The Enduring State: An analysis of governance-making in three mining conflicts

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This article investigates the profound ambiguity of the state in the organization of contemporary business?society relations. On the one hand, there has been a decisive shift from government to governance, encouraging private actors, such as corporations, communities and NGOs, to address social and environmental concerns themselves, i.e. without the state?s involvement. On the other hand, however, the continued importance and relevance of the organized state is difficult to ignore.

In this article we examine the role of the state in three cases of mining conflicts in Chile, one of the world?s most important mining countries. Through longitudinal, qualitative research of confictive mining governance relations between state organizations, large corporations and local communities, we show that the modes of influence conducted by the Chilean state oscillate between direct, central steering (?cathedral?) and indirect, dispersed vouching (?bazaar?). Elaborating on Foucault?s concept of governmentality, we offer a hybrid theory of state organization, where the dematerialization of the state?s responsibility is seen not as the norm but rather as a particular mode of governance that sits alongside the underestimated, yet enduring, material involvement of the state.