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# Producing in-between spaces of resistance: nexus thinking and the virtual and physical spaces of protest around the 'La Luz' mining project in Wirikuta, Mexico

Alexandra Engelsdorfer

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## Abstract

What difference does it make if research analyses resistance in a local space, a global space, or a space in-between (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015; Bhabha 1990; Soja 1996)? This article takes up the perspective that 'online' activities are intertwined with 'offline' actions to a degree that 'online' and 'offline' become a hybrid continuum (Wilson 2006; Kluitenberg 2006) and therefore a space in-between. The article is based on a case study that analyses the resistance of the *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta* (Front in Defence of Wirikuta - FDW) against Canadian mining projects in Wirikuta, Mexico via Facebook posts. It engages with the question of an extended concept of space that thinks between categories of the cyber/virtual (often thought of as local) and the physical (often conceived of as global), and how it can contribute to research on resistance. The case of the FDW illustrates how the reconceptualisation of the local and the global in an intertwined, hybrid 'physical-cyber nexus' that goes beyond fixed spatial categories gives access to a rethinking of how resistance is expressed by the FDW.

*Keywords:* Social Movements, Resistance, In-Between Spaces, Cyberspace, Mexico/Wirikuta

## Introduction

Despite numerous efforts to reconceptualise spatiality in the formation of a 'global landscape' (Appadurai 2001), dichotomous ideas of space separating

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the virtual from the actual or physical are notably persistent (Dolata and Schrape 2015; Froehling 1997; Mercea 2012). This can be seen with the rise of a technology that had a catalysing effect on globalisation ties: the Internet. The emergence of the World Wide Web in the 1990s set high hopes for a kind of 'democratic non-physical space' – a space free of physical limitations and (national) control, an opportunity to freely express and state (opposing) opinions. 'The Cyberspace' was perceived as a new space for social movement networking, resistance mobilisation and 'cyber activism'; at times it is even seen as *the tool* that makes protest beyond (nation state) borders successful. Nevertheless, it remains a tool: In research on social movements, cyber-activities of resistance are mostly interpreted as a complementary, supporting feature for offline protests, mediating communication and assisting in organisation and mobilisation. Even scholars aiming at implementing interactions between virtual and physical protest still tend to evaluate online protest as a helpful 'accessory part' that needs to be aligned with an 'actual' physical counterpart (Díaz Cepeda 2015).

But offline and online activities are intertwined in more complex ways (Graham 2013) and simultaneously contested to a degree that makes the persistence of offline-online categories obsolete (Kluitenberg 2006). Not only are they obsolete, but also narrowing; the conceptualisation of the 'online' and the 'offline' as two separable spaces prevents researchers from engaging with hierarchies and power relations within and between these categories (Meek 2012; Wellman 2001). To an ever-increasing degree, resistance is 'taking place' in offline and online spaces at the very same time, in a 'physical-cyber nexus'. Agents of resistance are most certainly placed in some physical place while they are articulating 'cyber protest'; and despite the so-called 'digital divide' that reproduces social inequalities in terms of access and use of the Internet, the tendency to be 'online' in some social network on the smartphone while being engaged in 'physical' protest is increasing remarkably. This appears to apply foremost to resistance movements that go 'beyond' nation state borders as well as other boundaries of spatial limitations, and that are concerned with matters of environment and land usage rights, as in the case of resistance in Wirikuta. This research engages with the question of whether different concepts of space influence the way we look at resistance. How can an extended concept of space that thinks between categories of the cyber/virtual (often thought of as local) and the physical (often conceived of as global), contribute to research on resistance?

In order to illustrate the benefits of a 'physical-cyber nexus' perspective, I will draw on a case study of the *Front in Defence of Wirikuta's (FDW)* resistance against the La Luz mining project in Wirikuta, Mexico. (Re)thinking resistance in a 'physical-cyber nexus' sets a new spatial outlook on resistance and helps us understand its hybridity. Focusing on *where* the FDW places their resistance, I demonstrate how the research findings of a 'spiritualisation' and an 'environment' approach work through a 'physical-cyber nexus' and thereby produce a space of resistance 'in between' that is

not well enough understood through categories of 'local' or 'global'. This spatialisation of resistance 'in-between' influences contents and goals, setting opportunities as well as limitations. To elaborate my research question, I will first give some background information on the case of resistance in Wirikuta, before conceptualising space, place, the cyber, and the nexus for the following analysis of the production of an in-between space of resistance.

## Background: Wirikuta

Speaking in traditional geo-political terms, the Wirikuta territory in the Catorce region in northern Mexico merely consists of vast desert land. However, it is host to a biodiversity that is unique in the world (Reyna-Jiménez and Arce 2015) and offers plenty of a particular underground resource that has been provoking transnational interest in the region since 1821: silver. In 2009, the Canadian mining company First Majestic Silver acquired 22 mining concessions covering 6327 ha of land and launched the "La Luz Silver Project".<sup>1</sup> Up to this day, the project is not yet a producing mine but still in "development and exploration".<sup>2</sup> Although the "La Luz Silver Project" is neither the only nor the biggest First Majestic enquiry, resistance against the mining plans of the Canadian company has been strong, widespread, and persistent. However, the resistance was not initiated by the local residents of the Catorce region, most of them hoping for prosperity from the mining project. Wirikuta is a sacred site<sup>3</sup> and the destination of an annual pilgrimage for the Wixáritari people who see the mining plans as a threat to their indigenous identity<sup>4</sup> and rights. With the foundation of the *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta* (Front in Defence of Wirikuta – FDW) in 2010, the resistance gained visibility and accountability. Although the FDW does not represent all Wixáritari communities, the association promotes itself as the "only space of coordination with the Wixáritari communities in terms of legal and administrative management, political strategies and every other area in which the individual and collective rights of the indigenous Wixáritari community are threatened or violated, and in the defence of the sacred sites

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<sup>1</sup> The La Luz Silver Project is not the only First Majestic Silver project, and First Majestic is not the only Canadian company to operate in the Mexican mining business. Notably, in 2011, another Canadian mining company, Revolution Resources Corp., launched a much bigger project on open-pit mining, called "Universe Project" covering 59 678 ha of land and thereby 42,56% of Wirikuta territory (Solórzano Granada 2013: 10).

<sup>2</sup> First Majestic Silver: *La Luz Silver Project*. Online:

[www.firstmajestic.com/en/projects/exploration-development/la-luz](http://www.firstmajestic.com/en/projects/exploration-development/la-luz) [07/03/2017].

<sup>3</sup> Wirikuta is a protected ecological site by the State of San Luis Potosí (firstly announced 1994, expanded 2000) and the UNESCO.

<sup>4</sup> Following Taiaiake and Corntassel, 'indigeness' or the concept of 'being indigenous' "means thinking, speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one's indigeneity" (Taiaiake and Corntassel 2005: 614).

of the WIRIKUTA Zone”.<sup>5</sup> As a conglomerate of Wixáritari representatives, lawyers, artists, politicians, *ciudaden@s* (people from Mexico City), NGOs, INGOs, and scientists, the FDW is not a fixed point of resistance agency, but a fluid yet “localized transit point” (Appadurai 2001: 4). For their protest, they adopt a variety of tools that have changed and developed over time,<sup>6</sup> but generally, they have exclusively focused on non-violent resistance (Boni et al. 2015). The resistance and protection of Wirikuta continues to this day and is currently also contending with the issues of waste deposits and water use.

## **Place, space, cyber and the nexus**

The question of where resistance occurs, and whether resistance depends on or is shaped by its spatialisation, has been explored by scholars on a wide scale. These investigations mostly focus on global, transnational or translocal resistance in comparison to local resistance, in keeping with the slogan ‘place and space matter’ (e.g. Graham 2013). Arjan Appadurai’s (2001) announcement of a newly emerging “global landscape” illustrates the geographical outlooks on ‘globalisation’ that established a ‘new place’ of resistance on a global level. The emergence of a ‘global’ as a space somewhat different from the ‘local’ provoked a debate on how these spatialisations could be differentiated, or, conversely, be thought together.<sup>7</sup> The notions of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, the first thought of as a delimitable and tangible space and the second described as something unlimited and external, do not merely “serve as a topographic ordering”, but also implement a “scaling of relationships (hierarchies)” (Buckley-Zistel 2016:17) that favours one space over the other.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, the Internet, built on technological advancements in information exchange, was crucial for the spatial diffusion of ‘globalisation’, bridging temporal and spatial distances (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In the context of resistance, the Internet was underestimated for a long time (Dolata

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<sup>5</sup> FDW: *Who we are*. Online:

[www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org/?page\\_id=366&lang=en](http://www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org/?page_id=366&lang=en) [07/03/2017].

<sup>6</sup> In 2011, the FDW organised a demonstration in Mexico City, mobilising a great number of both Wixáritari people and *ciudaden@s*. This reached a peak with the submission of their demands to cancel the 22 concessions in Wirikuta to the then Mexican president Felipe Calderon. In the same year, one delegation of Wixáritari leaders, accompanied by FDW representatives, brought their case in front of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York; another group of representatives attended the Mining Justice Week in Vancouver and addressed the First Majestic Silver Corp. in ‘their own territory’.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Swyngedouw (1997) who suggested a concept of ‘glocalisation’ to describe how the ‘local’ is contributing to the construction of the ‘global’.

<sup>8</sup> See for example discussions on the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding literature (e.g. Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013) and the call for ‘local solutions to global issues’, considering ‘local solutions’ more accountable and ‘rightfuller’ than global efforts.

and Schrape 2015), mostly seen as a tool for social movements to get organised and mobilised and to 'mediate communication' (e.g. Froehling 1997; van Dijck 2012). The 'cyber' was analysed as new space, the mediator between the local and the global, translating approaches and advocating causes. The so-called cyberspace connects and is inextricably tied to physical spaces, yet is perceived as separate from the physical, as virtual space. Protests and resistance movements in the 'virtual, global space' have been evaluated by many scholars and activists, especially with the rise of Occupy (Theocharis et al. 2015) and the Arab Spring movements (Khatib 2015), leading to statements such as "the revolution will be twittered" (blogger Andrew Sullivan in Díaz Cepeda 2015: 44). Scholarship opened up a gap between 'cyber-optimists' who see great value in 'cyber activism', and researchers who speak of 'slacktivism', problematising a 'click here to protest' mentality that uses resistance as lifestyle performance. Non-durable commitment, often without further engagement 'on the ground', is accompanied by representation issues. The 'Digital Divide' which describes the uneven access to the Internet around the globe that reproduces inequalities of power, money and education, favours voices that are heard either way, and limits the possibility of the Internet to serve as an 'alternative public' space where opposing opinions and subaltern voices could be communicated and published freely. With the Internet's visibility comes the possibility of its (governmental) surveillance (Alber 2015; Dolata and Scharpe 2015; Freudenschuß 2015), implying potential observation and control of activities for resistance movements.

Findings related to power structures (Castells 2007) and to control over the Internet severely neglect the 'disembodiment' concept implied by the 'Cyberspace' metaphor (Meek 2012). According to Meek, as a result of its multi-complex engagement *within* and *between* places, the cyber becomes a place itself.<sup>9</sup> He argues that places are not to be understood as 'physical' but

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<sup>9</sup> Places, especially in the context of Wirikuta, are not 'natural' entities but produced conditions. Places rely on a strong physical 'embodiment' (Wellman 2001), whereas 'space' in the recent discussion about political geographies relies on topologies (Allen 2011) that think 'outside the box' of fixed physical geographic units with definite boundaries. In this research, the production of space has an important role, as the FDW aims at connecting their resistance in-between the local and the global. Wirikuta is a matter of "everyday placemaking", as Liffman points out: "Huichol territory depends as much on dynamics practice as on inherited custom or an immutable cosmological hierarchy" (Liffman 2011: 21). For a long time, Wirikuta did not have (and did not need) a fixed territory with distinct boundaries. The annual peregrination of the Wixáritari people to Wirikuta was sufficient to mark and define it. When claims of other actors to the same physical area began to grow stronger, it became more important for the Wixáritari to define their territory in a way that could be understood and read by their opponents: With the support of NGOs the Wixáritari drew the first "classical" map [using] normative-hegemonic cartographical conventions" (Scheuing, this volume: 75) in 1994. The need to explicitly make their claim on a space with rela-  
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as 'relational', strongly connected to performed experience. Drawing on network theories, Wellman (2001) suggested a new concept of the cyber as Cyberplace, thereby overcoming the 'disembodiment' of Cyber'space' while at the same time complementing physical determinations of place. Cyberplace describes "community ties" that "transformed cyberspace into cyberplaces, as people connect online with kindred spirits, engage in supportive and sociable relationships with them and imbue their activity online with meaning, belonging and identity" (Wellman 2001: 229).

Placing the cyber in a global Cyberplace, though, and thus acknowledging the power structures that come with belonging and identity, is ambiguous. Rejecting the 'disembodiment' concept of the Internet as Cyberspace, the embodiment and placement expressed in the Cyberplace metaphor still provoke an oversimplification of the "myriad ways in which the internet mediates social, economic and political experiences" (Graham 2013: 2). Graham subsequently points out the discursive effects of framing the Internet as something spatial that can be governed accordingly.

Whether we talk about *Cyberspace* or *Cyberplace*, the idea that we are referring to an entity somewhat different from the real, physical world is implied. The Internet is not, however, "an abstract world, a digital global village" (Graham 2013: 9), relying on an online-offline dichotomy, but rather something interwoven with physical space, a hybrid (Kluitenberg 2006), and a new 'spatial structure' (Castells 2012). Also, both the thought of two independent spaces of the 'local' and the 'global' as well as the concept of the local being an integral part of the global (as stated, among others, in critical peacebuilding literature), do not correlate with the notion of a movement of flows that takes place in between fixed categories of space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). This space in-between can also be described as nexus, third-space (Bhabha 1990; Soja 1996), or nepantla (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015) and correlates with the observation of an in-between, or a nexus of the physical (often thought of as local) and the virtual/cyber (often thought of as global). Importantly, the space-in-between concept is not supposed to mark yet another, new space, but rather aims at illustrating the slipperiness of spaces and "oppose [space] structures of authority" (Pile 1994: 271).

In order to address this phenomenon, I will neither refer to *Cyberspace* nor *Cyberplace*, but to a 'physical-cyber nexus' which describes the 'global virtual online' and the 'local real world' as a spatial structure that should not be thought of as separate but together. As Kluitenberg (2006) and Wellman (2001) affirm, resistance that is visible 'online' around the globe does not only take place in an 'online space' but also is an integral part of the local ('offline') resistance. The nexus is therefore a perspective that draws 'online' and 'offline' actions and incidents into the same analytical field, thereby overcoming binary dichotomies. Using the 'physical-cyber nexus' as a

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tion to a territory rose with the perceived threat and competition about the very same geographical area.

methodological tool and concept, allows us to focus on 'online data' and still take research observations into account as a valuable contribution to research questions on resistance.

## Methodology

For the exploration of my research question I use qualitative, interpretative research methods. Focusing on the question of *where* (Amoore 2005) and its implications on the *what* of resistance, I aim to show the content of resistance on Facebook as a social network and how it is producing spaces accordingly.

I analyse the two most interrelated and most frequently used Facebook groups related to the main resistance movements, the *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta – Tamatsima Wahaa* (Front in Defence of Wirikuta – FDW) and *Salvemos Wirikuta*. The former was founded in 2011 but stopped posting in 2014 and currently has 823 followers.<sup>10</sup> The latter has a daily growing number of 60,168 followers,<sup>11</sup> is still actively posting and started in 2010. These days, one can find a variety of Facebook pages and groups connected to Wirikuta and resistance in Wirikuta in particular.<sup>12</sup> The Facebook groups in this analysis are closely intertwined and partly relate to each other; posts are commonly shared and reposted to a large extent. The *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta* Facebook group as well as *Salvemos Wirikuta* refer to the FDW as their founding organisation and link to the FDW webpage. Focusing on the FDW Facebook posts allows me to analyse the dominant discourse within the visible, transnationally organised resistance and to highlight the unspoken/unheard discourse positions. FDW serves as a fluent, "in-between" (Alvarez et al. 2004: 4) conglomerate for the resistance. In other words, the FDW is not the only agent in the resistance movement, but the most visible one.

2012 was a key period for the resistance movement due to its strong influence on politics that could be seen during that time span (Boni et al. 2015).<sup>13</sup> The present article thus concentrates on the analysis of the 200 posts published by the two Facebook groups during that year and is complemented by the analysis of key statements and descriptions of themselves on corresponding webpages and blogs. For the analysis of the Facebook posts, I draw both on Critical Discourse Theory (Jäger 2012) and Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 2012). Firstly viewing the material via an open coding procedure while bearing the questions of *where* and *what* in

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<sup>10</sup> as of 09/03/2016

<sup>11</sup> As of 09/03/2016

<sup>12</sup> There are also a variety of groups that originate from outside Mexico, such as Italian and Check Wirikuta resistance Facebook groups.

<sup>13</sup> Besides major public events (such as the 'Wirikuta Fest' cultural festival and ceremonies as well as pilgrimages), the FDW accomplished a judicial decree for the suspension of the 'La Luz' project in 2012.



mind, I then develop categories and subcategories, focusing on goals, strategies and forms of resistance (via axial coding). In a third review (selective coding), I carve out the frames used by the FDW to affiliate the Wirikuta resistance with a global level (Bob 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998). During the process it became obvious that the frames could not be subsumed neither to the 'local' nor to the 'global' category – unambiguously because, with their posts, the FDW did not place itself in either of the categories but in an 'in-between'. Also, the more 'common-sense' associations of 'local' and 'global' as something delimitable and tangible versus something unlimited and external do not apply to the research material due to the simultaneous and intertwined character of references to space in the posts. In order to outline missing discourse positions, I refer to existing research on the topic and to personal conversations with people allied to the resistance movement.

Speaking about visibility is important in order to highlight voices that were either kept quiet in 2012 or are still being silenced. As the structure of the Wixáritari community is primarily patriarchal, mainly men spoke in the resistance and through the FDW. In 2015, Wixáritari women started to promote their own views and needs within the resistance via social media. Another important group of people concerned with the resistance cause are the local residents. Although they are the ones most affected, they do not appear with a common agency of their own. Rather, they are the group that is disputed about: Both, the Wirikuta resistance and the mining companies compete over their voices, trying to persuade them of their respective position. The locals' position seems to be perceived as a crucial factor for the conflict's future.

### **In-between spaces**

The analysed posts exhibit references to an intertwining moment of both global and local discourses. Rather than neglecting spatial axes, the FDW aims at merging the local and the global in order to affiliate their cause with a global resistance, while at the same time using local references in its arguments, thereby producing a space in-between (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015; Bhabha 1990; Soja 1996). In order to win people over for local resistance on a global level, the resistance's goals have to be embedded into a context that not only local people care about. The aim of the mobilisation is to draw as many people as possible to its cause and, at best, to secure their long-time engagement by not 'just' gaining their solidarity or advocacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998) but by persuading them that they, too, are affected by this specific cause. I will demonstrate that a spiritual and an environmental approach can serve as discursive structures by creating a space between the 'local' and the 'global' that points to certain strategies, as described in the following.

*Between the 'local' and the 'global': a 'spiritualisation' approach*

On their webpage the FDW characterises itself as an association that concentrates on the promotion of the rights of the Wixáritari and their land claims.<sup>14</sup> Their self-definition also includes a somewhat irritating contradiction: On the one hand, they claim to support the Wixáritari mainly through advocacy work; on the other, they see themselves as part of the resistance, not only advocating, but living it. The FDW does not define itself as 'outside' helpers, but 'inside' comrades, also negatively affected by the threat to Wirikuta of extraction. This dual perspective relates to an argument structure that relies on the perception of Wirikuta as the origin and "heart of the world" (*Corazon del mundo*)<sup>15</sup> which implies a strong spiritual framing of the resistance movement. If the heart of the world was damaged or even destroyed, it would have immense implications for the 'rest' of the world, be it outside of the physical Wirikuta but within Mexico, or even across the globe. The analysed posts and documents highlight the "right to the sacred" which means the right to access a territory that is strongly connected to the Wixáritari identity and integrity. In a Facebook post from May 29, 2012, the FDW published a series of photos accompanied by small info texts aimed at illustrating the unique struggle of the Wixáritari. One of the posts says:

"The right to the sacred. The sacred places are the environment that is necessary for contact with the ancestors and connections with the supernatural world of the eternal life with the goddesses."<sup>16</sup> (See image 1)

With the resistance's enlargement and diffusion comes a problematic generalisation that can also threaten the credibility of the movement's 'original' urgency for its demands and divide the local resistance. In order to open up a new space of resistance, the Wixáritari community had to make a crucial decision. For a long time, the Wixáritari used to live more or less isolated and separated from Mexican society at large (Liffman 2000; 2011). On the one hand, this explains how the Wixárika culture was able to resist colonial and neo-liberal attempts to govern it and to maintain its traditions (for example the annual pilgrimage). On the other hand, it hints at emerging conflicts within the Wixáritari community between those who see great necessity to enlarge the resistance in order to strengthen their cause and those who see the opening as a threat and 'sale' of their culture. In order to affiliate with a global social justice movement that aims at protecting indigenous rights, the Wirikuta resistance has to rely on an opening up and commercialisation or marketing of their "indigenosity" (Bob 2005). In the process the resistance runs the risk of a 'strategic essentialisation'. With the

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<sup>14</sup> FDW: *Who we are*. Online:

[www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org/?page\\_id=366&lang=en](http://www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org/?page_id=366&lang=en) [07/03/2017].

<sup>15</sup> There is also a Facebook group with this name.

<sup>16</sup> All quotations are translated by the author from Spanish to English.

sole focus on 'indigenouness', other important aspects, such as socio-economic factors, get disregarded (Schön 2008: 122). In order to be heard on a global political level, the Wixáritari have to connect to an international indigenous rights discourse; using stereotypes about themselves for this purpose perpetuates their use in other areas and reproduces an image. Highlighting the FDW's conceptualisation and application of indigenous identity does not refer to a calculated use of topics or systematic engagement with themes the Wixáritari community did not 'originally' relate to. Nevertheless, self-definition, culture and even heritage are ever-changing features that are in strong interaction with their environment (Anzaldúa 2002).



Image 1: Doc. 127, posted by *Salvemos Wirikuta*, 29/05/2012



Image 2: Doc. 77, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta*, (18/11/2012)

The Wirikuta resistance not only has to withstand the double-edged sword of exclusion and openness, but also to perform it contentiously in order to maintain its inner unity whilst working on its expansion. The first ceremonies at the Cerro Quemado mountain to be openly documented, filmed and broad-cast on the Internet are illustrative of this. As the Wixáritari see the mountain as a holy core of their culture and spirituality, non-Wixáritari were forbidden to enter in the past. But in order to promote their cause, the FDW organised ceremonies at the Cerro Quemado in 2012 and brought together people from abroad, Mexico City and several Wixáritari communities who normally would not celebrate the ceremonies together, but apart (see image 2). The mining companies representing a mutual external threat thus had a unifying effect on the Wixáritari communities. Another celebration of stereotypical images of this kind is the Wirikuta Fest, a festival “in resistance of Wirikuta” that took place in Mexico City in May 2012. It was organised by the *AHO-colectivo*, a group largely made up of artists affiliated with the FDW, and attracted 60,000 visitors. The festival was heavily promoted by the FDW and shared via different Facebook channels, combining a mixture of programme announcements of international bands

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like *Calle 13* with information and facts about mining in Wirikuta. The festival was also supported by 'social justice movement agents', such as Greenpeace Mexico.<sup>17</sup> It was the festival's stated goal to "raise awareness for the Wirikuta cause" and to invest the entrance money raised in projects in the Wirikuta region.<sup>18</sup>

*Between the 'local' and the 'global': an 'environment' approach*

For the protection of the local land of Wirikuta, the FDW's argument draws on the framework of 'sustainability' in affiliation with a global discourse on the protection of the environment. While the mining companies try to promote a 'sustainable and socially responsible image' of themselves in accordance with a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy, the FDW critique aims to reveal the negative impacts of mining in the Wirikuta region. Looking at discursive structures in the dispute about Wirikuta, Boni et al. (2015) identify this strategy as part of a "conservation discourse". Through the framing of Wirikuta as an environmental matter, the FDW could access the global discourse of environmental protection and conservation. By pointing out and spreading information about the mining companies' immense water usage and their exploitation and destruction of the natural biosphere, the FDW illustrates the negative effects mining would have in the Real de Catorce region:

"Mega Mining projects use large amounts of water that threaten to dry up the reservoirs, which, according to the National Water Commission, are already overexploited and have a very low capacity to recover in this region. Moreover, the sacred fountains, where the Wixárika people get their blessed water from, are at risk of being contaminated with cyanide, xanthates, and heavy metals."<sup>19</sup>

In addition to publishing studies on environmental impact, the FDW embeds their arguments in the "masterframe" of a general critique of neoliberalism and capitalism (Schön 2008: 77). In order to do so, they share posts from associated Facebook groups, environmental INGOs and NGOs that are engaged with similar causes in Mexico. They also network with national struggles which make demands for political participation and freedom of speech, like the # *Yo Soy 132* movement, or the Zapatista movement, which fights for autonomy, recognition and a non-capitalistic world order/system. Besides focusing on defence and conservation, the FDW engages with an

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<sup>17</sup> Document No. 32, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa*, 25/05/2012

<sup>18</sup> FDW: *Qué es Wirikuta?* Online: <http://www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org> [04/02/2016].

<sup>19</sup> Document No. 80, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa*, 19/12/2012

additional approach. In accordance with affiliated movements such as the Zapatista movement, the FDW refers to a slogan that favours the building of alternatives: “*Otro mundo es posible* – another world is possible”. Much of the neoliberal critique is expressed via these network posts and illustrated in cartographies or pictures, and is embedded in a critique that sees the foreign mining activities as a continuation of colonial times, as shown in the following image:

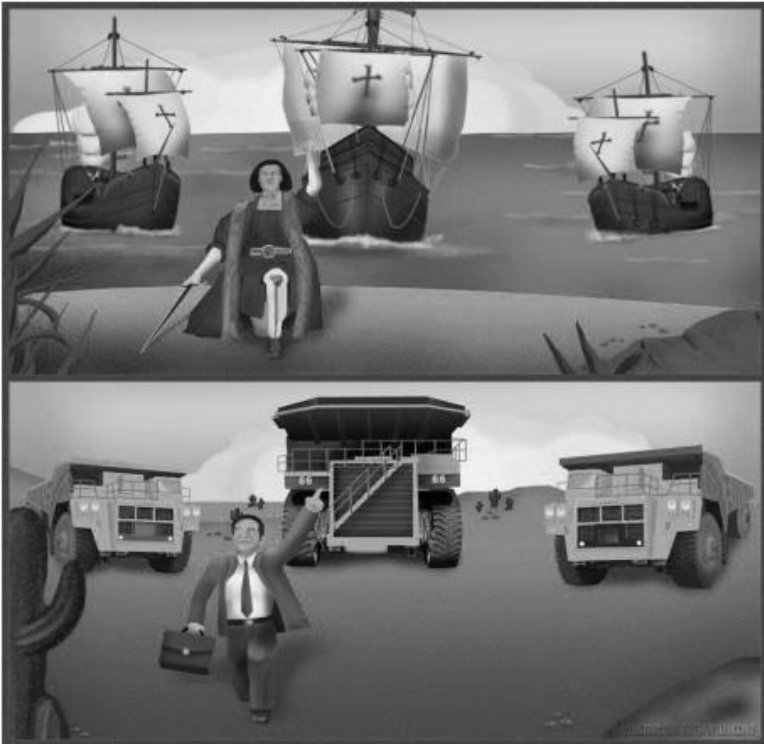


Image 3: “History keeps repeating... 1492... They came for gold... 2012... Open Pit Mining”. Document No. 73, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa*, 15/10/2012

*Possibilities of resistance in-between: counter-definitions and information*

The spiritual approach, creating a space in-between the local and the global, also has a strong connection to a conservation discourse. Arguments follow a logic that relies on a cultural established right of the Wixáritari to the territory of Wirikuta. For example, the following pronouncement of the

Forum for the Analysis of a Legislative Proposal in April 2012 refers to an inherited right to the Wixáritari sacred land:

“Wirikuta is the integral part of our Wixarika community’s ancestral, material and non-material heritage, therefore it is essential to guarantee recognition and access to the territory that we hold on to ancestrally and/or entered with respect to our tradition, even when there was no “officially” avowed entitlement from the Mexican State to do so.”<sup>20</sup>

The concepts of right to land and authority over it differ from the ‘official’ definitions of national state sovereignty held by the Mexican State. The above quotation shows that the resistance does not seem to see a contradiction or an obstacle in it, but rather a strength. The Wixáritari know about the legal protection of their claims through (amongst other things) the inscription of indigenous peoples’ right to the conservation of their culture and land in the Mexican constitution of 2001.<sup>21</sup> Framing their claim in terms of a tangible physicality of “location” has helped to increase visibility and legitimacy of the resistance towards the state and the public. This can be seen in the first draft of Wirikuta on a geographical map with, albeit augmented and ‘in-the-making’, nonetheless physical boundaries as defined by the resistance in 1994 and followed up accordingly to the present day (for a broader discussion of the effects of mapping see Scheuing, this volume). Thus, in May 2012, First Majestic Silver, in cooperation with the Mexican Secretary for Economics, announced that they would hand over 35 mining concessions within the Wirikuta territory to the Wixárika in a big publicity event – which was initially evaluated as a big victory by the resistance:

“Let us celebrate forever, let us celebrate now, but it doesn’t mean that this ends here: we will stay attentive...”<sup>22</sup>

But in the days following this post, the *Salvemos Wirikuta* group engaged in a counter-information campaign, stating that despite the mining company’s claim of having been cooperating with Wixáritari representatives in the process, the decisions had in fact been made without the knowledge of the “majority of the traditional, agrarian and civil authorities” of the Wixárika community.<sup>23</sup> *Salvemos Wirikuta* also published maps showing the territory of the “Wirikuta Reserve”, including the concessions held by First Majestic Silver. At the same time, this revealed that the 35 withdrawn concessions

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<sup>20</sup> Document No. 64, posted by *Salvemos Wirikuta*, 20/04/2012

<sup>21</sup> Comisión nacional para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas. Online: [www.gob.mx/cdi](http://www.gob.mx/cdi) [14/02/2016].

<sup>22</sup> Document No. 27, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa*, 24/04/2012

<sup>23</sup> Document No. 115, posted by *Salvemos Wirikuta*, 25/05/2012; shared by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa* the same day

covered just 721 of the total 5700 hectares that First Majestic Silver holds concessions for.<sup>24</sup> This incident illustrates, on the one hand, how First Majestic Silver and allies attempt to stage-manage themselves as a well-meaning benefactor who respects indigenous rights and territory claims to sacred land and uses, hoping that the Wixáritari themselves will not know detailed information about the exact amount of hectares they are trying to protect. On the other hand, the FDW's strategy to work and resist through detailed counter-definition, as well as counter-information and its viral distribution on the Internet, undermine First Majestic Silver and its allies' claim to a 'righteous truth'. The differing outlines and drafts of Wirikuta by the different agents and the specific use of its sacredness illustrate the importance of a geographical placing of Wirikuta as a powerful tool for the resistance. Still, the counter-definitions and information may only be as successful as they are due to active engagement with a physical-cyber nexus, connecting physical and virtual protest.

## **Conclusion**

With this article I have illustrated how spaces in-between the 'local' and the 'global' are produced in the case of the FDW in Mexico. The FDW's discourses of 'spiritualisation' and 'environment' produce a space of resistance in-between the local and the global. This enables the FDW to favour certain strategies in a physical-cyber nexus, such as counter-definitions (for example of territory) and counter-information.

The physical-cyber nexus as a thinking tool has been proven to be helpful, though it may be difficult to apply to contexts where there is probably (or seemingly) nothing 'digital' in the resistance involved. With the continuing process of 'digitalisation', the physical-cyber nexus will have to prove its further analytical potential. In this case, the analytic perspective of a physical-cyber nexus allowed me to integrate both global cyber and local physical protest without the reproduction of offline and online dichotomies, looking at the resistance from a continuum perspective (Kluitenberg 2006) instead. It was not necessary to ask whether the 'online activity' had implications on the 'physical ground', as Facebook is not separable but an integral part of the 'real world'.

However, the nexus has its limitations: non-FDW affiliated Wixáritari tend to be overlooked, as they are the ones affected by the so-called 'Digital Divide'. The space in-between produced by the FDW resistance therefore struggles to include all of the resistance. As a result, my findings give rise to multiple questions on power structures within the FDW and between the

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<sup>24</sup> The FDW suspected that First Majestic Silver put forward this proposal in order to "deactivate the Wirikuta Fest's potential" (Document No. 30, posted by *Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta Tamatsima/Wahaa*, (25/05/2012). The festival started just two days later.



FDW and Wixáritari communities that are not part of the FDW, as well as on the relationship between the supporters of the Wirikuta cause and the inner circle of the resistance. I have tried to illustrate how the 'environment' and especially the 'spiritualisation' approach blur the boundaries between 'those outside who stand in solidarity' and the Wixáritari themselves, and how they establish a perceived proximity of being affected.

Nevertheless, it is not and cannot be my intention as a researcher from the Global North to evaluate whether the FDW resistance is the 'real', legitimate resistance speaking for the 'actual' affected people. These questions can have a negative effect on the resistance by questioning its legitimacy. It is not for me to decide whose is the rightful approach in a cause I am not affected by. This does not solve the dilemma of social sciences research which should always uncover and challenge power structures and corresponding representation systems, while avoiding the reproduction of its own privileges and colonial continuities. The answer cannot be to reject any further research but to be aware of one's responsibility and limitations (Smith 2012). Tangled up in this dilemma, I leave it to the resistance itself whether or not, or how to evaluate their resistance.

– I reflect –

I came to choose the topic of ‘in-between spaces’ through the notion that all classifications and categorisations, all intentions to assign persons to determining and excluding conceptions of belonging and not-belonging is not just a matter of short-coming of the people’s lived realities, but also an act of illegitimate appropriation. Resistance in IR is often discussed as an abstract occurrence, an event that can be evaluated and categorised as effective or non-effective with regard to its impact on political or social change. However resistance is not an event disentangled from the people who form the resistance and therefore should not be categorised that easily either.

For this research my intention has been to present a different perspective that merges categories and spaces that are normally perceived as being separated. Nevertheless, ‘thinking in-between’ seems to require an engagement with persistent or established ways of thinking and categorisation to some regard. For example, thinking between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ tempts to embrace the very same categories once you try to distance your research from it, just by the simple fact of repetition and discursive reproduction. Or you create yet another category that is no more reasonable than the ones you tried to avoid because of their narrowing effect. Hence, during the research process I tried to overcome these pitfalls by not relying on established, dichotomous categories such as local and global, online and offline. However ‘thinking in-between something’ provoked questions on the “between what”? Therefore, I myself sometimes felt tangled up ‘in between’ my intention to avoid categories on the one hand and the necessity to fulfil academic research standards that favour categorisations, on the other hand. Thus, this is a first attempt to explain and explore ‘in-between spaces’ of resistance and hence contains contradictions and voids that demand further exploration.

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