) or on their capacity to organise powerful movements that can halt extractive projects in their community ([Kraemer et al., 2013; Misoczky and Böhm, 2015](#)). Nonetheless, those who are marked by exclusion face a struggle against the destruction of their world and their place on this earth that is still an urgent matter that needs scholarly attention. These stories not only make the absent present but embody an ontological multiplicity that is difficult to detect in politics in the public sphere. This multiplicity makes it possible to observe that the pluriverse is not merely a possibility ([de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018](#), p. 6); it exists in the struggles of those who confront extractivism in their daily world-making practices.

Notes

1. Extractivism as a concept refers to the extraction of large quantities of unprocessed, or almost unprocessed, natural resources destined towards global markets (Acosta, 2017; Gudynas, 2015). The concept is intimately connected to debates and mobilisation against concrete extractive projects in Latin America, implying that the analysis parts for local contexts, grounded in specific territories with concrete impacts on communities and ecosystems (Gudynas, 2015).
2. The installation of a third pulp mill is currently being planned and debated.
3. Territory is a relational construct where the histories, narratives and practices linked to the distinct characters of a particular place (e.g. mountains, swamps, forests) is what make up a particular territory (Escobar, 2008).
4. Some Mapuche groups aim for increased representation and inclusiveness in the Chilean system while others take a more radical stand in terms of decolonising the Mapuche identity, and claiming for total autonomy from the state (Kowalczyk, 2013).
5. The Free Zone status assured exemptions on any current or future national tax; the bilateral investment agreements with the home state of these corporations (Finland) and the corporate-state contract also created protections against future changes in laws that could have a negative impact on the return on investment for the corporations (Ehrnström-Fuentes and Kröger, 2018).

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