The philosopher of liberation neither represents anybody nor speaks on behalf of others (as if were his sole vested political purpose), nor does he undertake a concrete task in order to overcome or negate some petit-bourgeois sense of guilt. The Latin American critical philosopher, as conceived by the philosophy of liberation, assumes the responsibility of fighting for the other, the victim, the woman oppressed by patriarchy, and for the future generation which will inherit a ravaged Earth, and so on – that is, it assumes responsibility for all possible sorts of alterity. And it does so with an ethical, ‘situated’ consciousness, that of any human being with an ethical ‘sensibility’ and the capacity to become outraged when recognizing the injustice imposed on the other. (Dussel, 2008, p. 342)

Since 2006, when the Canadian corporation Barrick Gold first received authorization to start exploring the Famatina hills for gold and uranium, the people have been organizing themselves to protect their livelihoods, the hills and the glacier located in the Department of Famatina, in the Argentinean Province of La Rioja. Vecinos de Famatina Autoconvocados en Defensa de la Vida (Famatina’s Self-Convened Residents in Defense of Life), Coordinadora de Asambleas Ciudadanas por la Vida de Chilecito (Chilecito’s Coordination of Citizens Assemblies for Life), Vecinos Autoconvocados de Chañarmuyo (Chañarmuyo’s Self-Convened Residents), Vecinos Autoconvocados de Pituil (Pituil’s Self-Convened Residents) and Vecinos Autoconvocados de Los Sauces (Los Sauces’ Self-Convened Residents) – these are some of the names of the many people’s assemblies that have been organized to resist the onslaught of mining companies. Their united slogan is: ‘El Famatina no se toca’ (‘Don’t touch Famatina’).
The people of one of the poorest regions of Argentina – humble, common people – have so far been able to stop large and powerful transnational corporations, which have closely worked with national and provincial governments supported by corporative media, international development banks, and other powerful institutions: first Barrick Gold, then Shandong Gold and, more recently, Osisko Mining Corporation. The transformation of these common people into a political force involved the construction of a new critical consensus (Dussel, 2012), the consensus of the social bloc of the oppressed (Gramsci, 1975). Such construction has been achieved in the space of horizontal autonomous organizations (the assemblies), in public demonstrations (often repressed with violence), in the meetings of the Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas (Unions of Citizens Assemblies), as well as in the constant awareness and recognition that the struggle will last forever – the mountain will always be there, full of precious metals; therefore, its defense will last the life time of the current activists and go beyond the present generation.

In this paper we will present and discuss the people’s struggle to protect Famatina against transnational mining corporations and their allies through the lens of Enrique Dussel’s philosophy of liberation. To make our argument more understandable for those unfamiliar with the context of Latin American philosophy, we will introduce Dussel’s propositions first, and then present and discuss the case of Famatina in the light of his philosophy of ethics and politics. The data presented here was collected from documents produced by the ‘Argentinean communities of NO’, a designation provided by Antonelli (2011, p.7) to identify the ‘network of environmental and citizens’ asambleas (assemblies) as well as other actors who oppose mega-mining projects and share the same ‘ethical values, epistemic evaluations, and the promotion of citizens’ consciousness disseminating the discourse of NO by different means (professionals, academics, media etc.)’. We have also used data collected during a field trip in August 2012, when we visited Chilecito and the roadblock Alto Carrizal, conducting in-depth interviews with a range of activists.

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4 The Famatina Hills have a glacier which provides water for human consumption and for irrigation in the whole valley, including many cities and towns. It is also a cultural reference for the people.
The consensus of the oppressed: The Philosophy of Liberation

The Philosophy of Liberation (PL) emerged at around 1970. PL is defined by Dussel\(^5\) (2008, p. 340) as a ‘critical philosophy self-critically localized in the periphery within subaltern groups’\(^6\). According to him, ‘the originary intuition was influenced by the events of 1968’ and ‘inspired by the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, and especially Marcuse’s One-dimensional Man), which illuminated the political meaning of said ontology, allowing it to be more thoroughly understood’ (Dussel, 2008, p. 340). At that time, the mass struggle against the military dictatorship in Argentina and the rest of Latin America demanded from philosophers and scholars a critical and theoretical responsibility (Dussel, 2008), a ‘historical rupture in the field of philosophy’ (Dussel, 2012, p. 32), a rupture that could not avoid the consideration of the victim\(^7\) as a material corporeal being:

> From the first Frankfurt School, we discovered ‘materiality’ in the sense of living corporeality […]. This anthropological materiality, a far cry from Soviet dialectical materialism, was perceptibly close to our situation of impoverished, starving, and suffering Latin America. In the Southern Cone, the multitude of demonstrations shouted: ‘bread, peace, and work!’ three necessities that refer strictly to life, to the reproduction of its corporeal content (Leiblichkeit). […] Philosophy of Liberation set out from the locus enuntiationis of the material victim, from the negative effect of authoritarianism, capitalism and patriarchy. However, this is the root of a profound divergence with Critical Theory that continues up to the present […], that of the material negativity of colonialism […], a phenomenon which corresponds to metropolitan capitalism, Modernity, and Eurocentrism (Dussel, 2011, p. 17).

It was in this context that Emmanuel Levinas’ (1969) category of ‘totality’ provided the ground for overcoming the ‘narrow understanding of ontological Totality that dominated Critical Theory from Horkheimer to Marcuse, Apel and Habermas’ (Dussel, 2011, p. 18). The contact with Levinas, mainly with Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, produced a ‘subversive disorientation’ (Dussel and Guillot, 1975, p. 7). The discovery of Levinas was critical for the development of Dussel’s original analectic or ana-dialectic\(^8\) method: the adoption of the absolute transcendence of the Other as the point of departure. In the words of Mendieta (2001, p. 19), for Dussel ‘the other is beyond the horizon of the already experimented and understood’. Dialectics is ‘the method of self-reflection and self-projection of the same’:

> The horizon of the understanding and the existence of the self is a totality. Dialectics is the production of this totality. While we subscribe the ontological approach, the otherness of the other will continue to be an inscrutable alterity. The openness to the other requires the destruction of ontology and its substitution for a metaphysical approach, an approach generated from the fundamental principle which considers that the truth of the word is always beyond the given (Mendieta, 2001, p. 19).

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\(^5\) Enrique Dussel was born in 1934 in the town of La Paz, in the region of Mendoza, Argentina. He moved to Mexico in 1975 as a political exile and is currently a Mexican citizen, Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the Iztapalapa campus of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Autonomous Metropolitan University, UAM) and also teaches courses at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM). He has an undergraduate degree in Philosophy (from the National University of Cuyo in Mendoza, Argentina), a Doctorate from the Complutense University of Madrid, a Doctorate in History from the Sorbonne in Paris, and an undergraduate degree in Theology obtained through studies in Paris and Münster. He has been awarded Doctorates Honoris Causa from the University of Friburg in Switzerland and the University of San Andrés in Bolivia. He is the founder with others of the movement referred to as the Philosophy of Liberation, and his work is concentrated in the field of Ethics and Political Philosophy (http://enriquedussel.com/Home_en.html).

\(^6\) PL roughly emerged at the same time as the first works of Ranajit Guha in India. For Dussel (2008, p. 340), the PL and the movement later identified as ‘Subaltern Studies’ share common grounds, such as being a critical perspective ‘that utilized their own reality as a point of departure, and is some cases a revitalized Marxism as a point of theoretical reference’. However, these similarities may be ‘misinterpreted if the original situation is not taken into account and, consequently, the theoretical perspective is distorted’.

\(^7\) The notion of ‘victim’ is inspired by Walter Benjamin’s work and especially On the Concept of History.

\(^8\) The term derives from the Greek root ‘ana’ (beyond).
The analectic moment requires the openness to think, to listen, to see, to feel, to taste the world from the perspective of the other; it is conditioned by humbleness, by an expectant solidarity. Therefore, a philosophy which reflects from the perspective of the other is a philosophy of liberation. The analectic approach allows the recognition that there is a politics of totality and a politics of the other. ‘A political totality is divided between the lord and his oppressed as oppressed within this particular system’, the oppressed is the other of such totality. Therefore, the ‘politics of the other is an anti-politics, it is a political of subversion and contestation’. It is a politics which challenges established hierarchies and legal truths. ‘The politics of the other, the anti-politics of alterity, proclaims the injustice and illegitimacy of the actual system, not in the name of chaos and anarchy, but in the name of a new legality, a new legitimacy’ (Mendieta, 2001, p. 21).

Dussel’s (2012, p. 34) next intellectual movement was ‘a careful and archaeological rereading of Marx⁹ (from his early works in 1835 to those of 1882),’ allowing the clarification of the Exteriority-Totality theme. The concept of ‘living labor’ (Marx, 1973) as the pure subjective existence of labor, in Dussel’s (2011, p. 22) interpretation, cannot be separated from the person, from the immediate bodily existence: ‘This naked, carnal subjectivity is the height of materiality in Marx’s understanding (and in that of the first Frankfurt School)’. In Latin America, ‘philosophy must inevitably confront this negative materiality’ and deal not merely with the economic level, ‘but rather with the entire material sphere, which has its own economic and political origins and its own historical and systemic institutions’ (Dussel, 2011, p. 22).

The next stage in Dussel’s trajectory was the critical dialogue with the ethics of discourse. Starting in 1989, Dussel and Karl-Otto Apel engaged in a long North-South debate that lasted for ten years (see Apel and Dussel, 2004). For Dussel (1997, p. 1), the result was double edged: the clarification of the reasons why discourse ethics has difficulties with the grounding and application of moral norms; and the positive appropriation of its formal and procedural aspects, resulting in the elaboration of ‘an ethics that is able to incorporate the material aspects of goods and the formal dimension of ethical validity and consensuablity’.

In defense of the articulation of the formal with the material, Dussel (2004a) takes into consideration the principus exclusionis: the Other, the affected in the Exteriority, the excluded of the community of communication that cannot participate. This is because even to be represented poses a moral question to the problem of validity. The difference between discourse ethics and liberation ethics is basic: the first one departs from the community of communication; the second departs from the excluded of that community, precisely at the point where discourse ethics is at its limits. ‘The concrete principle liberta hic et nunc the oppressed, or turn the affected-excluded into a participant, has a logical procedural difference: the situations of exception for the practice of the discourse ethics are the normal situations for the ethics of liberation’ (Dussel, 2004a, p. 275). Therefore, there is a critical knot in the application of the basic norm of the procedural morality: the empirical historical material is relegated to a secondary and unimportant position; it has no relevance because validity, defined by discourse ethics as the rational universality of formal intersubjective consensuablity, has priority with respect to the ethical content (Dussel, 1997).

For Dussel (1997, p. 6), ‘formal morality always presuppose a material ethics, which determines the criteria of universal and concrete truth’. The formal must be articulated with the material. More than that: the material principle of ethics concerns, in the last instance, the reproduction and development of the human subject’s life – a content which has universal validity and determines all levels of the formal moral (Dussel, 2004b, p. 344):

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The ‘formal’ aspect of the moral (the correct, right, richtig), the level of universal intersubjective validity (Gültigkeit) abstractly determines, formally, all levels of material ethics. There is a mutual constitutive co-determination, always present, with different meaning (one is material, the other is formal). It is then possible to interpret the materiality of the victims ethically […] from the material criterion a priori of all critique (the negative critique which departs from […] the impossibility of living, from the unhappiness and the suffering of the victims.

The universal material principle is enunciated as follow (Dussel, 2004b, p. 345):

Who acts ethically presupposes a priori and always in actu the requirements (obligations, ethical duties) of the reproduction and self-responsible development of the human subject’s life, as mediations with the practical truth, in a community of life, in the perspective of a good cultural and historical life (as a way of interpreting happiness and evaluating values), which is in solidarity and have as ultimate reference the humanity and, therefore, has a universal claim.

The criterion of reproduction and development of human life internal to each culture allows all of them to be self-critical in relation to intrinsic moments which prevent life. It also allows all of them to have a dialogue with other cultures regarding what is valid or invalid to reproduce and develop human life. As a consequence, a universal formal moral principle is formulated: ‘The procedural intersubjectivity is valid if it conforms to the practical criterion of truth and to the ethical content’ (Dussel, 2004b, p. 350).

However, for Paulo Freire (2005), to achieve such a realization, a stage of conscientização (consciousness) is necessary, a process which can only be effective in the intersubjective communication of the oppressed people. It is in this negative moment that ‘the victim uncovers the normal system which exists as “natural” and “good”, as the “fetishistic capital” of Marx, as the ethically perverse “Totality” of Levinas, the “non-truth” of Adorno. As a consequence, it loses its validity, its hegemony (in the words of Gramsci)’. The system appears in the eyes of the victims, of the dominated, just as repressive, as a ‘dominating anti-validity’ (Dussel, 2004b, p. 355). The first subject of this ethical, critical, pre-thematic, but substantially creative, consciousness is the victim.

In a second moment, those who have some ‘experience’ of the ‘we’ of the oppressed can reflexively think about the situation of the Other. This is the moment when ‘organic intellectuals’ (again using the words of Gramsci) construct a thematic critique: a thematically explicit consciousness that is scientifically informed and results in the consensus of the oppressed. The third moment is the existential, historical and practical consciousness of the people, it the organizational moment, when the anti-hegemonic consensus is expressed in concrete struggles and in the construction of alternatives.

For us, Dussel’s ethical philosophy of liberation provides an affirmative critique of the dominant consensus of what is called ‘critique’ at the heart of critical management and organization studies. While the purpose of this conference paper is not to outline and discuss that consensus, which, as a shorthand, we could call ‘Eurocentric’ for now, this paper focuses on introducing Dussel’s philosophy of ethics and politics. Clearly, Dussel’s work needs to be thoroughly contrasted with the dominant critical philosophies at work in critical management and organization studies. However, for now, we hope Dussel’s critique will become implicitly visible by way of our in-depth discussion of the anti-corporate mining struggle in Famatina in Argentina. For us, this struggle is an example of a situation when dominant approaches of discourse ethics fail to produce adequate insights and critiques as well as starting points for alternatives. It is a case where the oppressed – those that are not even represented by ‘normal’ political structures and discourses – rise up and struggle. It is the rise of the oppressed in defense of bare life. Before we present the case, we will briefly discuss the recent Argentinean history and context of mega-mining projects.
Argentina’s mining boom10

Argentina’s 1993 Law of Investments in Mining 24.196/1993 assures fiscal stability for 30 years; reimbursement of VAT on exploration activities; exemption from tariffs and customs duties on capital goods, special equipment, or components of such goods. It also assures that mining servicing companies enjoy equal benefits: profits from mines and mining rights that are destined to increase company capital do not require income tax; the capitalization of mining reserves can reach up to 50%; there is VAT advanced reimbursement and financing in the case of new projects or the substantial increase in production capacity. Also assured are tax exemption on mining properties and accelerated amortization and royalties are limited to 3% at the mouth of the mine. Also in 1993, Law 24.228 was passed, harmonizing the provincial mining procedures and establishing public biddings for large scale mining. As part of this agreement, the provincial governments agreed to lift all municipal taxes, rates, and documentary stamp taxes that might encumber mining activities; it also included the reimbursement of VAT fiscal credit stemming from investments in exploration twelve months after expenses have occurred. The legislation was complemented by Law 24.585/1995, the Environmental Protection Code for the Mining Industry, which requires that each provincial government creates an enforcement authority, introducing the concept of ‘sustainable development’11. In Giarraca’s (2007, p. 4) view, it is this legal framework which has paved the way for ‘the enormous flux of foreign capital that has flooded’ into Argentina over the last few years.

The Argentinean Mining Laws are an expression of how ‘distinctive institutional and administrative territorial arrangement’ produces a ‘regional configuration in the divisions of labor and of production systems’ that results from ‘the conjoining of economic and political forces’ rather than being ‘dictated by so-called natural advantages’ (Harvey, 2010, p. 196). As a result of these institutional and administrative territorial arrangements, the evolution of this activity in Argentina over the last decade looks as follows: a cumulative export growth of 424%; from 18 mining projects in 2002 to 614 in 2011; a cumulative minerals exploration growth of 664%, from 135,000 meters in 2002 to 1,031,600 in 2011; a cumulative investment increase of 194%; a cumulative production growth of 841% (Argentina, 2012a).

Another governmental document presents mining as a state public policy, advertising 2.3 million km² with geological potential for the development of mining (Argentina, 2012b). This is an astonishing proposition, considering that the whole country’s size is around 3.75 million km². The implication would be the transformation of around 60% of the country into open pits. The same document advertises the existence of specific legal apparatus, following international patterns, and a competitive taxation scenario. Very true remarks! However, the same cannot be said about the following remark: ‘metallic mining developed with non-contaminating technologies’ (Argentina, 2012b, p.16).

In fact, mega-mining projects, based on the dogma of development and on the fallacy of the endless availability of natural resources, have an enormous adverse impact, promoting territorial fragmentation and destroying any chance of a multidimensional organization of labor and production. They are an example of a practice that, ‘with respect to the physical world and within the web of ecological life [...] changes the face of the earth in often dramatic and irreversible ways’ (Harvey, 2010, p. 185).

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10 This section is based on Misoczky and Böhm (2013), where we present the case of Andalgalá (a small town in the Province of Catamarca in Argentina) and the people’s struggle against transnational mining corporations and their allies.


As a consequence, amid the mining boom, an explosion of social protests and confrontations has arisen all over Argentina. Under the slogan ‘No a la mina’, the opposition against plunder and contamination has mobilized a variety of resistance movements, which have been actively confronting the extractive model of development driven by national and provincial governments in association with transnational corporations. As Harvey (2010, p. 203) indicates, ‘the institutional and administrative arrangements within a territory are, theoretically at least, subject to the sovereign will of the people, which means they are subject to the outcomes of political struggle’.

‘El Famatina no se toca’: The consensus of the oppressed

Barrick Gold started the exploration to identify the resources available at the Famatina Hills in 2003. In 2006 Barrick Gold received authorization for exploitation. The first meetings of Famatina and Chilecito neighbors occurred in March of the same year. They decided to look for information regarding mining procedures and impacts on the environment. Soon the people started to organize in many provincial asambleas, such as Los Vencinos de Famatina Autoconvocados en Defensa de la Vida, Coordinadora de Asambleas Ciudadanas por la Vida de Chilecito, Vecinos Autoconvocados de Chañarmuyo, Vecinos Autoconvocados de Pituil, Vecinos Autoconvocados de Los Sauces. On March 8th 2006 the neighbors blocked the access to the mine in Peñas Negras. On the same day, following months of mobilization which included demonstrations and roadblocks, the provincial government approved a law prohibiting open pit mining in the province and a referendum in Famatina and Chilecito, to be held on July 27th 2006, to deliberate about mining activities in the province. Barrick tried to negotiate and promised to leave the camp in place. However, the company did not fulfill its promises and attempted to remove the blockade with a judicial injunction and by violence. However, the people resisted and kept Barrick without access to the mining area (Mapa de Conflictos Mineros, 2013). The decision of blocking the road expresses, in many senses, the decision to put people’s bodies between the mine and the mountain, generating a ‘continuity between the life of the body and the life of Famatina, which are considered as being threatened by the same and only enemy’. The life risk that someone runs by putting the body directly into the conflict is comparable to the life risk of allowing the mine to operate (Avalle et al., 2012, p. 90).

At Peñas Negras, everything seems static, but there is this uncomfortable feeling that, all the time, something can suddenly happen. The stars are so big that they don’t tickle, they pulse. A fire illuminates in the distance the banner (El Famatina No Se Toca) that closes the path that leads to the camp of Barrick Gold mine, which defines itself as the ‘best of the world’. Close to the fire a retired 80 years old watchmaker, a public worker, an engineer, a walnut producer, a teacher, a retired policeman, and a housewife. They are part of a big net of citizens’ assemblies, those strange horizontal organizations without bosses, without leaders, without political parties, open to any member of the community. They will hold the blockade during the night. In the camp, as guarantee, there are two watchmen. Barrick Gold removed the 30 workers which were in the mine, nine vehicles, part of the lighter equipment, but the blockade will continue until the definitive removal of the company. How did it happened? How, in less than one year, these assemblies seem to be close to changing history? A blind man who saw too much said one of his stories: ‘When something is true it is enough that someone says it just one for knowing that it is right’. […] Maybe the assemblies are saying, only once, the new and coherent way of thinking in our times: the present and the future can be different from the past’ (Lavaca, 2007).

In March 2008, the activists celebrated the first anniversary of the Peñas Negras blockade. In commemoration, the assemblies of Chilecito, Famatina, Pituil and La Rioja blocked another road, close to the provincial capital, in protest against the non-implementation of the laws approved the

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13 The Famatina Department is located at the Province of La Rioja. The town of Famatina is a small place (around 6,500 inhabitants), Chilecito is also small, but not so much (around 30,000 inhabitants). Both are located in the Famatina Valley.

14 A reference to Jorge Luis Borges.
year before. The fact is that the provincial governor – Luis Beder Herrera – was elected, promising to eliminate mining activities, but very soon betrayed his promise and became a supporter and partner of mining companies. The activist Gabriela Romero told Lavaca (2008, p. 4):

The governor changed his discourse. First, he supported our struggle; he used to say that it was necessary to protect the water and the natural resources. However, after the election he forgot his own words. A few days ago he announced, in San Juan, that La Rioja would become a mining province (una provincia minera). When he made this kind of declaration he was outside the province. He does not have the courage to make it here because he knows that more than 90% of the population would not agree. We worked very hard and today there is a strong social movement opposing this activity. As a reaction, the radios, newspapers and the television are minimizing our actions and refusing to publish our communications.

At that point, the anti-mining activists faced the usual criticisms: to be against everything, to be against progress, to ignore that mines are present everywhere, also in developed countries (Lavaca, 2008). In contrast, the activists rejected the ideas of development and progress in its connection with extractive practices and, at the same time, denounced the fallacy of having to choose between mining and poverty, reaffirming their right to choose how to live with dignity. As we were told by an activist, ‘we started to have conscience that beyond poverty and necessity we must have dignity’.

On April 14th 2009, Barrick Gold representatives were received by President Cristina Kirchner, on the same day the people were violently repressed in Peñas Negras when they protested in and occupied the city of Famatina. On April 16th a judge accused one of the activists injured during the repression, and she ended up being condemned for assault. The judge also ordered the installation of a police station in Peñas Negras to guarantee the free movement of vehicles on the road. In September that year the asambleístas returned to the road and continued with selective blockade, which led to Barrick Gold not being able to continue the project. After that, in 2010, the Chinese company, Shandong Gold, made an attempt to prospect the mine, realizing, however, that the popular organization was too strong. It soon withdrew from the area (Langoni, 2012).

The words of an activist, documented by Avalle et al. (2012, p. 74), explain why the people organized and resisted:

We did not think, we did not reflect that we were evicting the biggest mining company of the world, we had urgency, there was something here that we had to confront. If the enterprise started to operate we would be left without water; if the enterprise started to operate we would be under serious risk. We decided, we moved forward, we acted, we had to do it.

On August 31st 2011 Osisko released the following communication:

Osisko Mining Corporation and Energía y Minerales Sociedad del Estado (EMSE), La Rioja state mining corporation, are pleased to announce that they have entered into a binding agreement regarding the development of the Famatina gold project (‘Famatina’ or the ‘Project’) in La Rioja Province, Argentina. The Famatina project area covers a 40 square kilometer zone hosting various gold-enriched epithermal and porphyry targets. Terms of the agreement include: US$500,000 cash payment to EMSE within 15 days of signing the agreement; a first-year US$10M commitment in exploration expenditures during the initial 4 years term (‘Initial Term’) of the Agreement; Osisko may earn a 70% interest in the Project by completing a feasibility study within the Initial Term, as said Initial Term may be extended at Osisko’s discretion for an additional term of 4 years if required to complete said feasibility study; Osisko commits to financing 100% of the Project’s development and construction costs, with repayment of EMSE’s portion from 25% of its attributable project cash flows; EMSE will be responsible for gaining all required permits throughout the life of the Project. […] Mr. Sean Roosen, President and Chief Executive Officer of Osisko stated: ‘In Famatina, Osisko has identified an ideal project with which to enter one of the best mining jurisdictions in South America. We are very excited at the addition of another high quality project to our current portfolio of properties. We believe Famatina hosts very promising targets with excellent potential for future development. We have assembled a highly experienced team to oversee the work and we look forward to an intensive exploration program on the property over the coming year’ (Osisko, 2011).
The people know, as we were told by the Famatina activists, that they will have to resist forever, because the minerals will be in the hills forever and will always attract the greed of mining corporations and associated national partners. Instead, for them, Famatina will always be a provider of clean water and much more, as we were told: ‘the mountain gives us this joy of seeing it every day; it is beautiful; the mountain is our mother’. Therefore, there is no option, but to continue to be on permanent alert and struggle.

Since the first days of January 2012 the people of Famatina are in a state of total rebellion. What happened is that some governors confuse electoral votes with the social license to blast hills and destroy aquifers. The people of Famatina have been interrupting since the first day of the year the access to the exploration site in rejection of the agreement signed by the governor. Security special forces from the capital ríojana surround the protesters who count on the support of the people, of local and ecclesiastic authorities. [...] The popular insurgence blocking the transit of mining transports is so important that the asambleistas in Alto Carrizal had the rotating presence of almost all inhabitants of the town. The new selective roadblock is located a few kilometers from the historical blockade of Peñas Negra, which, since 2006, has been in place against Barrick Gold. [...] The people insist in repelling the agreement between the governor and Osisko, announcing that they will never get the social license needed for the mine’s operation (UAC, 2012).

On the second day of the new roadblock the people were threatened by a group of around 25 young men, dressed as mine workers and identified as ‘Mining Action’ (Acción Minera). They were carrying machetes and sticks. They were supported by some policemen of Chilecito and from the provincial security forces. The people resisted and the operation failed to open the way to the mine (Prensa del Pueblo, 2012). However, provincial security forces continued to besiege the activists who have the support of the people, the mayor and the priest of Famatina. The bells of his church are a key organizational resource: they sound to alert any attempt of removing the activists from the road. When they sound the people know that they have to leave whatever they are doing and go to the hill to defend the blockade (UAC, 2012). According to the priest Omar Quinteros: ‘the people cannot crawl like snakes, they have to fly like eagles’. He has been facing threats of removal to another place and attempts to prohibit him of ringing the bells. The mayor who supports the struggle also faces legal threats from the provincial authorities.

January 22nd 2012 was a day of national struggle in defense of Famatina, a day marked by a demonstration in Buenos Aires and other cities around the country, and by a march in Famatina, with more than 4,000 people. On January 26th around 10,000 people marched in the province capital, filling the central square opposite to the governor’s office with slogans and songs against the agreement with Osisko. The manifestation started around 18:00 and went on until almost midnight. Under the slogan ‘No to mega-mining; yes to water, land, work and justice!’ they stated many times the pacifist character of the protest (Rodriguez, 2012a). It was one more expression of the self-constitution of a people. As we were told by activists, there are many cries behind El Famatina No se Toca; there are also many possibilities of seeing the other as a compañero (companion, comrade), of understanding that the people have the power to decide whatever they want. About this possibility, we heard in a meeting: ‘we are a people who walk slowly, who chew a lot; we had never confronted the established; it was a blessing that such a thing is happening to us’. De La Vega (2012, p. 1-2) tells us more about this metamorphosis:

Who would imagine that in such a small place – a place apparently insignificant if compared to the mountain’s immensity – and during another exhausting January due to the Ríojano summer, a people could rise again. Did I say people? Yes, even if in some institutional monotonous spaces to speak of a people looks like a delusion. Instead, they say: ‘four mad cats’ (some generously talk about five…). There is no doubt, in these corners we are witnessing a metamorphosis. Public meetings, marches, manifestations, caravans of cars and bikes, open radios … are testimonies of the many who added to those four. Even if no one counts, even if the corporate media hides, in the more calm moments there were seen around 4,000 ‘cats’. First transformation: the cats are multiplying in a geometric progression. But, more than this: the cats speak of rights, dignity, history and life. From their mouths come ‘meows’ of resistance and struggle. In some places there are cats talking of popular power and painting future horizons. And yes, without much consideration, they call themselves a people. […]
This is the second transformation. [...] the animal acquired the face of a people. A people who does not kneel, lost the fear, is proud of that passion that makes them walking and contaminates others. A people who restates their condition as the subject of politics, decide and struggle affirming their life and, while doing it, dance and sing to scare the death.

On January 30th 2012 Osisko updated the status of Famatina exploration project:

In response to recent community protests and media reports and requests regarding Osisko’s activities in La Rioja State, Argentina, would like to provide an update regarding the company’s current and planned involvement in the Famatina Project. [...] At this point in time Famatina is an exploration project only; there is no current plan, design or intent for any mining operations. Osisko has committed to spend $10 million, including environmental baseline studies, during the initial year of a 4-year term. Osisko intends to execute the agreement through its subsidiary Minera El Portal S.A. (MEP). Osisko’s partner in the project, EMSE, is responsible for gaining all required permits through the life of the Famatina Project. Osisko, in all its endeavors, is committed to socially and environmentally responsible exploration and development, and is dedicated to performing its work programs to the highest international standards of acceptance. [...] MEP representatives have started to design and prepare a community information and consultation program. This information and consultation is primary to the commencement of any exploration work on the site. If there is no social license for exploration and development around the Famatina project area, no work will be conducted by MEP. In the days immediately following the signature of the Agreement, groups from Famatina and elsewhere in Argentina commenced organized protests against what has misleadingly been called the ‘Famatina mega-mine project’. In fact, the development of a mine is still highly hypothetical, since very little is known about the amount, quality and location of the mineral resources that may exist in the properties within the Famatina Project. The environmental regulations of Argentina and the best practices policy of Osisko ensure that even if future exploration was to prove successful, there are many checks and balances in place that would ensure a thorough and lengthy review process prior to any potential mine permit being granted. On January 2, protesters obstructed access to the Famatina Project site. As of today this blockade is still in place, and demonstrations have been staged in Famatina, La Rioja City and elsewhere in Argentina. Although this obstruction has not had any impact on field work, the protest activities have impeded MEP representatives in their efforts to make initial contacts with people living in the vicinity of the Famatina Project as part of the community information program for planning and preparation. Osisko believes that factual information about mineral exploration in general and about this project specifically would reassure Famatina residents regarding environmental impact, as well as potential economic benefits to the community and state. Osisko fully supports the government of La Rioja and EMSE in this endeavor (Osisko, 2012).

Immediately the governor fully embraced the task assigned by Osisko, which transferred the responsibility for obtaining the social license to the provincial government. Precisely the day before the corporation announcement, Luis Beder Herrera made a call for dialogue and consensus building, speaking of the need of information and clarification and launching a project to the dissemination of the truth about the mining project. In response, the activists defined the project as a ‘brain washing attempt’ (Rodriguez, 2012b) and announced that they would remain in Alto Carrizal, in the camp La Dignidad (Dignity), until the agreement with Osisko is cancelled. In the words of Marcela Crabbe, a neighbor of Famatina and one of the first to be in the blockade: ‘What the company is doing it to exert pressure on the governor to remove us from here. But they will not succeed’. 
During these days the neighbors of Chilecito intensified their actions, visiting homes to disseminate information and then sticking a poster with the sentence ‘This family is informed that the water is more valuable than gold. Chilecito is not for sale’ (El Periódico, 2012). In the words of Famatina’s Mayor Ismael Bordegaray: ‘We don’t want the mine because we want tourism, we want the production of fruits, of peaches and grapes, of pears and everything that would die if they contaminate and leave us without water, as it happens now in Catamarca’ (Rodriguez, 2012b, p. 2).

The struggle continued during the whole of 2012 and the celebration of the first year of the ongoing insurgency started in the last days of December, in Famatina, and went on during the first days of January 2013 in Alto Carrizal. In the words of the activist Carolina Suffich, ‘this year was more difficult than the previous six years; the attacks were much stronger, as it also is the awakening and the people’s reaction’. Marcela Crabbe also values 2012 as the ‘more difficult and dynamic, the year which defined that there will be no mega-mining in Famatina and it was also the first time that the felt the weight of the people: the union is so strong as it is the conviction, the love and the defense’. Normando Ocampo recalls that ‘during 2012 the people achieved a state of deep conviction as a consequence of almost six years of consciousness (concientización) and passed from resistance to offensive constructing a strong unity and defeating the mega-mining policy of the provincial and national governments’. According to Carina Díaz Moreno, ‘the people realized that it would be the mine or us; that we need to be alert and defend what is ours by right. The struggle in Famatina is a great act of courage, dignity and sovereignty’. For María Laura Santillán, ‘the struggle in Famatina is a construction towards the truth, towards discovering alternative forms while saying no’. In the evaluation of Gabriela Romano, ‘the conquest was not casual; we organized as a people to defend ourselves and to decide the ways we want to live, because when a people stands and stop living in their knees, no one and nothing can stop them’. Domingo Palacios mentions that ‘no one has been exempt of defending the common goods’, a common cause which represents an immense commitment because it represents the future of our children and of all generations yet to come’. He adds that ‘it is not easy to leave our lives aside, because we have families and, many times, we leave them and move forward’. Inés Brizuela y Doria speaks of an ‘impeccable, dignifying and exemplar struggle that is being successful because the people are conscious that they are the owners of the real power’. ‘We will not give up not even for all the gold of the world, even when it means to live many things in the way to defend Famatina’, says Adriana Bertuzzi. Carlos Nilson describes how ‘the people took the struggle and made it their own’ in an historical event, a

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15 See Misoczky and Böhm (2013).

Figura 3: Corte Alto Carrizal

symbol of resistance because it is a struggle for live, not the life of one person, but of the whole people’. These were some of the testimonies collected by the Diario Chilecito (2013) during the first anniversary of the road blockade in Alto Carrizal. According to the editors, these are just a few, because it is impossible to have access to the thousands and thousands of citizens who are involved in the defense of Famatina having every and each day the same objectives: to organize, to struggles and to construct alternatives.

The first months of 2013 had been marked by an intensification of the conflict, with episodes of violent repression and persecutions. In April 6th (Easter Sunday) the neighbors of Famatina and Chilecito protested against the ‘mining dictatorship’ expressed by the judicial accusations against 17 activists of Famatina (Diario Chilecito and Voces a Cielo Abierto, 2013). On May 11th occurred an episode of violent repression against the people. It started when dozens of neighbors and members of the Famatina Assembly were protesting on San Martin square of this town, just opposite to the place where the governor would arrive for a party meeting with the support of pro-mining groups. According to Miguel Arca, an asambleítas, ‘the pro-mining group started to throw stones and soon after the police, instead of controlling them, started firing rubber bullets and tear gas against us’. The repression resulted in 17 activists injured and 5 arrested ‘. Despite the strong presence and violence of around 400 policemen, the governor could not participate in his political act. In the evaluation of the activists the intense repression of recent months is due to the impotence of the pro-mining groups: ‘they know they cannot convince us, they think that by aggressive means, beating, they will impose a reasonable thinking that cannot exist’ (Página 12 and Diário Chilecito, 2013, p.2).

Paula Ríos was one of the many who struggled in Famatina to defend life against mining projects. She was one of the victims of the repression and told Giachino (2013, p.1):

I was protecting myself to avoid being beaten, I was not, at any moment, confronting or provoking anyone, then a young man came and he was more harmful in his language than in his acts. When he realized that I could not get out of the well where I took refuge, he kicked in the head, when I changed position, he stepped in my shoulder. Then he said ‘get up son of a bitch’. As I couldn’t get up he raised me and pressed my face against the sand. At that moment, he pressed the gun directly against my body and said: ‘you would never do this again, because if I leave you alive it is because you are very lucky’. He then shot me five times: four in my back and one in my leg, and he repeated ‘hopefully we will not meet again, because if we do I will fucking kill you’. I confess that I never thought they were rubber bullets, I thought I was going to die. At that moment I thought about my kids and that if I had to die for a just cause, so be it.

The violence and the resistance had a different version in the corporate media, as it can be seen in the comments of Aranda (2013, p. 1), taking the case of Paula Ríos as an example. He wrote:

Paula Ríos committed the crime of protesting against the visit of the governor Luis Beder Herrera, booster of mega-mining in the province. Paula Ríos was not the only victim of repression. Another eleven people were injured by rubber bullets, much more were beaten with truncheons and stoned by local militants of the Justicialista Party and allegedly mine workers. ‘Anti-mining provoked disorders in Famatina’ was the title of a 15 lines text of Tiempo Argentino, reporting a version far from reality. [...] Tiempo Argentino did not interview Paula Ríos.
The episode was followed by the statement that ‘no bullets and no gas will stop the people’. At that moment there were 30 activists persecuted by the judicial system. Even then, the people kept on asking for peace. They also organized a protest against the violent repression in the capital La Rioja on the day of its foundation: May 20th (Moreno, 2013, p.1). They were constantly receiving expressions of solidarity, such as the note from the Grupo de Curas en la Opción por los Pobres (2013), a group of priests connected with the theology of liberation who also supported the priest of Famatina and his involvement in the struggle. At the same time, the retaliations continued. After 22 years of operation, the TV channel 5, which had not been manifesting an anti-mining position, but had been reporting the events related to this issue, was closed down in an obvious event of censorship, which resulted in the unemployment of all the workers who, however, continue to provide information online (www.DiarioChilecito.com.ar) and are planning to organize a cooperative and have their own channel (La Tijereta, 2013).

Despite all these repressive events, the people continue to be organized, struggling and convinced of the justice and value of their cause. On June 12th 2013, the Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados, Resistencia Juvenil (Youth Resistance) and the people of Famatina (2013) released this request on the web:

To the friends, neighbors, assemblies, families, and social fighters involved in other causes: we need flags and/or posters in support of our struggle to display in La Dignidad - Alto Carrizal. As everybody knows, we have been maintaining the blockade against Osisko since January 2nd 2012. Due to weather inclemency and to the passage of time, many flags deteriorated. Alto Carrizal is the place where we resist most of the time, it is a symbol of anti-mining resistance. [...] Thank you for the support and greetings from the eternal snow of Famatina.

It is clear that the people will continue to face the risk and threats which forced them to return to politics and to organize as a reaction to the immediate and daily experience of an intolerable reality. Such experience constitutes subjects and interrupts cycles of alienation and submission. These subjects construct cooperative relations and challenge the aims and practices of domination imposed by capital; at the same time, they reintroduce conflicts and demands in the public domain, confronting the public organizations allied with capital (Ciufollini, 2012), as we have been seeing in the defense of Famatina in the last 7 years and will continue to see as long as it is needed.

16 The words are saying: ‘To protest is a right. To repress is a crime. #FAMATINARESIST’.
Defending life, practicing the ethics of liberation

The oppressed have organized themselves in defense of life, which represents a new intersubjective consensus of the victims excluded from the formal procedures of the hegemonic forms of democracy. In their critical anti-hegemonic process the people have confronted the dominant and dominating system and have uttered, at the same time, a viable utopian project, aiming at the construction of new possible norms and institutions. The struggle in defense of Famatina is organized around the material conditions which would make life possible or impossible. It helps the understanding of what Dussel (2004b, p. 344) calls the ‘content’ of ethics. We wrote about this in the above introduction of Dussel’s ethico-philosophical project, but this proposition acquires now a renewed sense:

The ‘content’ of ethics (the reproduction and development of life) has, abstractly, its own universality and determines, always materially all levels of the formal ethics. The ‘formal’ aspect of moral (the right, richtig), the level of universal intersubjective validity (Gültigkeit), abstract and formally determines all levels of the material ethics. It is a situation of constitutive and always present mutual determination with different meanings (one is ‘material’; the other is ‘formal’). This is a fundamental thesis of the ethics of liberation, because in such a way it is possible to ethically interpret the materiality […] as an a priori of all critique (a negative critique which departs from the ‘absence’ of material actualization of the subjects, namely the impossibility of living, unhappiness, suffering … of the victims).

Therefore, from the position of the victims of the system, of the oppressed community of life, it is necessary to demonstrate the contradictory position of those institutions that intend to negate life and the impossibility of choosing death. In the words of Freire (2005, p. 77): ‘oppression is necrophilic; it is nourished by the love of death, not life’. Such love has been expressed in the episodes of using the state’s legitimate monopoly of force against the people; a monopoly which becomes illegitimate when used against those who fight for life (Dussel, 2004b). The legitimate coercion becomes violent domination (public repression) when it is used against the people who choose life and oppose death within their cultural and political context of reference.

Another principle of the ethics of liberation is the principle of feasibility, the necessary organizational praxis which comes from consciousness: ‘a deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as a historical reality susceptible of transformation’; ‘the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation’ (Freire, 2005, p. 85). Therefore, the emergence of consciousness demands the critical intervention in reality; and the critical intervention demands organization. This is the moment of what Dussel (2004b, p. 353) calls ‘critical-instrumental reason’. For him, the instrumental-strategic reason has a place in the ethical praxis of liberation: ‘we cannot fall in fetishisms; we cannot ignore the subaltern function of instrumental reason’. The problem resides when the feasibility criterion becomes an absolute principle. Dussel (2004b, p. 353) provides a description of the principle of the ethical feasibility:

An action, an institutional or systemic norm, is ethically operational and concretely feasible if it complies (a) with the conditions of logic, empirical, technical, economic, etc., possibilities which are judged by the following (b) [deontic] requirements: (b.1) ethical-material practical truth, and (b.2) formal-moral validity; within a range that goes from (b.a) actions ethically allowed (which are merely possible because they do not contradict ethical and moral principles), until (b.b) mandatory actions, which are ‘necessary’ for the actualization of basic human needs (materially – the reproduction and development of life; formally – the participation of the affected in the decision-making).

This principle is ethical because it defines as necessary that all human action that intends to be human and feasible has a dutiful bond with the life of each subject. At the same time, it ensures the recognition of each subject as equal and free. In this process of recognition, however, it is also
necessary to organize the praxis of liberation, taking into consideration the natural-physical and technical possibilities available at any historical moment.

The metamorphosis of isolated individuals into a people, mentioned before, is an expression of this second moment of ethics: when the oppressed feel their life is threatened, their critical consciousness awakens and, with it, the need of organization, of decisions oriented by a critical-strategic reasoning which is expressed in the many forms of struggle. From the positivity of the ethical principle of life, from the negativity of materially risking death, and from the absence of power in relation to the institutional (corporate and governmental) power, the victims realize the non-validity of the system, experience being a people, confront the actual valid consensus and elaborate the formal intersubjective consensus of the oppressed. In the process of constructing this consensus, the people elaborate a new project, a future validity which will guarantee life and will be politically and organizationally collective.

To finish this article and intervention, let us say a few words about the meaning of the ethics of liberation for us, academics. As it is clear by now, it is always the victims who have the original historical and concrete ethical consciousness. In a second moment, ‘only the ones which had some ‘experience’ of an ‘us’ against the dominated can reflexively think about the unhappiness of the Other: it is the thematic critique (scientific and philosophical, but both critical)’ (Dussel, 2004b, p. 356). It is this explicit thematic critique that we, intending to act as organic intellectuals, can elaborate from our position. The critical thematic consciousness has three moments: an ethical-critical consciousness of the oppressed, which is pre-thematic but substantively original; an explicit thematic consciousness; and an existential critical thematic consciousness. It is from that latter moment when, as a spiral, the intersubjective subject of the oppressed becomes articulated with organic intellectuals in a variety of ways. In this such an articulation that can be found in the ‘Argentinean communities of NO’ against mega-mining. It is our intent that this article is also located within such an articulation.

References


