FEELINGS FOR THE VALLEY

Exploring emotions in the context of the proposed lithium mine in Cáceres, Spain

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of solastalgia among the residents of Cáceres, Spain, in the context of the proposed lithium mine in Sierra de la Mosca. Solastalgia, as defined by Albrecht (2005), describes the emotional distress caused by environmental changes close to home. Using emotional geography as the theoretical lens and nearly three months of ethnographic research, I examined the residents' emotional connections to Cáceres through the concept of place attachment and the impacts of the proposed mine. Findings reveal a strong attachment to Cáceres, encompassing deep symbolic, social and emotional connections. However, the proposed mine threatens this attachment. This anticipated disruption results in significant emotional distress, which I termed 'anticipated solastalgia,' including feelings of sadness, anger, and anxiety. Historical exploitation of Extremadura and the involvement of distant decision-makers exacerbate these emotions, creating a sense of marginalization and betrayal. Additionally, the daily lives of activists involved in Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña are affected, with personal sacrifices and emotional strain. The study highlights the dynamic and emotional nature of place attachment and suggests that proposed industrial developments can fundamentally threaten this attachment. Furthermore, this research illustrates that solastalgia cannot be disentangled from political and historical contexts. It also demonstrates that solastalgia can extend beyond contemporary changes and can manifest even before physical changes occur, because of the anticipation of environmental and social disruption. These findings underscore the importance of exploring emotions and provide insights into the broader context of resource extraction and its implications for local communities, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and considerate approaches to the energy transition.

Keywords: energy transition, emotional geography, place attachment, solastalgia, Spain

Resumen

El presente trabajo explora la experiencia de solastalgia entre los residentes de Cáceres, España, en el contexto de la propuesta de una mina de litio en la Sierra de la Mosca. La solastalgia, tal como la define Albrecht (2005), describe la angustia emocional causada por cambios ambientales cercanos al hogar. Utilizando la geografía emocional como lente teórica y casi tres meses de investigación etnográfica, examiné las conexiones emocionales entre los residentes y Cáceres a través del concepto de apego al lugar y los impactos de la mina propuesta. Los hallazgos revelan un fuerte apego a Cáceres, que abarca profundas conexiones simbólicas, sociales y emocionales. Sin embargo, la mina propuesta amenaza este apego. Esta interrupción anticipada genera una angustia emocional significativa, a la que denominé 'solastalgia anticipada', incluyendo sentimientos de tristeza, ira y ansiedad. La explotación histórica de Extremadura, junto con la participación de tomadores de decisiones ajenos a la comunidad, exacerban estas emociones, creando un sentido de marginación y traición. Además, la vida diaria de los activistas involucrados en la Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña se ve afectada, con sacrificios personales y tensión emocional. El estudio destaca la naturaleza dinámica y emocional del apego al lugar y sugiere que los desarrollos industriales propuestos pueden amenazar fundamentalmente este apego. Además, esta investigación revela que la solastalgia no puede separarse de los contextos políticos e históricos. También demostró que la solastalgia puede extenderse más allá de los cambios contemporáneos y manifestarse incluso antes de que ocurran cambios físicos en el entorno, debido a la anticipación de la disrupción ambiental y social. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de explorar las emociones y proporcionan conocimientos sobre el contexto más amplio de la extracción de recursos y sus implicaciones para las comunidades locales, enfatizando la necesidad de enfoques más inclusivos y considerados para la transición energética.

Palabras clave: transición energética, geografía emocional, apego al lugar, solastalgia, España

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been significant attention placed on the energy transition, a shift underscored in political agendas (Markard, 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Brands, 2022). This transition involves moving away from fossil fuels toward renewable sources like solar, wind, earth, and hydropower (CBS, 2023). The necessity for this shift is rooted in the finite nature of fossil fuels and their contribution to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions, which have already led to irreversible impacts on both humanity and the environment (IPCC, 2022). Many scholars, such as Henriques & Böhm (2022), argue that this energy transition is crucial in mitigating climate change. For this shift towards renewable energy, minerals must be extracted (IEA, 2021; World Bank Group, 2017). The European Commission (EC), has set a target for the EU to extract at least 10% of strategic raw materials, including lithium, within its own borders by 2030 (European Commission, 2023; NOS, 2023). The extraction process of minerals, however, often significantly affects the communities living near these areas. Local residents frequently emphasise the socio-environmental impacts on land, water, and livelihoods, as well as their exclusion from decision-making processes related to these extraction projects (Balderson, 2022; Conde, 2017; Conde & Le Billon, 2017). Furthermore, according to Sultana (2011, p.163) resource struggles and conflicts, are "not just material challenges but emotional ones, which are mediated through bodies, spaces and emotions.''

Emotions, however, play an underacknowledged role in mining conflict research, because within the global extractive industry, emotions have mostly been considered 'soft' and therefore insignificant and ignored (Ey, Sherval & Hodge, 2017; Balderson, 2022). This rejection is supported by dominant forms of masculinity that positions emotions as irrelevant and irrational. It is related to the man/masculinity/rationality and woman/femininity/emotionality bifurcation, where objectivity and measurability are considered most important and valuable (Ey, Sherval & Hodge, 2017; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). This, however, has terrible consequences for those affected by mining and resource extraction. Ey (2018, p.2) argues: "In viewing emotional consequences as intangible, 'airy fairy' and irrelevant, the very real, tangible and embodied emotions and affects experienced in transformed places and communities are dismissed." This aligns with Sultana (2011) who emphasizes the need for considering emotions in resource struggles and conflict. Just as Sultana (2011), a variety of other researchers (see Ey, Sherval & Hodge, 2017; Komu, 2019; Bailey & Osborne, 2020; Balderson, 2022; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024) call for additional research that explores emotions in relation to mining activities.

In this context, emotional geography provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding the conflicts and emotional struggles resulting from mining activities. Emotional geographies explore the interplay between emotions and spatial environments, examining how places evoke, shape, and are shaped by human emotions (Davidson et al., 2012). The concept of solastalgia, introduced by Albrecht (2005), is particularly relevant here. Solastalgia is the emotional distress stemming from environmental changes, especially when they threaten people's emotional ties to specific locations. At the heart of solastalgia lies place attachment, the positive emotional bond individuals have with their environment (Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). Although solastalgia has been documented among those affected by mining activities (Ey, Sherval, & Hodge, 2017; Askland & Bunn, 2018), it remains relatively unexplored, especially in the context of power imbalances and dispossession and proposed industrial developments (Askland & Bunn, 2018; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024).

The Autonomous Community of Extremadura in Spain, particularly the municipality of Cáceres, is known for its abundance of lithium. Located approximately two kilometres away from the historic city centre of Cáceres, the natural area Sierra de la Mosca boasts a significant lithium deposit, which is even considered to be the largest in Europe (Earth Island, 2022). In 2017, the Australian mining company Infinity Lithium (IL), and its local subsidiary Extremadura New Energies (ENE) started investigating Sierra de la Mosca. IL and ENE plan to re-open the old tin mine, extract lithium and construct a lithium processing plant, which would produce up to 467,000 tons of battery-grade lithium hydroxide over 26 years (Castelos, 2023). The national Spanish government views Extremadura as a potential hub for green energy initiatives and is planning to establish a giga-factory for electric batteries, utilizing lithium extracted from Sierra de la Mosca (Castelos, 2023). On May 8, 2024, the executive director of ENE announced that the company will receive permission from the local government to exploit the lithium deposit by the end of the year. He stated that construction of the facilities will begin in 2025, with mineral extraction and processing set to commence in 2027 (Bermejo, 2024). However, as of June 2024, this claim has not been confirmed by any other sources.

The potential establishment of this mine, called San José de Valdeflórez, has been met with great opposition from the residents of Cáceres (Cácereño/as), particularly from the activist group known as Salvemos la Montaña de Cáceres. The biggest concern is the proximity of the mine site to the city centre and other important facilities. They are expressing concerns about the environmental consequences, fearing that the mining operations would adversely affect Sierra de la Mosca, an area cherished for its natural beauty and rich Mediterranean flora and fauna, which includes various rare and endangered bird species, reptiles, and amphibians (Earth Island, 2022). Residents also stress their connection to Sierra de la Mosca, making this situation a noteworthy ecological distribution conflict (Earth Island, 2022; Escobar, 2006).

While this conflict has gained some (international) media attention (see for instance NOS, 2023; Earth Island, 2022; El País, 2023), academic interest remains relatively limited, as noted by Castelos (2023). Primarily, existing literature regarding mineral extraction predominantly concentrates on regions in the Global South. As of May 2024, only a limited number of academics have delved into the expansion of the lithium mining industry in Europe and the existing scholarly work on this topic has mostly been centred on Portugal (Chaves et al., 2021; Dorn, 2021; Silva and Sareen, 2023, as cited in Castelos, 2023; Dunlap and Riquito, 2023). More specifically, the topic of lithium mining in Cáceres remains relatively unknown within academic circles, even though it 'exemplifies the trend of onshoring lithium in the Global North'' (Castelos, 2023, p.1). Scholars who have focused on various aspects of the mining area in Cáceres and Extremadura, have examined its historical and heritage significance (Mazadiego et al., 2019), the role of the state in the ongoing conflict (Castelos, 2023) and its environmental impact (Palma et al., 2019). However, there is a notable absence of perspectives from Cácereño/as regarding the proposed mine in the academic literature, which underscores the rationale for my focus on this aspect.

Therefore, given the lack of academic interest in emotions in mining conflicts, and the perspectives of Cácereño/as more generally I aim to explore how the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed mine. This leads to the following research question:

How do the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed lithium mine in Cáceres, Spain?

To answer this research question, I have created three sub questions. As solastalgia is closely connected to place attachment with my first sub question "*How are the Cácereño/as attached to the place Cáceres?"* I aim to explore the place attachment among the Cácereño/as. My second sub question "*What are the specific concerns expressed by residents of Cáceres regarding the proposed mine"* focuses on the concerns expressed by residents regarding the proposed mine and how this relates to solastalgia. With the final research question "*How does the proposed mine impact the Cácereño/as' daily life today*?" I aim to delve into the mine's influence on their daily experiences, particularly focusing on the ongoing process of the mine. Additionally, I examine issues of power imbalance within this context.

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to shed light on the emotional dimensions of mining conflicts and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how people experience the energy transition. Employing a more holistic approach to conflicts associated with the energy transition, which considers these social,

environmental, and emotional aspects of resource extraction, can lead to the development of improved policies that balance environmental sustainability with the well-being of local communities.

This thesis is structured as follows. After this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, detailing the relevant theories and concepts, including place attachment, solastalgia, and place protective action. Chapter 3 elaborates on and justifies the methodological choices. I describe the ethnographic research I conducted in Cáceres and reflect on my positionality as an 'outsider' due to the centrality of feminist epistemology in this research. Chapter 4 addresses the first sub-question, exploring how the Cácereño/as are attached to the place Cáceres by analysing their symbolic, social, and emotional connections, focusing on place identity and place dependency. In this chapter I argue that the Cácereño/as are strongly attached to Cáceres, which includes both the city and its natural surroundings. Chapter 5 highlights how the proposed mine threatens these positive emotional connections. It presents the specific concerns of the Cácereño/s, focusing on environmental, health, socio-economic and emotional issues. I outline how the residents of Cáceres experience 'anticipated solastalgia', which is the emotional distress caused by the anticipated disruption of place attachment. Chapter 6 examines the current impacts of the proposed mine, considering the historical context of resource extraction in Extremadura and its contribution to residents' feelings of marginalization, frustration, and anger. This chapter also explores the emotional strain and personal sacrifices involved in activism against the mine. Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the results and provides a theoretical reflection on the findings.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoretical framework, I discuss the theories and concepts essential for answering my research question 'H*ow do the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed lithium mine in Cáceres, Spain?*' I draw on insights and concepts from the academic field of emotional geography, which allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how the proposed lithium mine relates to the emotional experiences of those living in Cáceres. Therefore, I begin with introducing this theoretical lens. Following this, I explore the concepts of place attachment, the disruption of place attachment, and the related concept of solastalgia. This chapter end with a focus on place-protective action.

2.1 Emotional geographies

Emotional geography is my theoretical lens, and a subfield of human geography. Human geography focuses on the study of human activities, cultures, societies, and their interactions with the environment. It explores the spatial distribution and organization of human phenoma, seeking to understand the relationships between people and their surroundings (Daniels et al., 2012). Human geography as an academic field, has often ignored emotions, since emotions are often harder to define, observe and put into categories, even though they play a role in almost every aspect of life (Hood, 2022).

According to Pile (2010), many authors consider Anderson and Smith's 2001 editorial paper a turning point in human geography's recognition of the importance of emotions and affects. This shift is often referred to as the "emotional turn" in geography (Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). In their paper, they advocate for the serious consideration of emotions within the then-emerging 'policy turn' in human geography. They urged scholars to recognize that "the human world is constructed and lived through emotions," including "pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love, and so on" (p. 7). This would involve "a fuller programme of work, recognizing the emotions as ways of knowing, being and doing (p.8)". A few years later, particularly since 2003, more scholars have responded to their call, leading to an increase in publications addressing emotions in the field of geography and the emergence of the subfield emotional geography (Pile, 2010).

Emotional geographies explore the interplay between emotions and spatial environments, examining how places evoke, shape, and are shaped by human emotions (Davidson et al., 2012). Emotions are an integral part of the data instead of something to be excluded and consequently, emotional geographies contribute to a way of knowing, rather than an obstruction to knowledge about emotions (Bondi, 2005). This theoretical lens helps to explore 'emotions that people feel for one another and, more extensively, for places, for landscapes, for objects in landscapes and in specific situations' (Pile,

2010). Therefore, this academic field allows me to investigate how the Cácereño/as experience and respond to threats to their place, and how such threats may transform the social landscape of communities (Sejersen & Thisted, 2021; Balderson, 2022). Contrary to ‘’the masculinised, ‘rational’ understandings of people and place pervading the extractive sector (like the proposed lithium mine in Cáceres), engaging with people and place through emotional geographies emphasizes the “less observable and tangible, but no less critical territory of affect and emotion’’ (Pini et al., 2010, p. 559; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). Additionally, choosing emotional geographies over other theoretical approaches is of added value, since it allows to understand ‘’the deep emotions [..] rather than just exploring the “usual” reasons that a mine is unwanted near a community.’’ (Bailey & Osbourne, 2020, p.156), which, as I argued before, has already been extensively researched. To conclude, emotional geography as my theoretical lens, helps to comprehend the connection between resources, place and emotions. It enriches the understanding of the ways that emotions come to matter in nature–society relations and influence how and why people use, access, control and conflict over resource the ways they do, according to Sultana (2011).

There are many definitions in the social science literature of the concept ‘emotion’ and for a long time, emotions have been approached as static things or objects that can be studied or measured (Brugger et al., 2013.). Within the field of emotional geography, however, emotions are not conceptualized as static objects but rather approached as phenomena that are constructed by both people and place. Emotions are “always embodied experiences, where sites and context matter” (Sultana, 2011, p.164), and emotion is, therefore, deeply entangled with place (Ey, 2018). I approach emotions in a relational way, too, seeing them as flows, fluxes or currents in between people and places. This challenges the idea that emotions are solely contained in the self (Sörlin, 2021; Balderson, 2022).

2.2 Place attachment

Building on the insights from emotional geography, I will now explore the concept place attachment in more detail. Emotional geographies enhance the understanding of place attachment by highlighting how emotional connections shape individuals' relationships with their surroundings. Scholarship exploring relationships between people and place(s) can be traced back to the 1970s and till today it remains a popular topic to study (Hashemnezhad, Heidari & Hoseini, 2013; Gillespie et al., 2022). The increase in scientific attention to this topic is partly due to the recognition that people-place bonds are becoming increasingly fragile, with globalization, heightened mobility, and environmental challenges endangering the existence of, and our ties to, meaningful places (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Since the 1970s, numerous frameworks and concepts have emerged regarding people-place relations, such as "community attachment," "sense of community," "belonging," "sense of place," and "place attachment" (see for

example Sebastien, 2020 & Marais et al., 2019). I have chosen to focus on the concept of place attachment since this notion ‘’lie at the heart of studies of ties existing between places and society’’ according to Sebastien (2020, p. 205). Additionally, this concept is an important aspect of solastagia, which I will discuss later on, and is crucial for understanding why people often respond emotionally to place-based development and change (Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). Central to the concept of place attachment is the notion of place itself. Therefore, I first focus on defining and understanding place.

Conceptualizing place

Just as emotions, place cannot be but put in a neat categorization and explanation. The masculinist discourses in natural resource extraction also problematically approach the concept of ‘place’, often seeing it as a neutral, static emotion-free” entity (Ey et al., 2018). However, places are fluid, interactive, and a fundamental part of social life. Places are not just ‘resources’ or ‘objects’ but are also agents with emotional and affective components (Ey et al., 2018; Kearney, 2017). Furthermore, places hold personal connections, memories, identity and often underpin a sense of community (Philips, Murphy & Bresnihan, 2022). Ferrarello (2023, p.152) argues that “a place can be seen as vital for both the emotional and physical well-being of individuals and their communities.” Therefore, I approach the concept place as a fluid space that acquires meaning through cultural, individual, and social processes and stories that give meaning to a space. It encompasses geographical location, physical parameters, and identity, including meaning and value (Hashemnezhad, Heidari & Hoseini, 2013).

Place attachment; identity and dependency

In the most general sense, place attachment is the emotional bond that people form with places (Hashemnezhad, Heidari & Hoseini 2013; Devine-Wright, 2009). As of writing this thesis, however, various authors have offered different definitions and conceptual frameworks for place attachment. The diversity in conceptualization partly comes from its application across different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, architecture and geography (Marais et al., 2019). For instance, in migration and refugee studies, the focus often centres on displacement, while urban geography emphasizes positive attachment at neighbourhood level. Nevertheless, even within these disciplines (like urban geographers) there are different positions, with some arguing that place attachment relies on social features, while others highlight physical features (Scannell & Gifford,2010). Additionally, the concept place attachment shows similarities with other concepts, like sense of place, which refers to the relationship between people and places, whether negative or positive, weak or strong (Gillespie et al., 2022). Some authors, like Jorgensen & Stedman (2001), argue that place attachment is a component of the broader concept of sense of place, encompassing all its dimensions. Gillespie et al. (2022, p.5) also acknowledges "the deeply interconnected nature of these concepts" but distinguishes them as separate entities, which I do too, because place attachment

provides a focused lens on the emotional connections individuals have with their environment. This allows for a deeper understanding of the distress caused by the proposed mine (Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). Williams and Vaske (2003) view place attachment as a distinct concept too, consisting of two dimensions: place dependency and place identity. I also adopt this perspective and will elaborate on it later.

Most researchers describe place attachment as a multifaceted concept that captures the positive emotional bond between individuals and their environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Marais et al., 2019; Philips & Murphy, 2021). Sebastien (2020) argues that place attachment encompasses the feelings and emotions associated with a place. Estrella & Kelley (2017) and Poma & Gravanta (2018) emphasize the dynamic nature of place attachment, noting that it develops and changes over time through ongoing interactions. Place attachment has also been defined as both the process of attaching oneself to a place and the positive emotional connection that results from this process (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The benefits of place attachment include a sense of belonging, stability, and the ability to achieve long-term goals (Marais et al., 2019). A sense of belonging "involves the establishment, over time, of an affective connection to or a 'sense of fit' in a particular place, facilitated by the social interactions experienced in that place" (Gillespie et al., 2022, p.2).

Thus, place attachment encompasses the dynamic emotional bond, predominantly positive, between groups and individuals and their environment (Hashemnezhad, Heidari & Hoseini 2013; Devine-Wright, 2009). The majority of researchers have operationalized place attachment using the two sub-constructs of place dependency and place identity (Devine-Wright, 2009 & Sebastien, 2020; Williams & Vaske, 2003, Brown, 2023). I chose this approach too because it reveals various perspectives on people's connection to their surroundings, which then also contributes to their reactions towards proposed mining activities, such as the case in Cáceres.

Place identity is the symbolic, emotional and social links to a place which are intertwined with the ability to maintain a sense of self in one's environment. A person's place identity is about how they feel, what they value, the memories they have, their attitudes and shapes their daily life experiences. This feeling about a place comes from their personal experiences and interactions over time in that area and personal history is an important aspect of place-identity (Brown, 2023; Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). It is a complicated process where a person or a group feels emotionally connected to a place and feels like they belong there. People often form strong emotional ties to a place when they think it benefits our sense of who we are and meets our social, emotional, and cultural needs (Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). Thus, place identity is the symbolic connection between the individual and the place that transcends instrumentality. Place identity and place attachment are strongly connected and

confused, but place identity is an important driver of people's place attachment (Sebastien, 2020).

Place dependency can be conceptualized as a resource/materially driven relationship, described as the functional bonds people form with a place. This attachment is often determined by how effectively it can facilitate people's goals, desired activities such as recreational, occupational or social activities, and physical characteristics such as public transport or natural resources. In order for place dependency to develop and persist, a place must meet a person's needs, be functionally desirable and provide the capacity to fulfil a person's goals better than any other place (Philips & Murphy, 2021; Greer et al., 2020). So, place dependency is the connection based on the ability of a place to fulfil certain instrumental needs (Sebastien, 2020; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

There is often an emphasis on the social component of place attachment (Raymond, Brown & Weber, 2010). However, the physical characteristics and the real distinctions between the social and physical has not gained that much academic attention (Materson et al, 2017; Von Wirth et al., 2016). In doing to, the influence of physical place characteristic has often been ignored. Sebastien (2020) argues that the physical components of a place should also be considered in place-attachment research. Therefore, they highlight the importance of exploring the emotional relations focusing on the connections to the physical environments. I have reviewed several articles (Kearns & Collins, 2012; Sultana, 2011; Huang, Lin & Cui, 2021; Ey, 2018; Brugger et al., 2013) that explore how people feel about the natural environment surrounding them and how this is affected by human activities like residential development, fishing, tourism, mining, and climate change. The predominant emotions experienced in relation to the natural areas include love, awe, joy, happiness, pride, connection, peace and amazement. Specifically, awe, characterized by perceiving something as larger than the self, was particularly notable (Severin et al., 2022). Additionally, connection and belonging were emphasized, which strongly relates to place attachment theory.

2.3 Solastalgia

Having discussed the concept of place attachment, it is clear that people can have strong emotional ties to specific locations, considering them integral to their identity, sense of belonging and well-being. However, mining activities can disrupt the essence of these places and therefore challenge this attachment. As a result, solastalgia can emerge which describes the emotional distress caused by environmental change in familiar surroundings (Albrecht, 2005).

Before delving into solastalgia, it is essential to understand the context in which it arises. Therefore, I first focus on extractivism, as extractive activities often disrupt the places

people are attached to. I then focus on place attachment disruption, followed by solastalgia.

Extractivism

Mining is often considered a form of extractivism because it involves the large-scale extraction of natural resources (Dunlap, 2024). Extractivism, as Henry (2019) explains, is fundamentally an act of removal, where natural resources are extracted from the earth, often with significant environmental and social consequences. It represents a political and ideological system that prioritizes economic growth and industrial development (Dunlap, 2024). This process is particularly evident in areas termed "sacrifice zones," regions that government and industry stakeholders consider expendable in the pursuit of what they perceive as a "greater good" (Henry, 2019, p. 405). These zones are characterized by intensive extraction activities that degrade the landscape, disrupt ecosystems, and negatively impact the health and well-being of local residents (Zografos & Robbins, 2020). The idea of sacrifice zones emphasizes the difference between what is seen as the advantages of extracting natural resources (such as economic growth, energy production, and industrial benefits) and the negative impacts that local communities and environments experience. These are often overlooked or undervalued compared to the benefits enjoyed by larger, often distant, populations or industries (Castelos, 2023; Dunlap, 2024; Henry, 2019). In the context of the energy transition, the concept "green extractivism," has gained attention, where extractive activities are justified under the guise of decarbonization and sustainability goals (Castelos, 2023). Despite the green retoric, these practices perpetuate the socio-ecological injustices inherent in “traditional extractivism” (Dunlap, 2024).

Place attachment disruption

As mentioned, mining activities can significantly alter the surrounding environment. When these developments interfere with existing emotional bonds to a location, particularly in natural, wild, or non-urban areas, like the Valdeflores case, place attachment disruption can occur (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013). Thus, place attachment disruption encompasses the severance of emotional bonds to a place and can lead to place-based distress, which entails a wider range of stress related to negative changes in one's environment, and other negative emotions such as anxiety, grief, and a sense of displacement, sadness, and hopelessness (Devine-Wright, 2009; Collins & Kearns, 2013; Askland & Bunn, 2018; Philips, Murphy & Bresnihan, 2022). Kearns & Collins (2012), Sultana (2011), Huang, Lin & Cui (2021), Ey, (2018) and Brugger et al. (2013) all highlighted the emotional consequences of human activity in natural areas. Anxiety was an emotion that appeared in every study. Also worry, (out)rage and frustration, were common emotions towards the changes. Some other emotions were suffering, sorrow, dislike and dissatisfaction, worthlessness and guilt.

Most of these emotions are emotions that also frequently occur related to extractive activities (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Sejersen & Thisted, 2021; Hennings, 2019).

(Anticipated) Solastalgia

Over the past few years, many scholars have adopted the notion of solastalgia to explore the place-based distress and highlight the social implications of mining, as I aim to describe here (Askland & Bunn, 2018; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024). Albrecht (2005) introduced solastalgia which captures the distress caused by environmental change close to home. It represents "the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory" (Albrecht, 2005, p.17). This term combines solacium (solace), nostos (return home), and algos (pain). Nostalgia, the gap between where we are and where we once were or want to be, is central to Albrecht's theory (Askland & Bunn, 2018). So, it describes the sadness, depression, and desperation caused by profound environmental changes, essentially feeling homesick while still at home (Tschakert, Tutu & Alcaro, 2013). Stronger place attachment is linked to more intense feelings of solastalgia when experiencing disruptions to the environment (Brown, 2023).

Thus, solastalgia describes the distress and anxiety experienced when one's home environment is negatively altered (Albrecht, 2005). I, however, argue that it is crucial to reconsider the temporal dimensions of solastalgia, which include not only the present changes but also the anticipation and expectation of future disruptions. In the case of the Valdeflórez project, the mine is only proposed and has not been established yet. Despite this, the prospect of the mine has led to the formation of the activist group Salvemos la Montaña, who oppose the project, mostly emphasising their worries regarding changes to their environment. The concept of anticipated solastalgia, introduced by Moratis (2021), is of use in this case, and explores the emotional distress individuals experience when they *foresee* negative changes to their environment. Although initially discussed in a broader ecological context, it has not yet been widely applied, nor to specific scenarios like mining projects. Therefore, I argue anticipated solastalgia in a proposed mining context can be defined as the distress experienced by people due to the looming threats to one's place attachment and the envisioned future, encompassing feelings of sadness, grief, frustration and anxiety about what is yet to come.

Askland and Bunn (2018) acknowledge that solastalgia is useful for explaining place-based distress due to mining activities but emphasize the need to recognize the complex emotional landscapes communities face, including feelings of deceit and betrayal, that extend beyond the transformation or degradation of their local environment. They (p.20) argue that

"It encapsulates a sense of social disruption, as well as a sense of stress and disempowerment emerging through the planning process, everyday engagement with mining representatives, and the colonizing effect that the mine has on social structures, the natural and built environment."

Frustration is also common theme in ecological distribution conflicts, which is often due to the lack of understanding for complexities in the (emotional) relationships between people and place by external actors (Sörlin, 2021; Kearns & Collins, 2012). The feeling of frustration becomes more intense when the natural area is reduced to solely a commodity, instead of acknowledging it as an "entire landscape of living resources, memories of past use, and potentials of future use." (Sörlin, 2021, p.3). This resonates with Trujillo (2009.p.12, in Ferrarello, 2023), who argues: where the colonizers [and by extension mining, agribusinesses, oil and lumber interests…] saw a space-landscape, natives saw a place". This shows how external actors view land primarily as a space or landscape to be used and exploited, but locals see the same area as a place imbued with meaning, identity, and connection. Additionally, it is also the potential loss of community and broken promises which relates to a sense of betrayal, weariness and mistrust. Affected local communities often argue that in these cases there are forces related to national and global politics and markets that determine their future (Askland & Bunn, 2018). This, therefore, suggests that the conditions of solastagia go beyond just the relationship to environment or nature and extend to the system of relations that contribute to place attachment and interactions and relations outside of this (Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024).

2.4 Place protective action

When certain processes threaten or cause a "misfit" between place, identity and attachment, or when people experience solastalgia, communities can start engaging in place-protective action (Boudewijn, 2023; Moratis, 2021). As I have stated before, emotions are often not taken into consideration by actors such as policy makers and politicians (Devine-Wright, 2009; Kearns & Collins, 2012). However, emotions can be politically productive, as demonstrated by Kearns and Collins (2012), who highlight how people's emotional attachment to a coast in New Zealand mobilized action against a proposed development plan that would alter the coastline. This is in line with Sebastien (2020), who shows how people who have a strong place attachment are prepared to make personal sacrifices and even accept violent domination in order to protect a National Park. Moratis (2021), shows how anticipated Solastalgia act upon these feelings by joining social movements and engaging in activism. Thus; ''Emotions are […] more than just fleeting feelings; they can be deeply-held and enduring dispositions formed through lived relationships with local places, which are generative of a politics of resistance (Kearns & Collins, 2012, p.941).

Engaging in activism can impact individuals in various ways. Protests and collective action serve as fertile grounds for new relationships to form, as participants bond over shared goals and experiences (Gilster, 2012). However, this can also impact older friendships in a negative way, particularly when there are significant ideological differences (Gilster, 2012; Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). Activism often creates a sense of empowerment, reinforcing the belief that collective action can bring societal change (Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). It can provide feelings of empowerment, instilling hope and provoke courage (Moratis, 2021). And while it can positively influence well-being by enhancing feelings of purpose, hope and community (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Gilster, 2012), the demanding nature of activism can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion resulting from ongoing psychological stress (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

In conclusion, employing emotional geography as a theoretical lens offers a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between people, places, and emotions. The concepts of place attachment and solastalgia are helpful for exploring the emotional and social dynamics within communities facing environmental changes, such as those caused by mining projects. Place attachment encompasses the emotional bonds people form with their surroundings. When these attachments are threatened by environmental degradation, it can lead to solastalgia, a distress caused by the anticipated or actual loss of one's close environment. Thus, understanding place attachment is crucial for answering my research question because it sets the context in which solastalgia arises. This distress can lead to engaging in place-protective actions, as people mobilize to defend their cherished place against expected threats.

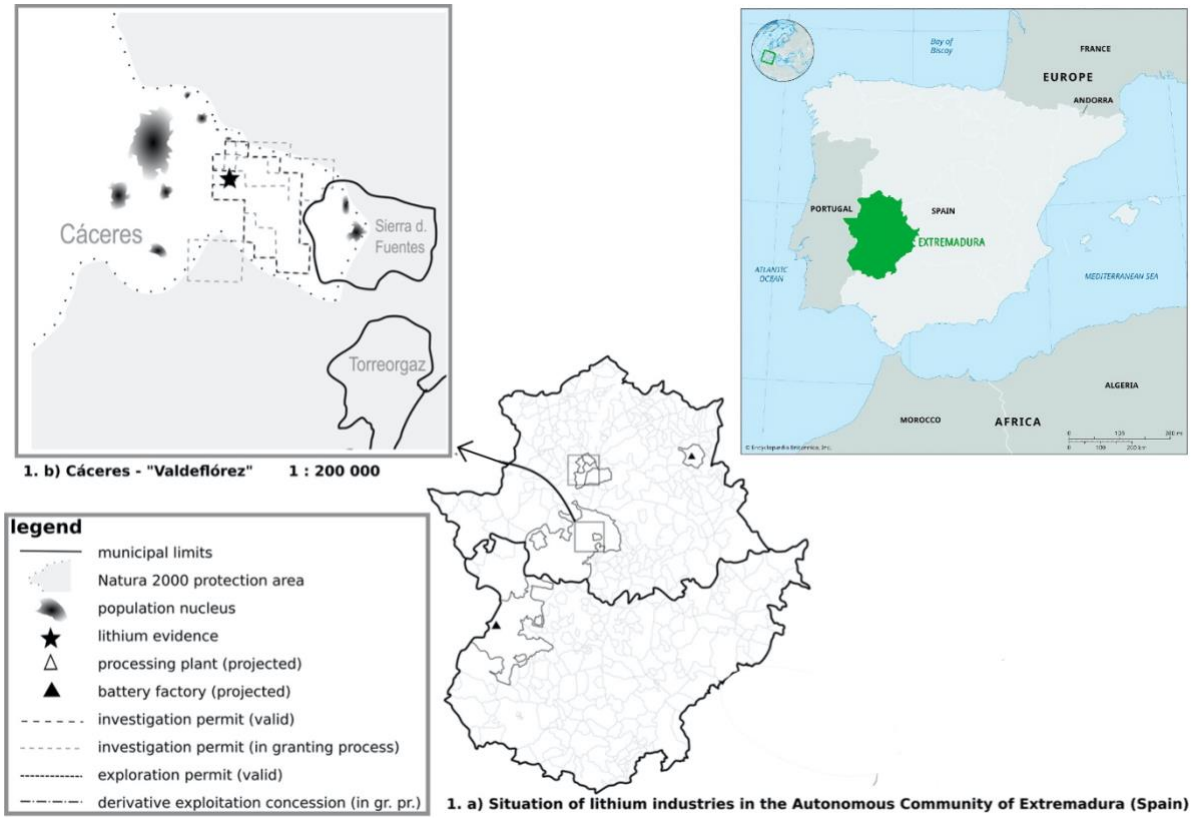
3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline my methodological choices. First, I describe the study area, where I dive deeper into some of Extremadura's demographic characteristics. Central to my methodological framework is feminist epistemology, which I discuss, together with my choice for a qualitative research design after the area description. I then describe the research participants, followed by explaining and justifying the multiple methods I have chosen. Furthermore, I detail my data analysis strategies, and reflect on my positionality and reflexivity. Finally, I address the limitations of my study.

3.1 Study area description

Before delving into feminist epistemology, I will first provide some contextual background to offer a comprehensive overview of the study area. The city Cáceres lies in in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura, which is situated in southwestern Spain, bordered by Portugal to the west, as shown in the right map in figure 1. Extremadura is divided into Spain's two largest provinces: Badajoz and Cáceres. Together, they account for 8.23% of Spain's total area (Eures, 2024; Britannica, n.d; Masot & Alonso, 2017).

Figure 1 Lithium industries in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura and its geographical location



Source: Castelos (2023), Britannica (n.d.) and own edits

On January 1, 2022, Extremadura had a population of approximately 1.1 million inhabitants, accounting for 2.2% of Spain's total population. This population is dispersed across 388 municipalities, with the province Cáceres contributing around 400,000 residents. In 2023 the city Cáceres had 96,195 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Madrid, n.d.). Extremadura stands out as one of Spain's less densely populated regions and 93% of its land is used for agriculture and forestry (Masot & Alonso, 2017). In the last quarter of 2022, Extremadura ranked among the bottom five regions in terms of economic activity and employment levels, while featuring among the top regions for unemployment rates (Eures, 2024). To be more specific: The unemployment rate was around 18%, surpassing the national average of 13% and the European Union average of 6%. Among individuals under 25 the unemployment rate is 40% (Eures, 2024; Earth Island, 2022). It is the poorest region, and almost 40% of the Extremeño/as are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, which is close to twice the European average (EAPN, 2021). In 2015 the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development categorized Extremadura, as the only region of Spain, as “less developed”, basing it on the high unemployment rates and risk of poverty. According to Castelos (2023, p.5) “the regional interests in creating a lithium industry and the ensuing conflicts must be understood against this background of economic peripheralization.”

Extremadura's economy relies primarily on services and agriculture, but it is also an important energy producing region (Eures, 2024). Under the Franco regime (1936 – 1975), numerous hydroelectric plants were constructed in Extremadura. Later, nuclear power stations were added, and today it boasts the highest installed photovoltaic capacity in Spain. The region exports 70% of its energy production to other parts of the country (Junta de Extremadura, 2022, in Castelos, 2023). Extremadura boasts one of Europe's largest lithium reserves and currently has 14 pending applications for lithium mining (Gourcerol et al., 2019). However, no exploitation permits have been issued yet (Junta de Extremadura, 2022, in Castelos, 2023). Two lithium projects and two battery cell plants are currently in the planning phase, including the San José de Valdeflórez lithium mine near Cáceres, the focus of this study (Figure 1).

3.2 Feminist epistemology & research design

My research, that focuses on how the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed lithium mine, is rooted in the realm of feminist epistemology. Within feminist epistemology, the notion of a singular, objective truth, is rejected (Sultana, 2007). In most Western science, the conventional epistemological standpoint of objectivity is highly prevalent. This assumes researchers can maintain detachment and distance from their subjects and participants. Additionally, there is a separation of mind and body along with logic and emotion (Mason, 2017). Feminist scholars, however, critique these points and argue that all researchers possess specific ideological and embodied standpoints. Furthermore, identities are understood as historically

constructed and fluid, evolving over time and adapting to different contexts. Feminist epistemology also acknowledges the presence of unequal power dynamics within the research process itself. These power dynamics influence both the research process and the resulting data (Sultana, 2007; Langevang, 2007; Johnson et al., 2021; Olukotun et al., 2021). Keeping this epistemology in mind during the whole research process - methodological design, doing field work, data analysis and the last writing phase- allowed me to stay critical and helped me in various ways. For example, it allowed me to challenge the dominant knowledge paradigms, resulting in focusing on emotions but also focusing on the more marginalized voices in the energy transition debate, that is often dominated by the more powerful actors (Dunlap, 2024). Moreover, as feminist epistemology emphasizes the importance of subjectivity, relationality, and situated knowledge, this also facilitated a more nuanced analysis of the emotional distress experienced by Cácereño/as, staying focused on the lived experiences and emotional realities of the participants. This provided a more inclusive exploration of the proposed lithium mine's impacts. Also, it assisted me in being aware of my own positionality, my role as a researcher and the dynamics between me and the research participants. Several of these key insights will be explained upon in greater detail in the rest of this chapter.

I adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research, centred on personal experiences, is well-suited for understanding feelings, opinions, and experiences - essential elements addressed in this thesis (Steckler et al., 1992; Mason, 2017). Additionally, qualitative methods enable a deeper exploration of responses, leading to a better understanding of the situation, motivations, and experiences. This research design is often characterized as an iterative process, enabling researchers to adapt their approach based on evolving insights during data collection (Mason, 2017). This turned out to be very useful for me, as the beginning of my fieldwork period in Cáceres for example highlighted new information and a new angle to my proposal.

3.3 Research participants

The potential mine does not affect one small community in particular; Cáceres has around 95.000 inhabitants, and also people who do not live in the city, (e.g. in the surrounding villages) can feel affected by the mine. Due to the scope of this thesis and logistic matters, I chose to focus on the experiences of people who actually live in Cáceres. I made the conscious decisions to not interview members of the mining company, pro-mining citizens and government representatives. In doing so, I follow Bailey & Osborne (2020), who call out the need for a sensitive research design when investigating the emotional experiences of research participants. Not including the aforenoted parties was done to generate trust between me and the participants, which would hopefully lead to gaining deeper emotional perspectives. I also did not want the participants to worry about me comparing their views to pro-mining parties. During the

fieldwork period this decision turned out to be very valuable as it immediately became clear that the topic is a sensitive matter. Due to my physical characteristics (relatively tall compared to and a different hair colour than most Cácereño/as) and the fact that Cáceres does not have a lot of foreigners, many people approached me asking why I was in Cáceres. When I told them I was there for my research which was about the mine, many people responded a little bit hesitant and distant. As soon as I explained I was focusing on people who are against the mine, almost everyone's body language changed completely; people started smiling again and gave me for example high fives. Some of them responded with; "ah good, then you are on the right side." and "I was a little bit worried that you were pro-mine". Also, one interview with a research participant who did not know my background, started quite distant. In my field diary, I wrote down the following reflection of the interview:

> *"She was quite reserved and asked me a lot of questions about why I was here. Only when I explained my perspective and why I found it important to focus on the perspective of people who it might affect, she started smiling again and told me: "okay, now it is good." This aligns with my experiences of the last few weeks."*
> November 2nd, 2023 – field diary Lotte

As I decided I wanted to focus on the people who are against the mine, I reached out to the activist group Plataforma Salvemos La Montaña via mail, Facebook and Instagram multiple times prior to my arrival. This, however, did not lead to any contacts but I met many people on the streets. After I had met people in the first few weeks of my fieldwork period, I sent a couple of them, who already told me they would like to participate, a message via either Telegram or Whatsapp asking if they wanted to do an interview with me. Therefore, many interviews were with people who I already knew. Furthermore, I used the snowball method, meaning I finished every interview with a question related to possible other participants. Through this way, I also could reach out to new potential research participants. In appendix A, the characteristics of my research participants and data collection moment can be found. For this thesis I used the data of 39 people. 21 of the 39 research participants are female and the ages of the research participants are between 17 and 70.

3.4 Methods

Ethnographic research

I conducted ethnographic research which is a qualitative research method that involves observing and capturing the experiences and perceptions of research participants in their own native environment. As it involves studying people in a certain context, the focus is on observations, rather than focusing on hard data and numbers (Mason, 2017). According to Adam, Gold & Tsui (2024, p.1) "Ethnography can be an effective research methodology to help deconstruct, understand, and intervene in the world." Given my focus of emotional relations in relation to the place Cáceres, it was very important to me

to observe and experience these places myself as well. This place-based approach to data gathering was also recommended by Bailey and Osborne (2020), who explored citizen perceptions of mining operations located in the Gloucester Valley, Australia. This method enables deeper engagement with the community and context, providing an embodied understanding of the place and its people, which facilitates a more comprehensive grasp of the situation. For example, by being present in the natural areas, I could directly observe and feel the love that people have for these spaces. However, doing ethnographic research comes with a risk of reproducing exclusion, marginality, and epistemic injustice (Adam, Gold & Tsui, 2024). Therefore, being reflexive when doing ethnographic work is a must, which I will explain in more detail in the section regarding positionality and reflexivity (Berg, 2023).

In the following paragraphs I will explain and justify my choices of methods. I have used multiple methods since no single method can ‘’capture the complexity and variety of [..] people’s lives’’ (Langevang, 2007, p.271). Each method has its limitations in isolation, but in combination they provide a lot of relevant data. Furthermore, this helps to capture the greater detail, nuances, connections, and complexities (Sultana, 2020).

Participant observation

Participant observation is a key method of ethnography, something I did too, where they actively participate in the daily activities of the community while also observing and documenting what they see and hear (Hurst, 2023; Bernard, 2017). Pader (2015, p.196) argues that “participant-observation is the fine art of hanging out’’. It can involve living, working, or simply spending time with a specific group of people. This allows the researcher to gain a more nuanced understanding of the research participants worldviews and perspectives and a deep insight in how people live their lives (Langevang, 2007; Pader, 2015; Hobbis, 2020). The ultimate goal is to explore and deconstruct what is often taken for granted in the daily lives of these individuals.

For the data collection I stayed in Cáceres from the end of September till the beginning of December 2023, which were 12 weeks in total. The first two months I lived with a Spanish family, almost in the city centre, something I wanted to do to get a real sense and experience of what living in Cáceres is like (Sultana, 2020; Bailey & Osborne, 2020). The last few weeks of the fieldwork period I lived together with 3 Cácereñas in a different part of the city.

In the initial 24 hours of my arrival in Cáceres, I bumped into activists from the Plataforma while they were putting up posters on the streets. Approaching them led to an invitation to join their activities for the day, during which I met numerous members of the Plataforma and exchanged contact information. Throughout the whole data collection period I accepted (almost) every invitation extended to me, leading to participating in

various events including demonstrations, governmental meetings, informational sessions, and casual gatherings. I also became a member of the local climbing association, and through these interactions, I expanded my network of contacts and got a real understanding of life in Cáceres.

A big part of participant observation is small talk. Small talk about everyday topics, often occurs naturally during these interactions and can provide valuable insights, Driessen & Jansen (2023, p.249), arguing it "is a central, yet taken-for-granted, ingredient of ethnographic fieldwork." It can also help in establishing trust and gain access to deeper insights that might not emerge in formal interviews or structured interactions. This was also the case for me. Within the first weeks, I already experienced how insightful ethnographic research and participant observation is, even though I was quite hesitant at the beginning. In my field diary on Monday 25th of September, day 4 of my field work period I wrote down the following reflection:

" It is a little bit strange, because I wasn't too much of a fan of ethnographic research and participant observation as I thought it was very intruding and not equal in a way. However, only after a few days I realize how extremely useful it is! There is so much information in the daily life and all the conversations I have had. Things I would not have thought of before are all coming to light now. I already feel like I have a sense of what life in Cáceres is and therefore already better understand why they do not want this mine."

Monday 25th of September - Field diary Lotte

Next to that, my field diary was an important aspect of the participant observation. I made notes during or immediately after every conversation. If I had the opportunity, I made voice memo's repeating and sharing everything I heard, writing them down later in my field diary. I also used my field diary to note ideas and interpretations for further exploration and analysis, including connections to theory and possible codes. Additionally, I used it to reflect upon the research process, which is crucial in feminist epistemology (Sultana, 2007; Langevang, 2007; Johnson et al., 2021; Olukotun et al., 2021).

In the first few weeks, while I did engage in informal conversations and took notes after these moments, I did not conduct formal interviews yet. Instead, I prioritized understanding the context and allowing people to become acquainted with me. Given the focus on emotions in my research, establishing trust between myself and the research participants was very important (Sultana, 2020; Bailey & Osborne, 2020; Askland & Bunn, 2017). Hence, I focused on this this and did not want to rush anything. Moreover, this period also gave me inspiration and guiding for the topic list. Back then, I already had my own theoretical background, research questions and ideas, but employing participant observation helped me to continually revise the questions. This period gave me new insights about the topic and angle as well.

Thus, participant observation enabled me to explore everyday life and life strategies, uncovering aspects that may be hard to articulate via interviews or other methods. Moreover, it gave me a more nuanced understanding of the world from the research participant's perspectives, instead of simply my own perspective which aligns with the ideas of Langevang (2007) & Pader (2015). Next to the participant observation, I employed other methods, which I will elaborate on in the following sections.

Interviews

In this research, I conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Generally, interviews generate, rich, detailed, nuanced and in-depth data that leave respondents' perspectives intact (Scheepers, Tobi & Boeije, 2016, p. 254; Steckler et al., 1992; Deonandan, Tatham, & Field, 2017). Focussing on the concepts place attachment and solastalgia, interviews are an appropriate choice for my topic: participants can express their feelings through their own words, so the subjective, lived experiences people have with their surroundings can be captured (Sebastien, 2020). Furthermore, doing semi-structured interviews allowed me to be sensitive to the lived experience (Bailey & Osborne, 2020). The interviews helped me to find out find out what people do, but also how and why they think and feel certain sway (Kitzinger 1995). As I conducted semi-structured interviews, the topic list shown in appendix B was my guideline during the interview, but participants also had the opportunity to put forward their own topics for discussion (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015, p.494). After each interview, I documented the main themes and new discoveries or topics. I then incorporated these into the subsequent interviews.

As a changing living environment is central in my thesis, I employed a mobile method, called 'walk-a-long', which entailed walking together with the research participants through Sierra de la Mosca (Moles, 2008). I did two walk-a-long interviews, and I joined a hike in Sierra de la Mosca where I talked to 6 people about the mine. Mobile methods help to understand the 'lived environment' and provide a detailed insight into the way people and place combine (Mason, 2017). In other words: walking interviews are a good method to explore the experiences and emotional challenges of (changing) people-place relationships (Philips, Murphy & Bresnihan, 2022). Additionally, it allowed me to touch upon topics which I could not have thought of before, due to what Bailey & Osborne (2020) call place-based triggers. For example, the place-based triggers helped people remembering their past, which also contributed to exploring their place attachment.

Body mapping & drawing

Body-mapping is a tool which can help in examining the concept of embodiment and emotional experiences within the body, matching perfectly with my theoretical lens of emotional geography as argued by Narváez (2022). This interactive and engaging method involves research participants drawing or tracing their own bodies and subsequently

explaining and writing down their emotions and experiences in response to my questions (Narváez, 2022; De Jager et al., 2016; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2021). Although I was aiming to employ this method during every interview, this did not happen, due to a variety of reasons. First, I sometimes did not feel comfortable to ask this because I did not want to interrupt the research participant or only project my own wishes on them. Furthermore, sometimes people simply did not want to do it. However, after the first interviews, I discovered that having something to draw actually turned out to be extremely useful. As the topic was sensitive and did came with many emotions, it sometimes helped to express these feelings on paper, not through body mapping perse but just by simply drawing or underlining things. Moreover, we talked about a certain place and through drawing this place, it became more realistic, both for me as for the research participants. Also, the drawing brought up new memories and it helped with explaining things. Therefore, after having discovered this during the first 3 interviews, I decided to give every research participant the tools (paper and pencils) at the beginning of the interview. They themselves could decide if they wanted to use it, whether for body mapping or just for other purposes, which also gave them more agency, as they didn't have to do anything they were uncomfortable with.

3.5 Data analysis

The aim of qualitative data analysis is to methodically examine, interpret, and derive meaning from the empirical data collected. Storing data can be seen as the initial stage of analysis, as it facilitates the subsequent analytical process (Scheepers, Tobi & Boeije, 2016). I stored all my empirical data in a folder on my laptop, to which only I have access to. After uploading the recordings in this folder, I deleted them immediately on my phone, to enhance privacy and security. As argued before, a qualitative research design is often characterized as an iterative process where constant reflection and possible adaptations are needed (Mason, 2017). This is also applicable during the data analysis phase. During my fieldwork period, next to adapting my topic list based on information retrieved, I always wrote down the most important themes after each interview that could potentially be useful for the coding phase. Before I started analysing my data, I transcribed every interview, with the help of Google Pinpoint. Most of the interviews were done in Spanish, so I also had to translate them. I used my own knowledge, the translation option in Word and Deeplr translate for this. I employed the qualitative data analysis software called Nvivo for the coding. My analysis is based on the ideas of Scheepers, Tobi, and Boeije (2016, p.265) who outline a three-step data analysis plan rooted in Grounded Theory principles. While I did not strictly adhere to these three steps, I did incorporate elements from each during my analysis. Since I had already written down the most important themes after the interviews and transcriptions, I had a list of codes. When I started coding the interviews, I was able to use these codes, but I also added new codes. In the second phase I revisited my codes, merged some if needed and then had another glance at the interviews to see if I had missed anything.

3.6 Positionality & reflexivity

Reflexivity and positionality are central tenets within feminist epistemology and qualitative research (Olukotun, 2021). Sultana (2007, p.382) argues that ‘’it is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research, especially in international field research contexts’’. Reflexivity involves the reflection on the self, process and representation. Furthermore, it encompasses the critical examination of power relations and politics in the research process, and the researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation (Sultana, 2007). It is crucial that this happens from the beginning to the end of the research process (Olukotun, 2021). Being reflexive throughout the whole process allowed me to identify contested areas in the research process and act upon these findings.

Additionally, feminist epistemology emphasizes the importance of understanding researcher positionality, since the researcher is never entirely removed from the context in which knowledge is produced (Langevang, 2007 & Sultana, 2007). Positionality refers to the social, cultural, political, and personal context or position from which an individual or researcher engages with and interprets the world around them. It encompasses various aspects of a person's identity, including their gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, and other social characteristics. These aspects shape an individual's perspective, beliefs, and biases, influencing how they perceive and interact with the world, and more specifically in this case, research (Mason, 2017; Sultana, 2007; Sultana, 2011). Understanding positionality is crucial because it can impact the way research questions are framed, data is collected, analysed, and conclusions are drawn. Furthermore, recognizing and acknowledging one's positionality is important for transparency in research, as it helps to identify and mitigate potential biases and ensures a more nuanced understanding of the research findings (Mason, 2017; Sultana, 2007; Sultana, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021; Cresswell, 2009). The identities that I think are most relevant to this research are my origin and residence, my academic background, and my viewpoint on nature conservation and the energy transition.

First of all, I am a white, female student with a Dutch background. I only had education in the Netherlands, the country I have lived my entire life in. I have lived in other parts of Spain for a couple of months, but never for a longer time than my time in Cáceres which was limited to three months. Therefore, I will never be able to completely grasp what living there and an expected change to the place Cáceres can feel like. Additionally, I value natural areas and know and experienced myself the importance of these places, but this is different than living in Caceres for a long time. Furthermore, I consider myself an activist, and I actively attend protests, mostly those related to environmental injustices and climate change. I am not a big supporter of the fossil fuel industry and for a while I

saw ‘green’ technologies as a potential solution, as long this does not impact people and nature in a negative way. Before the fieldwork period, when I was reading articles and watching short videoclips about the situation, I figured I supported the ideas of the activist group Salvemos La Montaña. I agreed with their ideas and strongly understood why they do not want the mine. However, I also read academic literature where I got a more nuanced view of perspectives in mining conflicts. As argued by different authors (see Mason, 2017; Sultana, 2007, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2016), it is inevitable to have own opinions regarding your research, but it has potential implications for the conducted research. During the field work period, I struggled multiple times with my own opinions regarding the proposed mine, but also as my position as a researcher. On September 26, 2023, I wrote down the following reflection in my field diary, after attending a demonstration against the mine:

"Beforehand, I noticed that I was a little nervous. I also wasn't sure if I should join the protest or not. What is my role as a researcher? How far should you go as an ethnographic researcher? It is a struggle. Initially, I had decided not to participate in the protest, but when I was there, I did join the people standing around, though I didn't really shout along. I was there to get to know people. But after everything I heard in the days before, I really understood why they were there. I felt a huge inner conflict. I am there as a student doing research, but I am also still Lotte, with my own beliefs."

My role as a researcher remained a recurring topic throughout the fieldwork period. In the spirit of reciprocity, I sometimes felt it was more appropriate to apply stickers which I thus sometimes did, while other moments I tried to keep a little bit more distance.

The researcher's positionality also includes how the research participants perceive them (Mason, 2017). This is also where my reflection of my own emotions is of relevance. Emotional geographies ‘’create room for reflexive consideration of the emotions that shape the research encounter between researcher and participants and acknowledges the role of emotion in data analysis and communication’’ (Bailey & Osborne, 2020, p.156). In doing so, my findings are ‘’co-produced’’ between me and my research participants (Bailey & Osborne, 2020; Sultana, 2011). So, due to the emotional nature and approach of my research topic, it was important for me to constantly and consistently reflect on the emotions I experienced myself and how this research positively or negatively affected both the research participants and me. Multiple times I was touched by and felt the frustration or sadness expressed by the Cácereño/as.

I noticed that my non-verbal communication, such as shaking my head or looking shocked, was quite noticeable and influenced the research participants' reactions. For instance, some participants mirrored my expressions. On the other hand, several individuals mentioned my enthusiastic, open, and empathetic character, which made them feel more comfortable sharing information with me. Although I often felt like an

intruder, many participants expressed gratitude for my choice of this topic, as they felt that most people only cared about money. Moreover, meeting someone like me made them feel taken seriously and hopeful.

3.7 Limitations

Before I started the field work, I was very aware that researching emotions can be difficult, based on the experience of other scholars, such as Kearns & Collins (2012). For example, emotions can be very intimate, and people might feel uncomfortable in sharing them (Sebastien, 2020). Additionally, some people have a hard time describing what they feel, and emotions easily get lost in translation (Kearns & Collins, 2012). However, I still followed Smith et al. (2016, p.5) who argue that; 'the fact that emotions are not easily located, defined, or measured should not be allowed to detract from their crucial importance to human geographies and human lives." After having completed the fieldwork, I do agree with Kearns & Collins (2012); for some people it was indeed hard to describe and explain what they felt. This, however, was not always the case and I have also spoken to many people who did not have any trouble articulating their feelings. Additionally, the body mapping was not always a success, as I have already elaborated on.

Moreover, the significant limitation of my study is my proficiency in Spanish. Although I could follow most of the conversations, I often missed the nuances, which hindered my ability to fully comprehend and engage with the participants. This was mostly applicable to the small talk situations. With the interviews, I could stick more easily to my own questions. However, during the interviews, the language barrier sometimes also affected my ability to ask follow-up question. Additionally, which not necessarily relates to the language, guiding and directing the interviews was sometimes challenging. Some participants tended to speak without pausing, making it difficult for me to interrupt or ask follow-up questions. I think that sometimes this lack of control over the interview flow limited my ability to gather comprehensive data and might have hindered the depth of the information collected.

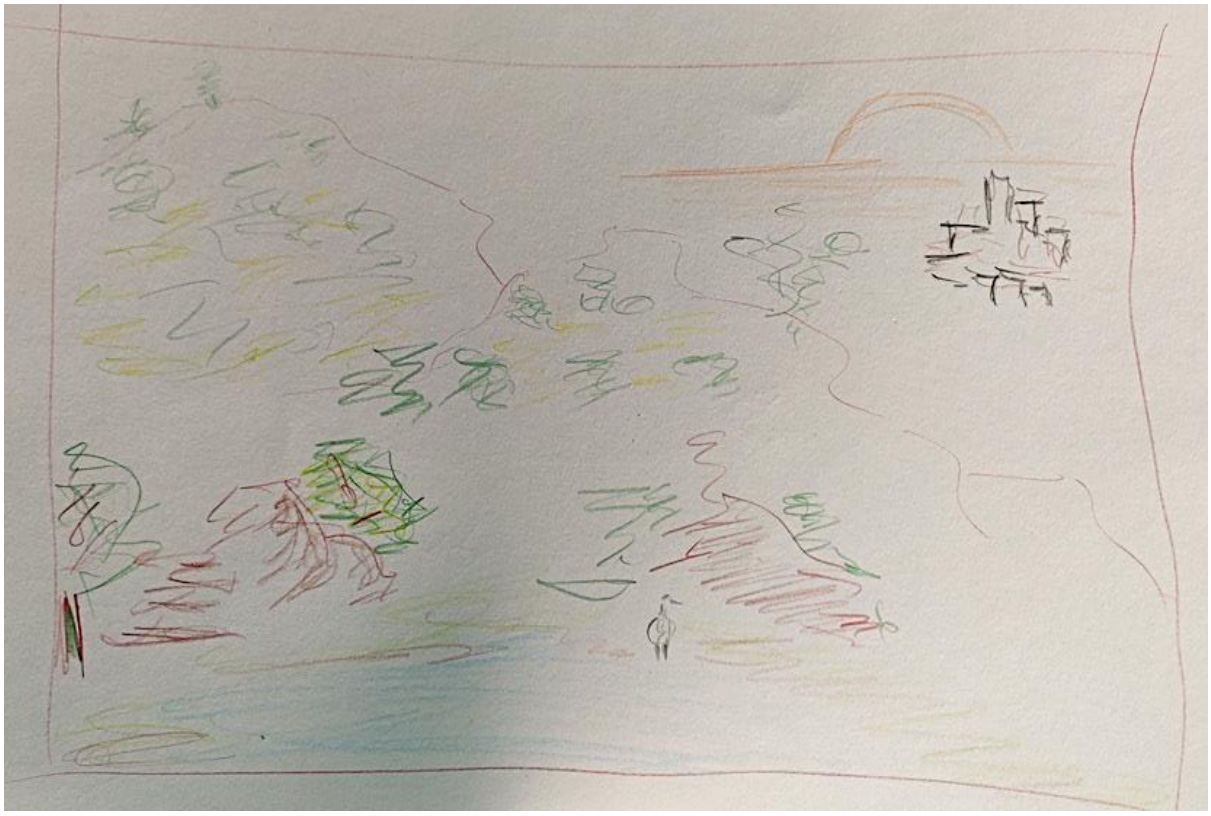
4. THE MAGIC OF CÁCERES

The Cácereño/as are strongly attached to the place Cáceres. In this chapter, I explore this place attachment, as it is a crucial aspect of solastalgia. According to many research participants, the charm of Cáceres lies in its harmonious coexistence of city and nature. Therefore, this chapter begins with an explanation of what the place exactly Caceres entails. Place attachment, the positive emotional bond people have with their environment, includes both place identity and place dependency (Brown, 2023). The second section of this chapter therefore focuses on place identity, which refers to the symbolic, emotional and social connection to a place, intertwined with the ability to maintain a sense of self in one's environment *(*Devine-Wright, 2013; Sebastien, 2020 & Philips & Murphy, 2021). The third section examines place dependency, which includes the facilities that a place provides to fulfil the desires and needs of its inhabitants (Sebastien, 2020).

4.1 The charm of the place Cáceres: its proximity of city and nature

First of all, it is necessary to explain what the place Cáceres exactly entails, as place is central to place attachment (Ey et al., 2018). For many, one of Cáceres' main characteristics is the beautiful old city centre and its proximity to nature, and this proximity is also why the place Cáceres encompasses both the city and its nearby natural surroundings. When I asked Elena to draw her experience of living in Cáceres, she created the following drawing (Figure 2) down below. As seen in the drawing, both the city (upper right) as the natural areas (left) where drawn. She argued that she centred herself in the middle of the drawing and explained: "Look, I'm here. And I can see all this, the mountain, the hills, and I can see the water. But if I turn around, I can see the city." Elena further continued: "I live in the dormitory of the university, close the mountain. It is an area that has spectacular views, and it feels like you are in the countryside, but you are in the city centre by bus in only 10 minutes!"

Figure 2 Drawing of Cáceres



Source: Elena

With the natural surroundings, she referred to Sierra de la Mosca, which is the area of the proposed lithium mine. Sierra de la Mosca is located around two kilometres away from the historic city centre of Cáceres. Figure 3 showcases the built city centre and its surroundings. Adjacent to the city lies La Montaña, which is visible from various vantage points within the urban area (Figure 4). Sierra de la Mosca is situated behind La Montaña.

Figure 3 Map of the city Cáceres and its natural surroundings

Source: author (2023)

Figure 4 The view of La Montaña from Museum Cáceres

Source: author (2024)

Sierra de la Mosca is situated in a natural park called Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes and has a long industrial history. During the 1970s, the Valdeflores mine opened and a variety of minerals were extracted, but it was closed in 1980s due to economic unviability. Since its closure in the 1980s, the Valdeflores mine has transformed into natural space (Me Voy a Caceres, 2023). The entire region received the formal designation of a Zone of Special Protection for Birds in 1989 and was further declared a Protected Natural Area in 1998 (Me Voy a Caceres, 2023). Nowadays, it is an area known for its Mediterranean flora and fauna, including a variety of (rare and endangered) bird species, reptiles, and amphibians. Lucía described the mediterranean forest as the following:

"Sierra de la Mosca is a Mediterranean forest, very well preserved. The Mediterranean forest has mainly la encinas strawberry trees, cork oaks and it also has a cultivated part with olive trees. And there are also wild areas, there are weeds, because from rockrose there is rosemary, there is lavender, there are many species, there are many animals too! There is everything from foxes to many, many other animals and there are of course the birds."

Lucía

Elena was not the only one who highlighted the proximity of the natural area to the city. The experience I had with Ana during our walk-along interview vividly illustrates this too. We met in the middle of the city centre and then walked towards the mountain. Once we left the hustle and bustle of the city centre behind us, we walked under a viaduct from where we looked directly at the mountain. She explained, with a smile on her face: "And yes, this is the best thing about Cáceres: You have the green and nature here, and you have the city there. You can see both simultaneously. It is just the best thing about Cáceres!". Virgen de La Montaña is also visible from many other places in the city. Conversely, the city can be seen from Virgen de La Montaña as well as from other spots in Sierra de la Mosca. This serves as a reminder of how closely intertwined the natural environment is with the urban landscape. Many argued that the natural area is not just adjacent to the city, instead it is an integral and inseparable part of it. Being in Sierra de la Mosca, research participants while pointing to the city in the background, repeated multiple times: "We are in Cáceres", "This area IS Cáceres." Thus, the place Cáceres entails both the city and its natural surroundings. In the following section, I focus on place identity, starting with a focus on the history of the place Cáceres.

4.2 Cáceres & place identity

History & heritage

History is an important aspect of place identity and refers to how the history of a place contributes to the sense of identity and therefore also the attachment that people feel towards a place (Brown, 2023; Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). Within Sierra de La Mosca, the area of the proposed mine, lies a huge water basin called El

Calerizo. It consists mainly of limestone rocks and forms a karstic aquifer, making it one of the most substantial aquifers in Extremadura. Nowadays, it acts as a natural filtration system, supporting biodiversity and groundwater recharge, contributing to the region's ecological balance (Naturalmente Cáceres, 2020). Besides this, El Calerizo has also been crucial to the existence of Cáceres since ancient times, due to its underground river. El Calerizo, with its strategic location and access to water sources like the Ribera del Marco, attracted civilizations, including the Romans, who built their settlements nearby (Naturalmente Cáceres, 2020). Many locals believe Cáceres is one of the oldest human settlements, attributing its development to El Calerizo. María for example, noted, "The water reservoir is really important. It's really, really important. This is really the cause of Cáceres." This resonates with Roberto, who argued: "the ancients settled more than 60,000 years ago in Cáceres because there was El Calerizo, not because it rained." María expressed a certain "fatigue" but also sense of belonging from living in the same place for such an extended period. She mentioned, just a Roberto, that people have inhabited the area for a very long time, possibly dating back to 67,000 years ago or even earlier. This long history of human settlement in the region contributes to a sense of connection and continuity with the land. Moreover, she suggested that this long period of settlement has become a part of the character of the people of Cáceres, which led to a feeling of familiarity and tiredness due to the enduring presence in the same place for such a long time. She noted: "I also say that it is our Cácereño character. We are like very tired of living you see, because we have been here, for such a long, long time!" Thus, as they have a long history and deep-rooted bond with the place Cáceres that goes back thousands of years, this contributes to a sense of belonging and identity.

Besides this, the historical and cultural significance of buildings in the city centre, recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage site, also contributes to place identity among residents. Nuria, during a meeting with local government representatives, emphasised how the historic city centre with its ancient palaces and diverse cultural influences, reflects centuries of "noble rivalries and diverse cultural influences." She also highlighted that its UNESCO World Heritage status not only acknowledges its historical importance but also emphasises the need to protect "its identity and heritage for future generations." Additionally, many people appreciate Cáceres for its physical characteristics, particularly the historic old city centre. These physical features play a significant role in shaping their place identity. As mentioned by Julia, the "impressive architecture" of the old historic city centre is "magical & incredibly beautiful" and functions as a testament of the city's rich history. Moreover, having this beautiful city centre also comes with a sense of pride expressed by multiple research participants:

"Well, I think that this life that we have in Cáceres is idyllic. And I don't know, people are taking pictures of these doors which are so famous! All these people come there to take pictures and that also makes me notice it again and proud you know. And when I am

there, I am forgetting about everything else."

Manuel

Moreover, despite being a popular tourist destination, many residents talked about the calm, tranquil ambiance in Cáceres, making them feel peaceful and attached to the city. Alejandro for example argued: "Cáceres has many different characteristics, but the thing I like most here is the tranquillity". Furthermore, people describe it as a safe city where there is barely any crime. Both Manuel and Lucía have also lived in other cities (specifically Málaga and Madrid), but neither found them to match the quality of life in Cáceres. Lucía emphasized the "extremely peaceful life" she experiences here, which she believes is unattainable in Madrid and when asked about what living in Cáceres means, she replied, "to have peace."

Natural features

The physical features of a location can also contribute to place identity (Sebastien, 2020) and Virgen de la Montaña serves as a significant component in this regard. For instance, David talked about an emotional connection he has with the mountain. On top of La Montaña, a sanctuary with a church can be found. According to him, the mountain is the backbone of Cáceres' history and sociology and therefore serves as a reminder of the city's history. He also noted how he barely has time to visit the mountain, but when he does, it is because of the connection he feels: "I don't have much time, but, sometimes, I get to a point where I feel so connected that I have to go up the mountain, yes, and... and you kind of feel something, you know, because of the emotional bond that the whole city has with the mountain." This feeling, while not being very specific, aligns with María who is able to give more words to the feeling she has towards the mountain. She shared how Montaña is not an evangelic name, instead "it is a name from the nature", is very important to her, highlights the history and comes with a sense of pride:

"I don't practice religion, but when I see Virgen de la Montaña, I am very much [gasps] Ooooh, WOW! Just WOW! Proud! because I feel this relation with the ancient legacy, this, synchronization with nature okay. It is still here. So, it's like Wow! Wow! Yes I really feel it, I really feel it."

María

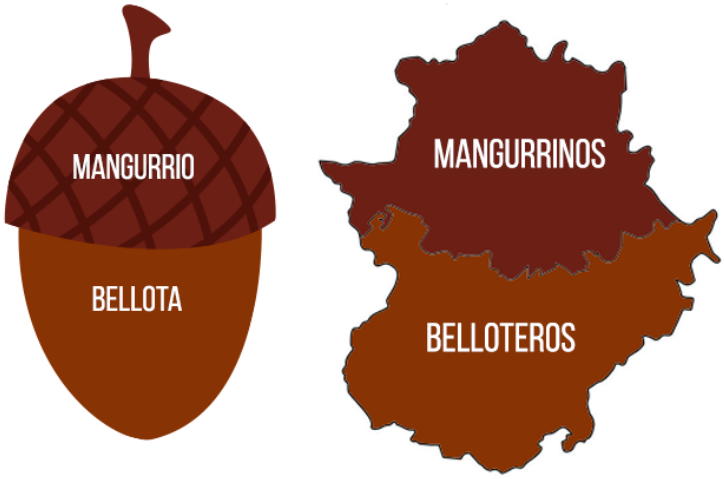
Other individuals who are also not religious, like Ana, also found sense of pride and connection in the mountain's presence and David emphasised that this is the case for many Cácereño/as. For Sara the mountain represents more than just a natural feature; it symbolizes her roots and upbringing, shaping her identity and belonging. She argued how the mountain: "is part of me, of my identity because I am from here. I have lived here since I was little, I grew up here, well, it is the place where you are born and raised, is your area, isn't it? [...] . The name of the mountain is important for the culture and personal identity of the residents of Cáceres too. María pointed out that there is a connection between the names given to many people living in Cáceres; many women in Cáceres are called

Montaña. Furthermore, one hospital is called ‘Hospital La Virgen de la Montaña’. This shows how the mountain's name is present in various aspects of life in Cáceres and contributes to its place identity.

Apart from La Montaña, many research participants also expressed a (strong) connection with Sierra de la Mosca. For many, Sierra de la Mosca, rich in diverse natural elements, beautiful and having a certain ambiance, symbolizes the essence and character of Extremadura's identity. Alba, for instance, emphasized its significance, stating, "For me, it's very symbolic of Extremadura, you know, the plants, the trees." Others, like María, echoed this sentiment, admiring its "typical Mediterranean" features and its “tranquil and pure atmosphere”. Manuel emphasized how each season brings unique scents and visual changes, which for Elena “evokes a sense of being transported to a completely different place” For both of them, this is a typical characteristic of the nature in the region Extremadura. Elena specifically shared how she loves to go there, and “gets blown away by the beauty of what she sees every time [...] this change is so notable that you can go to one place, over and over again and it always seems to be new.”

Moreover, specific natural elements present in Sierra de la Mosca, including the acorn, contribute to place identity. Carlos underscored the connection between Extremadura and local identity, stating, "Extremadura is the region that is identified with the acorn”. Within Extremadura there are two provinces: Cáceres with its people called Cácereños and Badajoz with its Pacenses. However, the terms “Mangurrinos” and “Belloteros” are also used to describe the people who live in these provinces, as some locals associate the shape of each province with different parts of the acorn. Cáceres resembles the "hull" or "mangurria," and Badajoz resembles the acorn itself, which is visualised in Figure 5. So, these terms derive from the acorn, a symbol which is deeply intertwined with the Extremaduran culture because of the prevalence of holm oak trees and the expansive “Dehesas” they create (Interviews, Café talk 2020). The Dehesa, comprising around 1,300,000 hectares, is the most important woodland type in Extremadura, as it constitutes of 67% of the forested area (Preposoil, 2021). This (cultural) connection to the land, exemplified by the symbolic significance of the acorn, highlights the relationship between nature and identity in the region.

Figure 5 The province Cáceres and the relation with the acorn



Source: Cafetalk (2020)

Besides this, the participants also expressed a deep love for the natural areas. Many expressed their love for Sierra de la Mosca utilizing words such as "beautiful", "precious" and “gorgeous” to articulate its physical characteristics. When Lucía started talking about Sierra de la Mosca, she started smiling, and talked about it in a very happy way. Based on my own observations, she expressed a profound sense of pride and delight. Julia expressed a profound affection for the natural environment, simply stating, "I love it, all nature", which resonates with María who argues she feels a general love to mother earth being in these natural environments. This love was further demonstrated during the bellota walk by the genuine enthusiasm expressed, where every encounter with nature, whether a flower, plant, or mushroom, was met with admiration and adoration. During the hike, the other participants always called me to have a look, explaining everything with pride. I wrote down the following about this experience in my field diary on the 11th of November, 2023:

“I sometimes felt like we were walking for only 5 meters, but then we had to stop again because we bumped into something else that had to be shown to me. Ranging from the madroños, fungi, cork, lavender plants, they showed me everything! When they called me this was always with great enthousiasm, love, happiness. There was just so much admiration!”

Furthermore, while walking through the area (figure 6) Fransico shared how he has been living there since they were young, but that the area remains beautiful every time they visited it. Sofía expressed the same sentiment with a huge smile on her face showing the appreciation for the place being there: “It is so beautiful, yes, very gorgeous, very pretty! She continued: “the oaks are beautiful, just the landscape in general.” Elena described it as a “fairy tale: area, “because it has a lot of diversity of nature. It is an ecosystem that has been maintained and protected from human action.”

Figure 6 Sierra de la Mosca

Source: author (2023)

Memories

Another important aspect of an individual's place identity is the memories associated with a particular place (Brown, 2023; Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). As people accumulate personal experiences and connections to their surroundings over time, a place can acquire significance. Given that many participants have been living in Cáceres for an extended period, they have made numerous memories which contributes to their attachment to the place.

For instance, natural features in Sierra de la Mosca triggered memories of Carlos' childhood during the Franco era in Spain. He shared how, when he was little, his grandfather had olive trees and sheep in the area, so he spent a lot of time there. As we walked through the area, he found a particular tool which he used for gathering asparagus, explaining how they twisted it like a rope to make it more flexible. Shortly after this moment, we encountered another plant, sticky rockrose, whose roots were used to extract a glue-like substance, so everything could be sticked together. Therefore, these childhood memories were triggered by the surroundings, evoking a sense of nostalgia for Carlos. Additionally, being in Sierra de la Mosca not only made Carlos recall his own childhood but also reminded him of the other enjoyable times spent with family in the area, thereby contributing to place identity. Fransisco also mentioned how he has been coming to this area since he was very young, just playing around; arguing "playing there was very wonderful", and Elena too fondly recalled the times spent walking with friends and her partner on the mountain.

Additionally, Ana remembers getting married on the mountain, highlighting important life events tied to these locations. Moreover, María reflected on her memories around the

river, expressing a strong emotional connection to the area, as she feels a sense of familiarity when she is near the river: “Going there I just feel something you know, like love and familiarity you know”. Furthermore, she discussed the cultural importance of the river, arguing that it was once a gathering place for women to wash clothes, including her grandmother's sister, who played an important role in her life. Despite being 93 years old now, this family member continues to talk about the cultural traditions associated with the river. Overall, María associates the river with feelings of familiarity, belonging, and cultural heritage, which shapes her place identity.

The Cácereño/as do not only have memories in the area of the proposed mine, also the city itself comes with remembrance. Being in the city for Manuel, comes with a lot of memories of his childhood:

“And like going, walking, to the old part, you know, it is magical. My mother lives near this part [explains], but my aunt and uncle, they live in the old part. So like, a lot of times I had to go walking from one place to another and then I passed all these buildings. That made me aware of the small details about the old part. […] And now when I am there again, I still see all the details and think about this walk to my aunt and uncle, you know”
Manuel

These examples illustrate how personal memories and experiences with the place Cáceres, particularly those related to the natural surroundings, contribute to the place identity in Cáceres.

Social relations

Moreover, social relations are a crucial aspect of place identity because they foster a sense of belonging and community within a specific location (Brown, 2023; Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). This is also the case for many residents, as Cáceres is their long-time home and the place where they have established deep connections with numerous friends and family members. For instance, Sara argued, "I feel at home here, because I have my friends and my family here." An encounter with someone you know while being in the city, is typical for life in Cáceres, which I personally experienced even within the first few weeks of my stay, written down in my field diary (October, 12, 2023):

“It is so funny, because I have been her only for 3 weeks, but I think if go to the city centre now, I will bump into at least one person I know. On the first few days many people told me this is what they like so much, and when I was joining the groups, it was impossible to walk for longer than 1 minute, because someone always knew someone. But now, only after a couple of weeks, I have this as well!”

Anonymity is not somethings that matches life in Cáceres, which contributes to its appeal. Alba argued: "For me, it's the perfect city. It offers all the benefits of a big city but

with a friendly, cozy atmosphere where everyone knows each other." Additionally, the open, warm personalities of people who live in Cáceres is something that is highly appreciated and for some actually the best thing about Cáceres. Asking Elena what she liked the most about Cáceres, she answered: “Well, above all, the people! Because, we are very connected, it is like, they’re very open people and I don’t know, very hospitable, I think. Everyone is just very friendly.” Therefore, the residents of Cáceres expressed a sense of community within the city, characterized by a warm, hospitable, and amiable atmosphere, which fosters a sense of familiarity.

In sum, the place’s cultural and historical importance, its rich heritage, peoples’ memories, experiences, and relationships with other residents, shape the Cácereño/as ‘place identity and contribute to a sense of belonging. In the next section I explore the other component of place attachment, namely place dependency.

4.3 Cáceres & place dependency

As previously mentioned, many research participants consider Cáceres the perfect place due to its blend of urban and natural features, making it also an ideal environment that meets the desires and needs of its residents. This enables me to discuss the second aspect of place attachment, known as place dependency. Place dependency can be conceptualized as a resource/materially driven relationship, described as the functional bonds people form with a place (Sebastien, 2020; Philips & Murphy, 2021; Greer et al., 2020). Instead of solely considering the physical resources a place provides, I have chosen to explore the concept of place dependency from the perspective of how individuals engage with and are linked to their place through their daily activities and interactions. This shift in focus moves away from simply considering facilities to examining practices, lived experiences and the relational aspects of place dependency.

Lungs of the city

First of all, the natural areas surrounding Cáceres, play a crucial role as the lungs of the city, as it provides essential green spaces and fresh air for its inhabitants. As expressed by Lucía, the preservation of trees is essential for ensuring a healthy environment, as they serve as a source of oxygen and contribute to cooling during the very hot summer months. Alejandro also emphasizes the importance of the countryside for survival (“we need to breath!”), highlighting its role in providing clean air and sustaining life. During one of the walk-a-long interviews I conducted, we came across the area of a former sanatorium, a hospital dedicated to treating tuberculosis patients. Carlos shared a personal story about his grandfather, who had tuberculosis during a time when no remedy was available. However, his grandfather managed to recover in that hospital, located in Sierra de la Mosca, as this is the area “with a lot of fresh, clean air.” Additionally, Sierra de la Mosca is home to a range of companies and organizations. For instance, one participant established a cooperative in 2011, known as ACTYVA, which is

involved in various activities, including the management of 62 hectares of olive groves and pastures in the mountains of Sierra de la Mosca.

Shops

The historic centre is particularly rich in shopping options, as it houses a variety of stores, ranging from local artisan shops, fashion boutiques, souvenir stores, and eateries. Additionally, there is a shopping centre located in the southeast of the city, where numerous clothing stores can be found. However, the city's shopping scene extends beyond these areas, as shops are spread out throughout the whole city. For example, Cáceres features many fruiteries across its streets, along with small shops offering essential items such as bread. The availability of all these shops makes life in Cáceres “very easy and pleasant” according to María. Victoria, a woman who stays at home to take care of her kids, starts many of her days with a stroll to a nearby fruit shop to pick up fresh ingredients for the meals of the day. This is followed by a stop at the small bakery and the bigger supermarket. And if she for example needs to go to a hairdresser, her own street already offers 4 options. Victoria noted that she can walk to all these shops, and the ease of access makes daily errands a pleasant and integral part of life in Cáceres. As the example of Victoria show, the facilities are within walking distance, which is one important characteristic of life in Cáceres. For example, one research participant compared her life in Cáceres with her life in Madrid, of which the latter she described as the worst time in her life. She saw for instance more things of Madrid while she was living in Cáceres than the other way around. She also explained how amazing life in Cáceres is due to its small size and possibilities to walk to everything, which she does “always or at least as much as possible”. The availability and proximity of these facilities contribute to a high quality of life according to many.

Events

Furthermore, the number of cultural events, especially during spring and autumn is something that is highly appreciated. While I was only living in Cáceres for 2.5 months, in 3 weeks I had already joined a various kind of festivals, ranging from an Irish festival to a blues festival, to a medieval festival. Joining these events, I saw and heard how important they are as perfect opportunities for gathering with friends: many people attend them with their own friend groups or randomly bump into acquaintances on the streets.

Sierra de la Mosca has also served as the setting for a diverse range of events, as expressed by the Cácereño/as. For instance, Lucía mentioned that there have been "solidarity routes for several associations." These solidarity routes aimed at supporting causes like autism awareness and cancer research. Furthermore, every year there is a Bellota hike, in which I also participated. During this event, people from different backgrounds come together to hike through the area while collecting acorns. Two weeks later, the group reunites to plant the acorns. For some, this is a great opportunity to

connect with people they don't often talk to or to meet new people while enjoying the beauty of Sierra de la Mosca. Additionally, Sofía normally joins the yearly reoccurring full moon concert that is held in the area: "We have done it for two or three years, in the summer, this year it hasn't been done here, but normally we come here and we do a full moon concert at night." Furthermore, the Plataforma has also organized events in relations to the proposed mine, such as an information moment, while providing everyone food. These examples demonstrate how cultural events and communal activities in both urban and natural settings play a significant role in shaping individuals' place dependency.

Recreational activities

Moreover, many Cácereño/as participate in recreational activities in both urban and natural settings. These activities play a crucial role in place dependency, as they offer only opportunities for physical activity and leisure and contribute to peoples' wellbeing. For example, going up la Montaña to visit the church and enjoy the view of the city is a popular activity among both residents and tourists, well summarized by Manuel:

> *There is this spot on the top of the mountain, you know this thing, the thing about this mountain, people just know it, for like always taking the Instagram picture, going by car to the top, spend some minutes there, or maybe 1 or 2 hours. It is very popular thing to do. It is really cool!*
>
> Manuel

Many view it as a must-do activity when visiting Cáceres, a sentiment I personally experienced on my first day in the city when my host took me to the top of the mountain. From there, she showed me the church and we watched the cityscape, while she outlined the important parts of the city and other cities on the horizon. We were by far not the only people who did this as their Saturday morning activity, as the parking lot was full and other visitors were also taking pictures of the views. Additionally, during driving up the mountain, I noticed many individuals dressed in sports clothes, hiking, or even jogging, a phenomenon later confirmed by other research participants as a common weekend activity for recreational and training purposes. However, while it is a popular weekend spot, people go up the mountain during weekdays as well, to "enjoy the sunset and have romantic self-brought dinner" (Natalia). For Elena, witnessing the sunset (Figure 7) the

Figure 7 View from Virgen de la Montaña. Source: Author (2023)

sunset atop the mountain is a luxury that goes beyond material possessions. It is a moment of profound connection with nature that heals her mind and body, essential for her overall well-being. The physical effort of walking and the satisfaction of reaching the top contribute to this sense of fulfilment:

"And going up the mountain to see the sunset, that's something that, well, for me it's a luxury. And it's a luxury, let's see, there are luxuries like going on a yacht, something that if you don't do it, you can live without them. Here and in reality, it is better to live without them, but there are other luxuries such as watching a sunset in the middle of nature, which is something that balances you as a person. That heals you, heals your mind, heals your body, sometimes only by the effort of walking and that satisfaction of arriving. That is imperative for life, for health."

Elena

While the mountain serves as a popular spot for recreational activities, it's not the only location where people engage in such activities. The area behind La Montaña, Sierra de la Mosca, is also used by many for hiking, running, or mountain biking. Javier argued these areas are "a resource for the people of Cáceres, not only at the level of producing food, but also for recreation". People appreciate having these options nearby, such as Sara, who expresses great satisfaction with the possibility to do many sport activities there:

"For me as nature lover, what I like the most is that I have the countryside next to it, so I can still do many activities in nature, [...] there is a recreation area very close to Cáceres where you can go and walk breathe fresh air. [..] And I can do many different sports, like hiking, running and mountain biking"

Sara

María visits Sierra de la Mosca everyday to walk her dogs and Laura goes there as much as possible to hike the "beautiful trails." Besides simply enjoying hikes in the area, Ana recalls how these walks were a significant part of her daily routine when she was younger, which allowed her to bond with colleagues who eventually became friends as they hiked together after work every day. Ana further explained: "You know, in the gym I can also walk on a machine and then I walk, but I really like to be surrounded by nature. It is so good for your mind! And then you can also walk together with friends." Lucía also described how these areas served as ideal escapes during the pandemic, offering lots of space and minimal risk of infection due to their spaciousness. She further expressed her love for Sierra de la Mosca:

"It is a place that I love because it has a lot, a lot of trails, a lot of possible routes, so it's not one route, no, there are many possibilities of a journey. If you only have two hours, well you go two hours, but if you want to dedicate the whole day, you go there the whole day."

Lucía

Multiple participants are part of walking groups, meaning they walk in these areas during the weekend, but also go to other parts in the region. Bird watching in the areas is also a popular activity for many, as there is rich diversity of bird species that can be observed and listened to. Going to the area and bringing binoculars, allows them to spot special birds such as the Blue Jay, which are unique to the region. Sofía emphasized the therapeutic effect of listening to the sounds of nature, such as bird sounds, she experiences when she is there. Alba, while being in Sierra de la Mosca, mentioned all the sounds of the birds, the quietness, not hearing cars and just the general calm this comes with, arguing: "the silence is incredible." Elena shared how she loved to sit down in Sierra de la Mosca, and listen to the sounds of nature, like the birds:

"I love it I love it because well, you can walk, you can see orchids, you can hear the birds so there is a lot of variety of birds and just mmm, the smell… I hear the birds, but I don't hear a car. For me, it is the best, it is very quiet, of course. It is fantastic! And then, depending on the season, you can hear the Arroyo de Valhondo running. Well, it gives you a lot of life. It gives me a lot of life."

Elena

Moreover, many people expressed feeling "different" being Sierra de la Mosca. For many, the contact with nature caused a sense of balance that is distinct from the bustling environment of the city. This emotional equilibrium is something they find only because of the countryside setting. For example, Manuel describes the experience as emotionally impactful, a moment of disconnect from the hustle and bustle of daily life. The act of simply walking in Sierra de la Mosca allows him to observe the changing seasons, which provides a sense of mental clarity and refreshment:

"I don't know, I think it has an emotional impact to me. Like when I go, it is like.. it is like disconnecting from everything else, just going there, hiking, going there for a walk and observing how the different seasons change the landscape, it is so cool actually, it is so 'mind cleaning'. I don't know how to say it."

Manuel

Sara echoed these sentiments as well, emphasizing the tranquillity and peace found in nature compared to urban settings. She emphasized that being in nature is a fundamentally different experience, one that leaves her feeling rejuvenated: "because in the end the contact with nature makes you have balance". Ana also expressed a deep affinity for nature, highlighting its therapeutic effect on the mind. Being surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of nature brings her immense joy and peace. Additionally, Julia emphasized the great sensory experience of being in nature, from the beautiful sounds of birds to the softness of the ground she feels walking there barefoot, which "gives her life". Furthermore, many described being in Sierra de la Mosca as being free; "I associate it with the feeling of freedom" (Carlos) and "I think I feel liberated, free" (Maria).

Overall, people love Sierra de la Mosca because they feel a strong connection to its beautiful scenery, plants, and animals. Visiting the area brings out many different feelings, like amazement, calmness and happiness, showing how much Sierra de la Mosca means to those who get there. Together with one research participants, a drawing (figure 8) was made, outlining all different characteristics and emotions of the area. The words energy, freedom, calmness, protection, love, confidence, peace, strong, serenity, and connection were written.

Figure 8 Body map drawing

Source: Author and María (2023)

Thus, people engage with and are linked to their place through their daily activities and interactions, depending on Cáceres for a multitude of reasons. These include the availability of shops, events, and opportunities for recreational activities, which offer chances for physical exercise and leisure, ultimately contributing to their well-being.

Conclusion

In this chapter, through using the concept of place attachment along with its related and connected components, place identity and place dependency, I discussed the most important pillars of the attachment of the Cácereño/as to the place Cáceres (Hashemnezhad, Heidari & Hoseini 2013; Devine-Wright, 2009). Many residents perceive the natural area of Sierra de la Mosca as inseparable from the city itself, asserting that the city and its natural surroundings are essentially one entity. This perspective shows how the place Cáceres encompasses both the urban environment and the surrounding natural landscapes. The historical significance and beauty of Sierra de la Mosca, the city's architectural richness and its UNESCO recognition, intertwined with Extremadura's essence, and the cultural importance of La Montaña all shape residents' place identity. Besides this, the memories linked to these places and the strong social connections within the community enhance the overall place identity of Cáceres (Brown, 2023; Devine-Wright, 2013; Philips & Murphy, 2021). Moreover, exploring their place dependency, focusing on practices, reveals a deep attachment among residents. The availability of shops, cultural events, and recreational facilities fulfil essential needs and fosters a strong sense of reliance on Cáceres and contribute to residents' quality of life. Sierra de la Mosca, in particular offers moments of tranquillity, freedom, and emotional rejuvenation, aligning with other studies (Kearns & Collins, 2012; Sultana, 2011; Huang, Lin & Cui, 2021; Ey, 2018; Brugger et al., 2013). Thus, the Cácereño/as are undeniably attached to the place Cáceres in various ways,

5. THE FEAR OF LOSING LIFE

In the preceding chapter, I demonstrated how the Cácereño/as are strongly attached to the place Cáceres. If developments, like mining activities, interfere with existing emotional bonds to a location, particularly in natural, wild, or non-urban areas, such as the San José de Valdeflórez mine, place attachment disruption can occur (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013). The expectation of place attachment disruption, which involves the severing of emotional ties to a place, is experienced by the Cácereño/as, which I will outline in this chapter. Furthermore, place attachment disruption can lead to solastalgia, which describes the distress and anxiety experienced when one's home environment is negatively altered (Albrecht, 2005). Given that the San José de Valdeflórez mine project remains in the proposal stage and has yet to be implemented, the concept of anticipated solastalgia, as introduced by Moratis (2021), is central in this chapter too. Using this notion allows me to explore the emotional distress the Cácereño/as experience since they foresee negative changes to their environment. Therefore, in this chapter, I first dive deeper into the different concern the Cácereño/as have, followed by their fear of displacement.

5.1 Impairment of Cáceres

> *"When I think about the mine, I think destruction. Destruction of ecosystems, destruction of the quality of life, destruction of health, destruction of silence... Destruction of everything, destruction of MY life. That's it."*
>
> Sara

Just like Sara, many Cácereño/as are deeply concerned about the potential impact of the mine on their lives. The predominant fear is environmental degradation and its numerous adverse effects, such as the long-term consequences for their health. Elena for example, is afraid to go back in time. Cáceres, like many cities, suffered from poor hygienic conditions which led to various diseases. The situation improved significantly when modern sanitation and water supply systems were implemented. This transformation helped eliminate many health issues related to poor hygiene and water quality. However, the arrival of the mine might mean "going back in time", according to her.

The environmental side effects that were mentioned by many Cácereño/as align with findings from Kaunda (2020), who researched the environmental impact of lithium mining. The main negative environmental effects include contamination of both water and air due to the release of pollutants and chemicals used in mining processes. Furthermore, noise pollution from mining activities is an effect, as well as the destruction of natural habitats. The process of mining may also contribute to water loss in the surrounding area. Moreover, the landscape itself will undergo significant changes. In the rest of this chapter, I focus on what these side effects exactly mean for the Cácereño/as

and how this relate to place attachment disruption and solastalgia. I address the various fears, including concerns about contamination and the loss of life, as well as the emotional weight of potentially leaving behind the place Cáceres.

Health impact worries

One topic that consistently dominated the conversation was the health implications of the proposed mine. This was specifically due to the to the mine's proximity to key locations such as the city centre, the hospital and university. Elena captured the overarching fear of the Cácereño/as, expressing the belief that the mine would not only disrupt the idyllic life and natural environment of Cáceres, which I will discuss later on, but also pose significant health risks to its residents: "In other words, we're going to destroy this idyllic life, and as we have this natural environment so close to the city, we are only going to make people sicker." During an information meeting organized by people from the Plataforma, multiple scientific studies were cited to underscore the health hazards posed by the mine, such as cardiovascular diseases, respiratory illnesses, cancer, skin irritations, neutrocity, and the high mortality rate around similar mining projects. Specific examples were shared as well, for example how the exposure of dust coming out of the galleries of the mine, increases between 9 and 14% of the risk of suffering a stroke and that there is a direct correlation between this exposure and a decrease in lung capacity among the children.

During the interviews I conducted, the research participants showed genuine fear for them. Manuel shared how he has been reading many articles over the last few years and is now very afraid of getting intoxicated through drinking water since the mine will pollute El Calerizo: "Maybe I will get sick, cancer for example, it has happened a lot of times around the world with a lot of projects and it is always the same story." For Francisco the uncertainty about his future makes him worried too. He shared how he, as many other people from Extremadura, has hypothyroidism and wondered: "What is going to happen when the water that I drink can't be mixed with my medication? I am really worried about that!" The higher risk of not getting pregnant and miscarriages was also mentioned during the information meeting, and a serious fear of Lidia. Being in her mid-twenties and wanting to have kids in the future, the potential arrival makes her worried about getting pregnant and the health of her future kids. Apart from the genuine fear people have because of the mine, this potential impact on their health also comes with a lot of frustration and anger when we talked about this topic. Many, like Xavier, started using cursing words, raising their voices, and visible became angry: "Excuse my words, but if the mine will come her, that is very, very shit and it means our death! Everything is in danger, our safety, our health, everything!". Currently, Cáceres is viewed as a place where harmful influences that could affect people's health are absent, and where pollution and health risks are minimal. However, the arrival of the mine could change this perception.

For many, this fear, together with other worries are reasons to move, indicating place attachment disruption, which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Thus, many people are afraid of how the mine impacts their health. Manuel emphasized the importance of prioritizing discussions about health, as these are the primary concerns for many people and the main arguments used by mining companies. However, he also pointed out that the impacts of the mine go far beyond just health considerations, as I will explore in the subsequent sections.

Changing nature

As I discussed in the preceding chapter, the relationship between the Extremeño/as and their natural surroundings is deeply intertwined. They share a special connection to nature, viewing it not only as a physical environment but also as an integral part of their cultural heritage and identity. The proposed mine, however, threatens to disrupt this connection in profound ways, which already comes with emotional distress, indicating anticipated solastalgia (Moratis, 2021). As emphasised by David, the trees, mountains, and landscapes are not just scenery; they are part of the identity of the people. Cutting down a tree or destroying a natural habitat, which will be inevitable if the mine would come, is not only an ecological concern but also an assault on the cultural heritage of the area:

"Maybe in Madrid a mountain does not matter, but here it is so much more. Here cutting down an oak tree is practically a crime. And it does not matter if you are from the extreme right or an ecologist, this act hurts! Yes, if you take out an oak, an acorn, people feel that as part of their identity. Part of their identity! I think this can be considered a colonial attack. I don't know, the extreme things that they do to a mountain is colonial."
David

This example already highlights the perceived difference between people from Extremadura and Madrid, a theme which I will elaborate on in Chapter 3. Furthermore, for many residents, the thought of El Calerizo, the geological formation that is the reason Cáceres exists, being contaminated is painful. While the Cácereño/as feel sad about the environmental degradation, they are also frustrated about the treatment of something that is the foundation of the city's history and identity.

Besides, simply destroying the beauty of the area for a mine, makes people sad and frustrated as well. On my third day in Cáceres I got invited to visit the area of the proposed mine. Alba, the women who invited us, told us everything about all the trees, flowers and plants we encountered and the birds we heard. She admired the Mediterranean trees and the beautiful contrast they create with the plains around Cáceres (figure 9).

Figure 9 View over Sierra de la Mosca

Source: Author (2023)

Appreciating the beauty of the nature, the sunny weather and the silence resulted in describing this moment as perfect and peaceful in my field diary. However, when we started talking about the mine, the ambiance changed completely:

> *"We were standing on top of the mountain, we looked over the valley, we saw all the beautiful trees and the plain surroundings, we saw the city Cáceres in the distance. It was very serene. But then this nice, peaceful moment and ambiance changed when she started talking about the mine. She told us how everything will be destroyed, how all the trees will be gone, how everything will disappear. She became quite sad, and downcast, and I don't know, I really felt it and her sadness. I even got goose bumps, I think because the contrast was so big between the serenity of the moment and the idea that this won't be here in the future. I don't know, I really felt this potential disaster for them."*
>
> Field diary – September 24, 2024

During another hike through Sierra de la Mosca, a similar moment occurred while talking with Sofía. She deeply admired all the present natural elements, including the madrone trees, constantly snapping pictures and discussing the beauty of the area. Sofía expressed disbelief that anyone would want to destroy such a cherished area. As we kept on walking, Sofía repeatedly talked about the potential loss, emphasizing that this area is inseparable from Cáceres itself. She felt that if it were destroyed, a part of her identity would be lost. Patricia echoed this sentiment during an information meeting, stating that the mining project "will change your own Extremadura".

These examples underscore the strong place attachment held by the residents of Cáceres, as well as the disruption to that attachment posed by the proposed mine (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013). The individuals are already

experiencing stress, anger, sadness, and frustration due to the expected negative changes they foresee to their place Cáceres, indicating anticipated solastalgia (Moratis, 2021).

Losing the important facilities

Furthermore, people are afraid the mine will affect their daily lives and therefore also their well-being, which links to the previously discussed place dependency. For many residents, many depend on the natural areas around Cáceres for recreation and relaxation. Lucía highlighted how the mine would deprive the Cácereño/as of their green spaces, which are crucial for enjoying fresh air and escaping the urban environment. And while Sara first preferred not to think about her own life when the mine will arrive, since "our minds have great powers and thinking creates reality" she explained how her daily life won't be and "simply can't be the same when the mine arrives". Sara, who is very attached to the place Cáceres, sees herself as a true sports enthusiast and nature lover, believing that when the mining activities starts, she won't be able to do the things she loves most around Cáceres anymore. During weekends, when she's free from work she enjoys activities like hiking and cycling and immersing herself in the sounds of nature, like the wind blowing and the chirping of birds, for her mental clarity. However, she fears that if the mine proceeds, these activities will become impossible. The noise generated by the mining machines is expected to overpower the natural sounds she loves, making it difficult to enjoy these outdoor activities. Furthermore, and equally important, there will simply be less space for her to do these activities. This is also a worry for Manuel, as the destruction of these habitats would reduce the opportunities for outdoor activities. Manuel, who loves to visit the area and has lots of good memories with friends and family there, indicating place attachment, wonders what he can do when the mine arrives: "And what will I do? What can I do if I want to enjoy the nature during the weekend? If I want to have a picknick with my friends and family. I will have to take the car! But what I don't want to drive? What if I don't have a car?" Lucía shared how she thinks she can't enjoy nature anymore, just as for Javier, for whom the mine also presents a potential threat to the environment and his children's upbringing. For him it is important that his kids are surrounded by nature, and can spend time in nature, which has great educational value. The mine would make this impossible.

Additionally, the destruction of natural habitats could result in the loss of the crucial "green lungs" of the city, which play an important role in cooling down the area during the warmer summer months. Moreover, it could lead to the destruction of important ecosystems, as Alejandro emphasized by stating, " if there are no trees, there are no animals. There is nothing without trees. We need these ecosystems to survive you know. We need the trees to breathe. We need the animals." Daniel echoed this sentiment, highlighting the area's significance as a typical Mediterranean forest. He drew a comparison to Monfragüe, a protected natural area located 70 kilometres away,

emphasizing that destroying such an area would be considered barbaric. He sees Sierra de la Mosca as having similar characteristics, and questions why it is acceptable to harm it. There is also a general concern about a loss of water supply, as the mine uses a lot of water. The extraction and contamination of water sources could have severe consequences for both the local ecosystem and the community's access to clean water for drinking and irrigation. Luis emphasised the immense water consumption by the proposed mine, estimating that it could require a third of the water consumed by the entire population of Cáceres annually. This demand could result in water shortages for the Cácereño/as, particularly during dryer periods of the year. Similarly, Francisco underscored the scarcity of water in Cáceres and its important value, comparing it to gold due to its importance. The emotional intensity surrounding concerns about water supply was also very palpable during my conversation with Lucía: she was very frustrated and angry over the potential long-term consequences of water extraction for the mine.

The examples presented in this section again show that there is an expectation of disruption of their attachment to the place Cáceres, which already evokes feelings of loss and distress among the Cácereño/as.

Impairment of economy

Besides, many of the activists are worried about the future as the potential arrival of the mine comes with a significant threat to employment opportunities in the area. David described the potential mine as “a fucking economic ruin, it is obvious!” as the biggest consequence, bigger than the health impact for example. Lucía argued that the existing jobs in agriculture, beekeeping, and local cooperatives are at risk of disappearing if the mine proceeds, and thus impacts the livelihoods of many: “Let it be clear, all the people who are in the Valhondo stream, those orchards, all the people who have cattle out there are, they are going to disappear, beekeeping is going to disappear, everything!” This sentiment resonates with Javier, who currently works in Sierra de la Mosca, owning an ecological cooperative. While he is afraid of the future as well, he is already feeling the impact of the potential arrival of the mine. He explained: “with a project like this on the horizon, the banks do not dare to give any financial support, there are just too many risks”. Consequently, this lack of investment makes his aim of the realization of new jobs, which Javier believes could potentially reach to 383 positions, impossible. Therefore, for Javier, the potential mine represents more than just a looming threat to the environment; it directly impacts his livelihood and aspirations for the community, already indicating place attachment disruption.

Furthermore, the Cácereño/as are worried about the future of tourism in Cáceres because of environmental pollution of the mine. David painted a dark picture of the consequences of the mine, suggesting that it could drive away tourists due to the environmental concerns. He shared how the typical outside Spanish terraces in Cáceres,

which he loves to visit and “are just part of life in Cáceres” will be covered in black dust and acid rain. This will inevitably “make the Germans leave. They are going to pack their bags and they are going to run away!” He further continued: “Who the fuck comes here when the only thing you see is pollution?! No one wants to sit on a terrace and be confronted with this.” Also, for Maria who works in the tourism sector now, fears her future, for exactly this same reason. Luis emphasized the importance of (cultural) tourism as the primary economic driver for Cáceres, noting that “our potential is very much threatened." During a demonstration held in front of the building (figure 10) where 27 EU heads, including the Spanish minister for culture and sport, came together to elevate culture to the status of an essential public good, Lidia expressed her concern too. Tourism in Cáceres is closely tied to the cultural heritage of the city. She argued that “tourism and the mine are not compatible," indicating a fear that the two industries may clash.

Figure 10 Demonstration September 27, 2023

Source: Author (2023)

Changing life in the city Cáceres

Moreover, there is a fear of how the proposed mine threatens the everyday experiences and spaces the people value in the city itself, thereby contributing to place attachment disruption (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013). One interaction with Claudia, which I reflected on in my field diary, highlights this feeling perfectly:

“Since 13:00, I have been joining the members of Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña. There is a festival, so the city is bustling with people, making it the perfect opportunity for the group to distribute "No a la mina" flyers and engage in conversations. After this busy day, it's time for a short break, so we decided to head to Café Los Siete Jardines; a café located in the old historic centre, situated higher up. As I walk outside together with Claudia, holding my ice coffee, to sit on the terrace, she stops me and points to La

Montaña, which seems quite close from this point. She tells me, while shaking her head in dismay, that if the mine would come, we wouldn't be able to sit here anymore. Apart from the health risks, she fears the noise that mining activities would generate, making it impossible to relax here, which she describes as 'one of the best cafes in Cáceres. She is also worried that she wouldn't be able to enjoy the view of La Montaña anymore, with constant traffic of cars and trucks needed for the mining activities."

Field diary - Lotte

Claudia's concern about the potential noise and disturbance from mining activities would disrupt her ability to enjoy a relaxing moment at Café Los Siete Jardines, a place she values and considers one of the best cafés in Cáceres. Her fear of losing this cherished space reflects a deeper emotional attachment to the city, which is threatened by the prospect of industrial development, and anticipated solastalgia. Sara's also shared a deep sense of worry and sadness regarding the potential impact of the mine on her life in Cáceres. When we started talking about the subject of the mine, she became quieter, and she lost the happy expression on her face she had when we were talking about life in Cáceres just a few minutes earlier. And while she initially appeared somewhat sad, her emotions shifted to frustration and anger as our conversation progressed as she began speaking with increased intensity and volume. This was mostly because she sees the mine as a force of destruction that will harm her life in Cáceres. These examples show again, how places not just 'resources' or 'objects', but agents with emotional and affective components (Ey et al., 2018; Kearney, 2017).

Visual impact

In the previous section, Claudia's concern about the impact on the view of La Montaña underscores the potential loss of familiar landscapes that contribute to the Cácereño/as' place attachment. This sentiment reflected a common worry shared by many regarding the visual impact. Claudia and I only discussed this aspect while we were in the city, but it is important to consider that the proposed mine in Sierra de la Mosca could also alter the visual landscape of the entire area, which also plays a role in their place attachment. The picturesque, beautiful and typical Extremadura and Mediterranean forests may disappear entirely, which "would be terrible" for Manuel: "During the weekends, I go there to enjoy the serene landscape, look at the beautiful trees, to listen and watch the birds, to relax. But I won't be able to do that anymore when the mine is going to be there. I don't want to watch ugly machines and trucks!" Initially, the mining company wanted an open-pit mine, but they switched to an underground one. As a result, the company shared drawings showing little infrastructural impact on the area. However, there is widespread scepticism about this claim among the Cácereño/as, which I will delve into further in the next chapter, exploring various aspects of the process in greater detail. Patricia highlighted, even with an underground mine, the extensive facilities and infrastructure that are needed, including processing plants, warehouses, waste ponds, and parking lots, would "dramatically change the area's appearance." Being very frustrated and angry,

Lucía shared her visualization, of both the open-pit and underground mine and the underground mine:

"When they talked about the open-pit mine, I saw a huge hole there, very immense. I saw a total desert panorama, and just no trees. Terrible.... And well, everything was fenced off, everything around it, and it was going to be closed to the citizens from Cáceres. And the second visualization is the underground mine, there would not be anything on the surface they say, but this is not true, and it is probably going to be worse, because they have to make extremely huge tunnels, and that will take a lot of machines. And those machines have to get there, so there will be cars and trucks and they will have to destroy all the trees!"

Lucía

Elena expressed that she prefers to look at trees when she is walking with her dogs and not at massive drilling machines and tunnels, just as Lucía who hikes there to relax and does not want to look at how her "backyard, the doors to her home are destroyed". Furthermore, Ana and David expressed their fear about witnessing the physical transformation of the landscape first-hand, particularly the removal of typical mediterean trees. As someone who is a bird lover and member of different hiking groups, Ana thinks she does not want to be in the area that is only filled with machines. All these examples show the feelings of hopelessness, grief, and anxiety about what is yet to come, due to the looming threats of the mine, indicating a strong place attachment and its related anticipated solastalgia (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013; Moratis, 2021). Talking about the impact of the mine, David shared how it is hard to think of the future for some people. He explained: "It's one thing to think about it, to see it in the newspaper, but it's another thing to see it with your own eyes, I guarantee you when a bulldozer arrives at the mountain gate, people understand the impact".

Since the mine is still in the development phase, there's no opportunity for an embodied experience of the mine yet. However, nearby and within the natural area lies Cantera Olleta, a closed quarry where they used to extract aggregates like sand, gravel, and crushed stone for construction projects. These activities stopped in 2003 and even though the quarry is now fenced off due to past accidents, it is still visible. During my walk-a-long interview with Ana, we spent almost an hour surrounded by olive trees and horse riders. When we adjusted our route and left the trees behind us, we suddenly encountered Cantera Olleta (figure 11) This was quite surprising for me, and Ana and I discussed the strange experience of transitioning from natural surroundings to the sight of extensive human intervention. Ana mentioned that compared to the proposed mine in Sierra de la Mosca, this quarry is extremely tiny, and as she already does not like the visibility of this quarry at all, she fears the future. She expressed that the mine would be disastrous for both the people of Cáceres and the surrounding area, as it would lead to the destruction of nature. She pointed out that even with an underground mine,

transportation needs would still cause environmental damage and a changing landscape, a landscape that she loves and perfectly represents the beauty of Extremadura. So, the contrast between the serene olive tree groves and the presence of Cantera Olleta served as a reminder of her future and her reaction underscored the connection between people and place, and the anticipated solastalgia.

Figure 11 Cantera Olleta

Source: author (2023)

5.2 Losing home and displacement

As I discussed in the previous chapter, many research participants see Sierra de la Mosca as part of their home. For instance, during my visit to the area, Alba repeatedly emphasized, "We are in Cáceres," highlighting her strong connection to the area. Due to the proposed mine, many people expressed a deep sadness and anger over the potential destruction of this home. For instance, during my conversation with Lucía about the mine's arrival, her previous enthusiasm about "the amazing life in Cáceres" turned into visible anger. She expressed her concern that while some might benefit from the mine, the majority would "lose everything." She explained how the mine will, according to her, lead to a loss of home and while she excused for speaking louder, she explained:

> *"The loss is enormous... Enormous!!! They are going to destroy the nature that is our home, our house! It's our home! It really is our home you know.... It is tremendous, tremendous. Terrible! " [...]. It's not that we are talking about a mine that is lost out there, somewhere far away, no, it affects the city. OUR city. "*
>
> Lucía

This quote illustrates place disruption as it highlights her connection with the area, but also the emotional distress and expected sense of loss experienced, and thus anticipated solastalgia, due to the proposed mining project (Devine-Wright, 2009;

Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013; Moratis, 2021). The fear of losing their beloved home in Cáceres due to the arrival of the mine is deeply rooted in the people's strong sense of place identity. For many people, like Antonio, moving would be the only option if the mine arrived. He stated: You know lithium is toxic right, would YOU want to live close to something toxic? See, there you have your answer''. This quote of Antonio highlights the reality of many Cácereño/as who are struggling with the unsettling idea that they might have to move away because of the perceived risks associated with the mine. Manuel shared his apprehension, saying he will seriously consider moving out of the city if the mine goes ahead. He highlighted the scale of the project and its potential health hazards, suggesting that moving to a town further from the mine might be a wise decision to protect his health and the health of his loved ones. Similarly, Laura expressed a sense of inevitability about moving, saying, "When the mine arrives, we have no future here. My family and I will move. My health is the most important thing, and because of the mine, my health is in danger, so we will have to move." Lucía also emphasized the crucial link between a healthy environment and a continued life in Cáceres, stating, "We live here because it's a healthy city. If that changes, we won't hesitate go somewhere else." This highlights the fundamental role that environmental quality plays in residents' decisions about where to live. However, this reality of displacement, comes with a lot of sadness and anger because people are strongly attached to the place Cáceres. Even though there is the potential to move, the Cácereño/as expressed a strong preference for staying in Cáceres due to their strong attachment to the city, which is well articulated by Lidía. She also explained this is the case for her children:

"It is that they destroy what is important to us. I could have been living in Huelva, in Valencia, in Seville, in Madrid, in many places, but I chose this place. I chose exactly this place, because this place is amazing. [...] Maybe, I am one of the few people of my generation whose children are working in Cáceres but my children are also very clear about it, they just love it here! My son works in data science, but he could work from anywhere, but he works and lives here, because he likes it. And my daughter is a nurse and it is the same thing, she can have a job all over Spain, she can, but we live here, because we love it here you know."

Lidia

It also comes with the struggle of potentially leaving behind loved ones, which shows its social component. Alejandro, for example, does not know if it is possible to leave together with all his friends and family. Furthermore, during the interview with María, she opened up about the emotional struggle she faces when considering the possibility of leaving her loved ones behind and adjusting to a new way of life once the mine opens, which is a life that may no longer be in or near Cáceres. María expressed her dilemma, which is on the one hand the idea of leaving everything behind versus accepting the new, bad reality. She also acknowledged the financial constraints that prevent some of her family and friends from moving with her. During the interview, when we started talking about this, María's

mood changed, and the conversation grew a little bit tense. Seeing and sensing her discomfort, I attempted to lighten the mood with a joke. I wrote down everything that happened in my field diary:

María: And all people that I love, live here, you know, all the people. But do I have to say: I'm leaving and I'm leaving behind everything. Or do I just to have accept that I'm living this way.? ..... And that is hard.. that's hard. How can you make decision like that?"

- *María becomes really quiet, looks sad, starts shaking her head. -*

Lotte: Yes, I understand, that is hard. And what about your friends and family?"

María: "Not all my family and friends can move, not to the same place, but also because they just don't have the money. "

- *María looks dejected*
- *Lotte makes a joke, feels also uncomfortable and starts talking about another topic*

This experience with María highlights the distress experienced by people, due to the looming threats to one's place attachment and the envisioned future, encompassing feelings of sadness and anxiety about what is yet to come.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has delved into the multifaceted concerns of the Cácereño/as regarding the proposed Valdeflórez lithium mine, building upon and deepening the understanding of their place attachment established in Chapter 1. This chapter illustrates the emotional impact that proposed industrial activities can have on a community, even before they materialize. The proposed mine not only poses environmental and health risks but also impacts the connection between the Cácereño/as and the place Cáceres, as it jeopardizes their cultural heritage, recreational opportunities, and overall well-being. In other words, the expectation of place attachment disruption (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster; 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013), is palpable among the Cácereño/as, as they struggle with the impending threat to their beloved home. Additionally, the San José de Valdeflórez project, although still in its proposal stage, invokes a profound sense of anticipated solastalgia: there is a looming threat to their place attachment and the envisioned future, which comes with feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration and anger about what is yet to come (Moratis, 2021).

6. FROM EXTREMADURA, FOR SPAIN

"I feel a lot of rage and anger in my belly because of everything that is happening. And I also feel it in the heart.. because I feel, I feel very connected to the earth. I feel a lot of love for nature. But extractivism and this way of colonization, makes me so angry [....] And it is colonization of the earth but it is also the colonization of my body. There is no consent, no consent! It is like violation, they just enter the area and there is no consent, and even if we have been saying no no no no for seven years, seven years (!) in our right to say no and they still they still do it. They still do it and it is so, so tiring. "
María

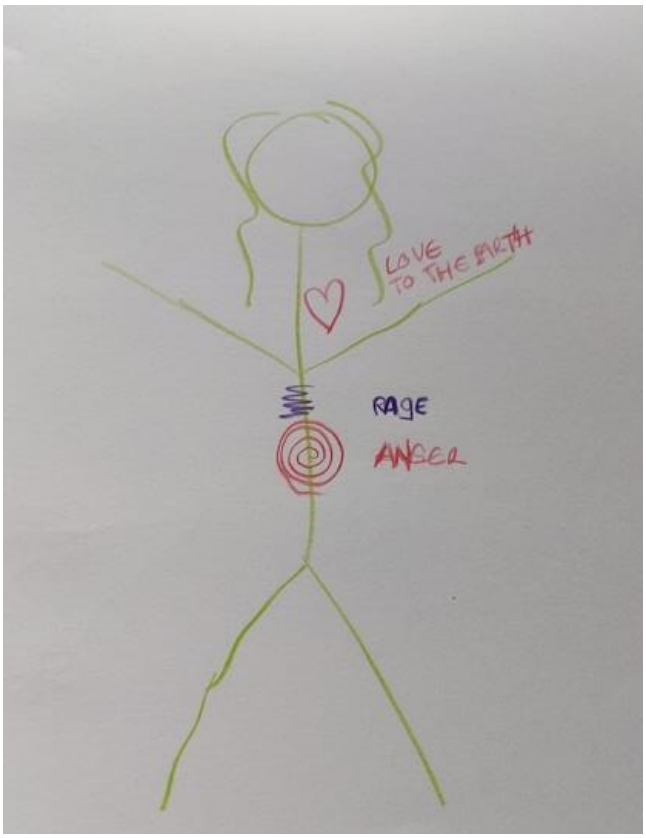


Figure 2 Body mapping drawing, impact of the mine, made by María

In the previous chapters, I explored the attachment that residents of Cáceres have to their environment, contrasted with the looming threat posed by the proposed mine. The potential arrival of the mine might change this attachment, leading to place attachment disruption and anticipated solastalgia. However, as highlighted by María above, these emotions are not solely due to the expected environmental changes and the impact on peoples' daily lives; the process itself also brings out a variety of negative feelings. Askland and Bunn (2018) acknowledge this as well, arguing that solastalgia is useful for explaining place-based distress due to mining activities but emphasize the need to recognize the complex emotional landscapes communities face that extend beyond the transformation or degradation of their local environment. Therefore, in this chapter, I will delve deeper into the political processes and their emotional impacts, focusing on how political practices are experienced and perceived by local activists.

First, I examine the history of resource extraction in Extremadura, arguing that the region has been predominantly utilized for extracting resources to fuel the development of other parts of Spain, while it has seen little to no benefits from this extraction. This historical perspective provides context for understanding how the Cácereño/as perceive their position within Spain, often feeling marginalized and exploited. Then, I delve into the

relationships between local residents and external actors, such as mining companies and government authorities, highlighting the dynamics of power and exploitation. The resulting feelings of disempowerment and betrayal among the local population will be explored, which sheds light on how the residents position themselves and the social and emotional impact of these political interactions. In the final section, I explore what it means to be an activist in this context, examining the challenges faced by local activists who resist the proposed mining activities in their place. This final section provides a deeper understanding of how these processes affect communities emotionally, highlighting the interplay between local resistance and external pressure.

By structuring the chapter in this way, I aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the political and emotional landscape surrounding resource extraction in Extremadura, illustrating how historical exploitation, power dynamics, and activism intersect in this region.

6.1 Resource extraction in Extremadura

Among the research participants, there was a prevailing sentiment that the region Extremadura is merely a “colony” of Madrid existing solely for the advancement of the central governmental interests. This aligns with the concept of extractivism, which prioritizes economic growth and industrial development, often at the expense of certain regions, termed "sacrifice zones" (Henry, 2019; Dunlap, 2024). Bruno, who was visibly angry about this situation, argued that the “colony Extremadura contributes the development of the rest of Spain, where Madrid and big companies are the ones who earn lots of money, but us, the citizens, we do not get anything!”. David described the situation “as gentlemen from Madrid stealing everything from us”. Being visibly very frustrated and angry he repeatedly argued: Extremadura is a colony! Extremadura is a colony! A colony. Colony. Point. We are a colony.” Others also expressed their frustration and anger about the feeling of taken advantage of, neglect and exploitation, arguing that the local population only get environmental degradation but does not receive any money. Marta, who started to talk louder and even smashed on the table during this moment, illustrated this sentiment which is felt by many:

> *“I am quite confident in saying that this is neo-colonialism you know. The company comes here to get whatever they want, to extract, but leave the place completely destroyed, contaminate the place, destroy the ecosystems, and when they have what they want, they will leave. And they get all the money you know. But we, the Cácereños get nothing! Except for a polluted place. […] Even now, I get angry again when I talk about it. It is just so frustrating!”*
>
> Marta

For many, the potential mine is a reminder of the past which I will elaborate on in the next paragraph.

(History of) sacrifice zone

Extremadura has a rich history of mining (Castelos, 2023) and multiple people argued that the exploitation of the region's resources without fair compensation or consideration for the local population has been happening throughout history, with Cantera Olleta as the most recent reminder. Many, like Maria, Natalia, Silvia, David and Ana, highlighted the history of inequality in land ownership, with a few individuals and state actors owning large amounts of land, rich in natural resources, using it for the development in other parts of Spain. This resulted in leaving Extremadura to survive with minimal resources and according to Maria, this nowadays also attribute to the region's poverty. And while this led to poverty, she also suggested that it has led to an attachment and more balanced relationship between people and nature, a topic discussed in chapter 4. The arrival of the mine, however, would destroy this balance and therefore the proposed mine "is a repetition of the past". Silvia shared her frustration and feelings of unfairness over the fact that throughout history the Spanish government heavily invested in Catalonia. This investment entailed utilizing resources from Extremadura, like animals, natural resources but also people. However, now some Catalans seek independence, leaving Extremadura with nothing in return and maintaining its status as the poorest region of Spain. To Silvia this is "really unfair" and does not help the region at all: "And what do we get? What do we have?! Nothing. Only being the poorest region of Spain!" Talking to both Natalia and Silvia simultaneously, Natalia added an extra component to their frustration, arguing that the region has been used as a waste disposal throughout multiple times in history:

"You know, Extremadura has been used as a waste disposal many times. They extract all the resources here, they use is it in the north, and then they dump the waste again in the south. Preferably in a small village, because there is a lot of space here. But come on, how unfair is that?! We don't see anything of the money. They are only using the resources and then wanting to dump the stuff they don't want, again."

Natalia

Thus, the Cácereño/as feel frustrated about the fact that their region Extremadura is treated as a dumping ground for others' interests and that the proposed mine reinforces patterns of the past. Additionally, the proposed mine not only exacerbates the environmental impact on Extremadura but also reflects a broader negative perception of the region. Silvia feels frustrated by the prevailing perception of Extremadura as a region of incompetence and ignorance, shared by many others who also feel marginalized and overlooked. She argued:

"They really think that we are stupid here. That only stupid people live here who don't understand anything, who are living far away from anyone. And they think they can just do whatever they want to do! [..] It makes me angry and frustrated, because you know, we live in a great region, in my opinion the best of Spain. The people are great, we have

amazing cultural events, the nature is amazing. But people in Spain sometimes don't even know where Extremadura is. You have to say: close to the border of Portugal. People even think we don't have Mcdonalds here!"

Silvia

The proposed mine serves as a stark reminder of this disregard, as it reinforces the systemic issues of exploitation and neglect. According to David "Spain is very centralist", noting that almost all the regions in Spain are underfunded as almost all the money goes to Madrid. He supported his argument by giving the example of how the whole budget for Extremadura is only 13% of the whole budget for the ministry of Education and employment, leaving Extremadura left behind. While this statement was not confirmed by other sources, feelings of being left behind were evident in other situations, such as during the demonstration on September 26th. While we were waiting for the governmental representatives to arrive, Laura shared her discontent about the situation arguing that people from the ministries come her, while the normal citizens through taxes pay for all their costs, such as the luxurious hotels they will sleep in, and the expensive food they will eat. Additionally, Alejandro pointed out a contradiction in the goals of the national Spanish government. While the government aims to enhance public transportation by improving the train connection between Madrid and Lisbon, it neglects smaller cities and villages like those in Extremadura. He fears that this oversight could exacerbate isolation in rural areas, and he questions the logic of prioritizing development opportunities like mining while simultaneously neglecting crucial infrastructural investments. He argued: "What's the point [...] to destroy even more land and leave more villages without connection, without transport, without life, without anything.". Thus, many people feel left behind, sometimes even feeling being a second-class citizen, aligning with the concept extractivism (Castelos, 2023; Dunlap, 2024; Henry, 2019).

Decision making and distribution of wealth

Furthermore, many Cácereño/as expressed frustration as decision-makers from the national government, and people from the European Commission, who do not have the same attachment to the place Cáceres, are making important decisions about life in Cáceres. David articulated this disconnect:

"People in the north, in Madrid, they are just sitting comfortably behind their expensive laptops and wearing expensive suits and they decide what needs to happen. But they don't understand the true consequences for the people who live there. [..] You know, it is different when you are from here and have your life here."

David

For Manuel these distant authorities fail to grasp the true consequences for those "who call the Cáceres their home" as they are "lacking the connections with Cáceres' reality and natural environment". This perfectly resonates with Trujillo (2009.p.12, in Ferrarello, 2023), who argues: where the colonizers [and by extension mining, agribusinesses, oil

and lumber interests…] saw a space-landscape, natives saw a place". Moreover, Javier shared how with Olleta neither the mining company nor the government took responsibility after it was closed, resulting in huge environmental damage now, contributing to his fear for the Valdeflórez mine. Manuel shared his anger about how the residents must deal with the negative consequences of the mine, but the distant decision-makers do not: "It is super frustrating, because people who are not living here, are going to earn from this project and the problem is just for the city and the people who are living her but not for the people who made the decisions you know". According to Lucía the people who make these decisions "don't have hearts, they don't have minds, they don't have anything, they just think about money". Elena sees similarities with what she called peripheral or developing countries "which are in the end just places in which decision-makers have no compassion for the people who inhabit them or for the ecosystems.". This perspective resonates with the concept of extractivism, where regions are exploited for their resources with little regard for local communities or environmental sustainability (Dunlap, 2024). She is sure that Cáceres will follow the same path, making her very furious and angry.

Additionally, the activists criticized the involvement of an Australian company. Lucía emphasized that despite the company appearing to be Spanish on paper, due to a legal construction they created, the benefits will be for Australia or other countries in Europe: "the extracted resources will be taken abroad, depriving the region of potential benefits." Moreover, there is dissatisfaction regarding the lack of benefits that people in the region will derive from the lithium extraction; many argue that residents in the southern part of Spain are not interested in electric cars. David argued: "In your country there are many electric cars, but here in Spain there are not any! The electric car is going to be for a few. And when the petrol car is finished, the electric car will only for a tiny amount of people". These views highlight an imbalance where the economic benefits of the mining operation will unfairly favour distant entities.

6.2 Lack of trust

Besides this, there is a widespread lack of trust in government representatives and the mining companies among the Cácereño/as. Expressions of anger and frustration are evident, with residents highlighting examples of perceived corruption and lies. Additionally, there is a great sense of disempowerment, an important aspect to consider according to Askland & Bunn (2018) within mining contexts, which I will elaborate on in the following sections. In doing so, this sheds light on the social and emotional impacts of these political interactions.

Betrayal by the local government

First, many residents are disappointed in governmental representatives. People like Lucía expressed disbelief, frustration and sadness at how politicians prioritize personal gain

over the well-being of citizens. While intensely drawing circles on the paper I gave her, raising her voice and visibly frustrated, she argued that she feels like living in an upside-down world, where politicians should prioritize citizens' welfare but instead focus on filling their own pockets. She further expressed her disappointment in local governmental representatives:

"I think we're in an upside-down world! Backwards. Because in reality, those who govern us, should look after the well-being of the citizens, but they do not look out for the well-being of the citizens. They just want to fill their own pockets !! [...] And it's a shame that we have politicians to defend us, but they don't defend us. I cannot understand why we have representatives who do not get to the bottom of the issues. So, it gives me a lot of sadness you know..."

Lucía

Furthermore, feelings of betrayal have been persistent in this conflict and the trust between the citizens of Cáceres and their local authorities has been eroded over recent years, largely due to the changing stance on the proposed mine project by political leaders. Initially, the local government representatives, including the mayor, clearly and openly opposed the mine, aligning with the viewpoint of the people from the Plataforma. However, this attitude suddenly changed, leaving people like Manuel, feeling disappointed, disillusioned, and betrayed and led moreover to a loss of trust in political representatives:

"I think I just felt betrayed you know. It was so strange, because first he was saying so powerful, like with a lot of power, no the mine, and he said that the mine can't be here and the mine won't come here. But he suddenly moved to another way of thinking, like in favour of the mine and I don't know, but now I wouldn't put my trust in political parties"

Manuel

Elena also noted the ambiguity in the government's stance, highlighting the various perspectives and actions taken by government representatives: "During elections, they always say no to the mine but then I think they got pressure from Europe, and then they said, o well let's study, they don't say no anymore, they say let's see yes, so we can't trust politicians you know". This inconsistency makes it challenging for activists within the Plataforma, who initially found it easier to advocate but now struggle as they feel they must also convince local representatives. Consequently, these experiences have left activists feeling confused and distrusting. Additionally, 800.000 euros of public subsidies given to mining companies and the lack of transparency in how decisions are made, has made people even more disenchanted as many felt political motives are hidden.

Moreover, there is widespread belief among many that bribery is pervasive, particularly within government and large corporations. Residents like Antonio pointed out Spain's historical issues with bribery, stating, "We have a long history of bribery in Spain. In the

end, it is always about money." Others, like Luis and Patricia also shared this sentiment, highlighting their suspicion regarding the interactions between the lithium and mining lobby and political representatives, as the mining company has initiated “thousands of meetings” over the last few years. Manual is sure this has also played a part in the changing view of the mayor and would not be surprised if it turned out the mayor might have received some financial support. While for some it only remained to speculations, María told me she has evidence, and shared the process of the beginning of the mining process and how her former neighbours were offered money:

“The neighbours were telling us what was happening, that there were suddenly getting machines into their properties. And they were not informed! And then there were people from the mining company who said if you allow us to keep us on your territory, we are going to pay you. A thousand euros or something like that.”

María

Furthermore, the scepticism goes beyond concerns of potential bribery. Many individuals also voiced doubts regarding corporate sponsorships for the community newspaper, and financial support for events in Cáceres. Many shared the story of how local sports teams, like the basketball team were offered financial support by the mining company. Carlos, visibly frustrated, highlighted the misleading perception created by such actions, stating, "people think that this mining company is really interested in the culture and well-being of the people of Cáceres. But that’s not the case. Not at all!". He argued how these sponsorships could be interpreted as attempts to manipulate the public opinion rather than genuine community support. Furthermore, there are concerns about the integrity of the mining company's leadership, with Manuel mentioning a CEO connected to illegal activities elsewhere and how this raise questions about the company's ethical standards.

Lies by the mining company

“And then the lies, all the lies.. And the European Commission wants this, and they give all these subsidies to these – excuse my words – fucking Australian company! They get so many subsidies, I just can’t believe it. And the Cácereños will not get anything. There is so much greenwashing, and the company keeps on lying and change the numbers of the expected jobs constantly. And also, when you really think about what they are saying, it does not make sense. They share so many lies,[…] it is really frustrating.”

Marta

This quote highlights the frustration felt by many Cácereño/as about the lies the company is sharing. Manuel shared how the mining company is telling that this project is an example of green and sustainable industry, but that this is a big lie and that “you only have to read their project to see for yourself.” Pedro, a physics academic specialized in mining, believes that the company is not being truthful and is instead hiding information and spreading lies to promote the project. He came up with the example of how the company claimed that the mine would be fully powered by hydrogen, which he believes is

impossible based on his own conducted research. He also mentioned that the company is misleading people by showing images of trees instead of accurately depicting the environmental impact of the project. According to María, the mining representatives think that "we are stupid" and that "they just tell us whatever they want. They are putting so much effort in, in hiding, not only part of the truth, but putting a lot of lies on top of it". Furthermore, despite initial support for the mine, David acknowledged, expressing evident anger, the discrepancy between promised job creation and the actual job loss, arguing that the mine will destroy far more jobs than it will generate:

"But there is also work in Valdeflores, there are companies now... And you know, the new jobs are a fucking lie! I mean, it is fucking lie, you go to the average number of workers that a mine has. [...],. How many workers does a mine of this kind in Spain have on average? 11!"
David

This aligns with other participants, of whom many also shared their frustration over the inconsistent and misleading information provided by the mining company, that constantly changed the number of new jobs. In 2020 for example, ENE argued it would lead to 700 new jobs (ENE, 2022) whereas in 2024 the company talked about 450 (Bermejo, 2024). Doing their own research, looking at other mining communities, they came to the realization that even the lowest estimate of 100 is not feasible and 10- to 20 new jobs would make more sense. Also experiences from other mining situations in the world made the activist realize that the company is sharing lies, as these specific communities did not experience any benefits. Lucía used the words "propaganda" to describe what the company has been doing so far and Javier also does not believe the companies intensions as their objective is only to make profit: "I mean, what they want is to make money and that is it, they don't want to create jobs". Moreover, the new potential jobs promised by the mining company are not suitable for the Cácereño/as since engineers, geologists, and chemists are needed, but these roles are unlikely to be filled by Cácereño/as. Instead, global companies will bring in their own staff to fulfil these specialized roles:

"They are going to bring in people from Canada, Australia or wherever they want, because obviously here, no one is trained in mega lithium mining, obviously, no one in Extremadura who grows up here, says, I am going to be a technician and engineer in lithium mega-mining, that is the fucking reality!"
David

Not being heard

Moreover, despite efforts to voice concerns and engage with policymakers, there is a belief among the activists that their opinions are not valued nor considered. Therefore, many feel unheard and disregarded by the government, resonating with the concept extractivism (Henry, 2019; Dunlap, 2024). María started laughing about my question

when I asked her if she feels the government is listening to the activists. She argued, while shaking her head, bluntly stating, “NO! No not all. They do what they want, they do not care about us." This sentiment is echoed by Alejandro who has the idea that the government "never listens to people who live in villages or in the south." He thinks the government ignores their concerns and sees the Plataforma as irrelevant, leading to a feeling of dismissal and disregard despite their efforts. He compares the presence of the Plataforma to an annoying fly that is constantly swatted away, indicating that while the government may acknowledge their existence, they do not take them seriously or give them any importance:

“I’m just telling you; they are not interested in us. We are not important to them and for them we do not exist. For the national government, the local government, we do not exist for them. Maybe we are a little bit scary, and I think that they might be a little bit worried of us, but in the end, they don’t care about us, they don’t give us any importance. They know we are there, but for them, we’re nothing more than a nuisance… We’re like a fly, and they try to get us out of the room. When they see us, they are like ugh, fuck, you’re annoying, you are bothering us all the time. And you know, there are a lot of people who are against the mine… but it seems like the government does not care.”

Alejandro

The frustration of not really being listened to was also felt during a protest held the 26th of September 2023. I wrote down the following reflection in my field diary:

“The spot for the demonstration was positioned far from where the ministers convened, so it was a little bit strange. Some people told me this was very typical, because they are never really listened to. Others were quite frustrated when they realized they were placed so distantly; because there was no change they would be seen or heard by the ministers. And while the activists made a lot of noise with the whistles, I am pretty sure there is just no way that the ministers had any idea the Plataforma was there. Next to that, the heavy police presence made the ambiance for me very tense. There were really not that many activists, and I think the amount of police was out of place. When I wanted to take a picture, I could not even leave the assigned spot, which also made me felt trapped and strange. I was just surrounded by three big police men who were not kind at all.”

Thus, the frustration of activists feeling unheard and disregarded by the government is palpable. Many perceive the disconnect between their efforts and the government's response as a broader issue of systemic neglect for local voices and concerns. Additionally, there is a profound sense of betrayal among the Cácereño/as towards both their local government and the mining company, due to suspicions of bribery that further undermine trust in institutions. These feelings of being disregarded, betrayed, and distrust resonate with Askland & Bunn’s (2018) findings.

When certain processes threaten or cause a “misfit” between place, identity and attachment, or when people experience solastalgia, communities can start engaging in place-protective action (Boudewijn, 2023; Moratis, 2021). This also happened in Cáceres: in response to the proposed mine, several residents have started the activist group Salvemos la Montaña, aiming to protect their beloved place Cáceres. However, being an activist also comes with its challenges and battles and for many the activism has become an important part of their daily existence. As I move into the next section, I explore how this ongoing conflict impacts activists' everyday lives. This provides a deeper understanding of how political processes affect communities emotionally.

6.3 Being an activist

“It started in 2017, suddenly, there were excavators in my friend’s garden! They just started there, without saying anything, they just went there and started their investigation. They didn’t even ask the people if it was okay, they just started. So, after a couple of weeks, some people who lived in the area of the proposed mine and friends of them started to organize meetings, like Ana and her husband, to think about the things they could do to stop it.”

Manuel

This quote underscores the origins of the Plataforma: when the mining company began investigating the area without notice or permission, local residents began organizing themselves in response. One of the first activities the Plataforma organized was an event in Sierra de la Mosca, full of information about the proposed mine, while visitors were also able to meet people who worked in the area, including trying their products like cheese and honey. Since then, the members of Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña have organized various activities aimed at raising awareness and advocating for their cause. This includes organizing street activities, displaying banners, holding informative talks and meetings, setting up information tables in public spaces, and collaborating with political groups and associations. Additionally, they utilize legal means such as appeals to address certain issues. Approximately 8 to 10 people are highly active. In the following paragraphs I dive deeper into what being an activist means and how this impacts their daily lives.

Extra job

Engaging in the platform involves personal sacrifice and emotional strain, as highlighted by participants like Daniel and Claudia. They invest a lot of time and effort into educating themselves about the potential hazards of the mine, often spending many nights researching its negative impacts, educating others, and attending activist meetings, which feels like an additional job. This results in stress as they struggle to balance all the responsibilities they have. Moreover, constantly being confronted by the potential danger of the of the mine leads to feelings of worry and sadness (Askland & Bunn, 2018). María

found herself in a similar situation, dedicating five hours a day to activism until it became overwhelming, forcing her to take a break. This is a common occurrence, as the demanding nature of activism can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion from ongoing psychological stress (Chen & Gorski, 2015). However, stepping back from activism was challenging too, as it had become central to her daily life, resulting in a significant adjustment in her daily life:

"It was very, very hard for me because I was very dedicated to the Plataforma, and you know I dedicated so many hours in the day. It was like a job for me; from Monday to Friday I spent at least 5 hours a day to something that was related to the mining industry. [...] And I could not do it anymore at one point, but then suddenly I had so much time left and I also did not know what to do. It was very strange. "

María

She also expressed the unfairness of the situation, arguing that members of the Plataforma are normal citizens who are trying to protect their home, dedicating their free time to this cause, while people from the mining corporations are employed and earn money with this. For Marta being against the mine but doing research about the mining company and its claims for her job is complicated, frustrating but also powerful. She acknowledged the challenge of maintaining objectivity as a researcher while also being deeply passionate about the topic. She tries to focus on scientific evidence, "on what we can prove and not on emotions or whatever you know, because I hope that with real science we can convince people that the mine is you know.. well... the worst". Furthermore, for Ana being an activist is sometimes very tiring as the results of all the work she puts in is not always visible:

"I have been in this project for 6 years, and it is so much work, so much time, there are so many lies by the company, you have to do research, spread the word, it is a lot of work. And sometimes it is hard, it is also emotionally hard when you put in so much work but you do not see any results."

Ana

Lucía expressed disappointment in the apathy displayed by friends and fellow citizens, despite her immense efforts to raise awareness:

"We worry so much and we invest so much time in the activism. At one point, we put notes in every, and I mean literally every mailbox in Caceres, and still, people don't know about it and don't show up for the meetings or approval sessions. But you know, we do it for everyone. We ourselves have major concerns, but we also do it for people living in the city. And that is frustrating, that even your friends seem uninterested. But our whole lives revolve around it."

Lucía

Changing relationships

Moreover, for some, being part of the Plataforma and passionately dedicating time to this cause also affects their relationships with those outside of the Plataforma. This commitment can negatively impact older friendships, especially when there are significant ideological differences (Gilster, 2012; Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). Ana, for instance, shared how her friend group, consisting of former colleagues, includes individuals with varying opinions on the mine. She used to discuss the issue with those in favour of the mine but stopped due to its negative impact on the group dynamic and to avoid more conflict, they collectively decided not to discuss the topic when they are together as a group. The apathy of some of her friends is however "very, véry disappointing". Roberto described losing a friend who initially opposed the mine but suddenly switched sides to supporting it. There were rumours circulating that this friend had received money from the mining company. While Roberto empathized with his friend's situation, as he was nearing retirement and could use the extra income, it ultimately impacted their relationship, because Roberto was not able to understand why his former friend made this decision, feeling perplexed and angry: I think in the end I just really could not understand, and it made me, like, too angry."

Within the Plataforma, there have been several internal challenges, as highlighted by various members, which also impacts people's daily lives. One recurring issue is the struggle with its horizontal organizational structure, where decisions require consensus through voting. This process has turned out to be complex and time-consuming, leading to frustration among some members who may prefer more hierarchical systems. Additionally, María pointed out that certain members had a strong 'Cácereño mentality', characterized by a dualistic view of power dynamics. In this perspective, one party holds power and dictates actions, while the other party is expected to obey without challenging the established authority. Thus, some individuals within the Plataforma believed they had greater power and could dictate the actions of others, while the rest had to accept everting, stay nice and just obey, even though they maybe did not specifically like the ones with power. However, this dynamic eventually shifted:

"At one point it was too much for people who did not have any power. We recognized our own feelings and emotions about the process, and we confronted the others and said: We don't want this anymore! We have been trying to work together, offered many solutions, work together, to find the solutions with all our differences, and to keep this diversity okay but you just only think about yourself!"

María

Additionally, some individuals within the Plataforma were also accused of abuse of power, using their positions for personal gain or to start their political aspirations, leading to mistrust and resentment among other members. Lucía shared how after a couple of years "their masks fell and we saw the real person, and you know, our suspicions were

real, they really wanted to make a political career. And they tried to make the platform to be a political group." These conflicts led to the departure of some. Furthermore, disagreements on certain topics are not uncommon within the group due to its diverse members, getting consensus is challenging to achieve at times. One recurring topic is the support for other anti-mining groups. Ana shared how she and her husband Roberto support the anti-mining group in Cañaveral, but many within the Plataforma are opposed to this. Ana finds this lack of support incomprehensible, making her feel angry with and disappointed in others within the Plataforma. However, despite these tensions, she remains committed to supporting the anti-mining group in Cañaveral joining their protest march, "but not as members from the Plataforma, just as normal citizens." Moreover, there have been instances where members have left the platform, either due to personal reasons or as a form of protest because they did not agree with certain decisions of the Plataforma. This sometimes further her complicates efforts to maintain cohesion within the group but was also a big relief for some.

Thus, the platform has various internal challenges, encompassing interpersonal conflicts, and ideological differences. Being an activist plays a role in their lives both outside and within the platform, but despite the challenges, being a member of the Plataforma also brings positive aspects, which I will further elaborate on.

Sense of community and hope

Despite its challenges, being an activist within the platform also brings a range of positive emotions due to numerous rewarding experiences. One notable aspect is the diversity of its participants. David initially found it surprising to encounter a wide range of individuals within the platform, which was contrary to his expectations:

> *"I was expecting all the hippies on bicycles. But there were people with important jobs, having lots of power, university professors, academics yes, and I was shocked, I mean, there was a firefighter who was more or less right-wing, and a very well-dressed lady with her expensive clothes and accessories and so on."*
>
> David

For many this diversity enriches the platform. Moreover, this also brings together individuals who may not have interacted otherwise, which contributes to creating meaningful connections and relationships among its members. David acknowledged that he has met many new people through the platform, such as Claudia and Daniel, with whom they share little in common in terms of occupation and lifestyle: they are at least 20 years older, both having "serious jobs" while he is a student. Despite these differences, they have become friends and enjoy spending time together, which is also an experience Manuel has:

> *"I met so many people who are so cool, they have a lot of interesting things to say and everyone has a lot of ideas, about the mine but also about other things. [...] And I also*

got to know more personal things, what they do, and we have been spending time together, going for a drink or something, socializing, this is something really positive, which I otherwise would not have had."

Manuel

This sense of community is an important aspect of the platform experience for many. The ability to engage in meaningful conversations and connect with like-minded individuals is also something many value. Lucía highlighted that despite these differences, they unite around a common objective: opposing the mine. The common goal brings everyone together, crossing over personal differences and creating unity among members.

Moreover, being part of the platform give the members hope as they witness the impact of small efforts. Despite David faces scepticism from friends who question his dedication, saying "the rich will do what they want anyway", he emphasizes the importance of taking action, however small, to contribute to the larger struggle against projects like the mine. He believes that persisting in these efforts, even when the outcome is uncertain, is crucial because doing nothing will not bring any change at all for sure.

Seeing other people also being aware, and taking care about their city, and putting energy, gives motivation and hope to continue for many. The hope keeps people motivated to keep fighting, even when they had to deal with many setbacks. Elena believes in the importance of protests to put pressure on politicians, basing her experience on the time where she lived in in Basque country and saw the active social mobilization in this region.

"For example, a region where life is good in Spain is Basque Country, okay. It is the region of Spain with the highest standard of living. There are only three million people, but 60% of the protests, which take place at the national level, are held there, right? Yes, it's a society that mobilizes a lot. And I think that social mobilization does work because politicians want to be in power, okay, but if you don't vote for them, they are not in power. And if you go out into the street, and make yourself heard they are more aware of what you want."

Elena

These examples show how being an activist can positively influence their well-being by enhancing feelings of purpose, hope and community (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Gilster, 2012).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I delved deeper into the political processes and their emotional impacts, focusing on how political practices are experienced and perceived by Cácereño/as and more specifically local activists. The proposed mine not only threatens the environment but also disrupts the emotional well-being of the Cácereño/as. For an extended period,

many Extremeño/as felt angry and frustrated due to their sense of being unheard and disregarded by the government. The proposed mine only serves to intensify these sentiments, resonating with elements of extractivism where external decision-making prioritizes economic interests over local concerns (Castelos, 2023; Dunlap, 2024; Henry, 2019). Suspicions of bribery contribute to feelings of betrayal towards both the local government and the mining company, exacerbating distrust in institutions. These emotions underscore the profound impact of external decision-making on local lives. Moreover, engaging in activism impacts relationships inside and outside the platform, leading to conflicts and even the loss of friendships (Gilster, 2012; Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). However, being an activist also brings positive aspects. The diversity of its participants fosters a sense of community and connection. Furthermore, the shared goal of protecting their environment provides hope and motivation, reinforcing the belief that collective action can make a difference (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Gilster, 2012).

7. CONCLUSION

In this research, I aimed to explore the experience of solastalgia, as introduced by Albrecht (2005), among the inhabitants of Cáceres in relation to the proposed lithium mine in Sierra de la Mosca. The central research question was: "How do the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed lithium mine in Cáceres, Spain?" To address this question, I employed emotional geography as my theoretical framework, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between people, places, and emotions (Davidson et al., 2012; Pile, 2010; Egan, Sherval & Wright, 2024; Bailey & Osbourne, 2020; Sejersen & Thisted, 2021; Balderson, 2022; Sultana, 2011). Over nearly three months of ethnographic research in Cáceres, I explored the perspectives of the Cácereño/as. Being an 'outsider' but immediately being welcomed by some Cácereño/as enabled me to critically observe the situation, while also getting a real feeling of the situation and life in Cáceres. In this final chapter, I systematically address the sub-questions I formulated, aiming to offer a thorough understanding of the experience of solastalgia among the Cácereño/as and thereby answer the central research question.

With the first sub question "How are the Cacereño/as attached to the place Cáceres?" I delved into the Cácereño/as' place attachment, consisting of both place identity and place dependency (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Marais et al., 2019; Philips & Murphy, 2021). First of all, the place central in this research includes both the urban and natural landscapes of Cáceres, as the area of the proposed mine, Sierra de la Mosca, is viewed as inseparable from the city. Moreover, the residents of Cáceres possess symbolic, social and emotional connections to both the city and its natural surroundings, highlighting place identity (Devine-Wright, 2013; Sebastien, 2020; Philips & Murphy, 2021). The historical significance and beauty of Sierra de la Mosca, intertwined with Extremadura's essence, the city's rich heritage, unique architectural features, UNESCO recognition, and the cultural importance of La Montaña all contribute to shaping this identity. Additionally, memories associated with these places and strong social connections within the community further enhance Cáceres' place identity. The cultural and historical significance of the place, combined with their personal memories and daily interactions, fosters a profound sense of belonging among the inhabitants. For many, Cáceres is not merely a place on the map, but an integral part of who they are.

Furthermore, place dependency, the functional relationship individuals have with a place based on its ability to meet their practical needs (Sebastien, 2020; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Philips & Murphy, 2021; Greer et al., 2020), but explored through practices, is strong. The city offers a diverse range of shops, ensuring easy access to essential items. Cultural events, such as festivals in the city and solidarity routes in Sierra de la Mosca, foster community engagement and social connections. Recreational activities like

hiking, cycling, and running in Sierra de la Mosca provide physical exercise and allow Cácereño/as to connect with nature. Being in the area brings a sense of balance, freedom, and emotional rejuvenation, all of which contribute to their wellbeing. Moreover, the natural areas surrounding Cáceres serve as vital green spaces, offering fresh air. Thus, the Cácereño/as are deeply attached to the place Cáceres, evident through their symbolic, emotional, social and positive connections to both the city and its natural surroundings (Hashemnezhad et al. 2013; Devine-Wright, 2009). Hence, this case study highlights how a place is fluid, interactive, a fundamental part of social life and not just a 'resource' or 'object', but an agent with emotional and affective components (Ey et al., 2018). However, the proposed lithium mine poses a significant risk to this attachment, potentially affecting the positive emotional connections the residents have with their place. This concern leads to addressing my second sub question: "What are the specific concerns expressed by residents of Cáceres regarding the proposed mine?"

The proposed mine in Sierra de la Mosca has evoked a variety of concerns among its residents, intertwining environmental, health, emotional, and socio-economic issues. At the core of these concerns is the potential impact on their health and environment. With the mine's proximity to residential areas, many are anxious about the potential release of toxic chemicals into the air and water, which could result in substantial pollution and affect their health. The emotional attachment that the Cácereño/as have with their place is also crucial to understanding their concerns about the proposed mine. Employing the concept of place attachment revealed their strong bond with Cáceres, however, the proposed mine is perceived as a threat to this attachment. The place Cáceres, and specifically Sierra de la Mosca, is not just a space but a crucial part of their heritage and identity, embodying the essence of Extremadura and holding personal and collective histories. This profound connection means that any threat to it is perceived as a threat to their identity and heritage. The potential loss of recreational spaces, essential for community activities and personal well-being, further exacerbates these fears. Additionally, many are afraid of being forced to move from their homes, which also comes with worries about the potential rupture of their social environment, as they may have to leave friends and family behind.

This demonstrates how place attachment disruption is already somewhat palpable among the Cáceño/as, even though the mine has not yet materialized (Devine-Wright, 2009; Gobster, 2023; Collins & Kearns, 2013). Typically, place attachment disruption occurs due to actual changes to a place, but in this case, it is the mere prospect of future change that is causing the expectation of disruption. Moreover, this exemplifies anticipated solastalgia. Albrecht (2005) introduced the concept of solastalgia to describe the distress and anxiety experienced when one's home environment is negatively altered. In the case of Cáceres, however, the mine is only in the proposal

phase, yet the prospect of its development already causes significant emotional distress. Building on Moratis (2021), the concept of anticipated solastalgia in a mining context, which I describe as the distress experienced by people due to the looming threats to their place attachment and the envisioned future, encompassing feelings of sadness, anxiety and frustration, about what is yet to come, is a more useful notion. Thus, anticipated solastalgia is palpable among the residents of Cáceres, as they experience anxiety over future environmental changes and the disruption of their place attachment. They experience a profound sense of sadness and anxiety, foreseeing a future where their beloved place Cáceres and way of life are threatened. It is, however, essential to acknowledge that the focus so far has been on future apprehensions but the proposed lithium mine already affects the Cácereño/as currently due to the historical and political context, which is why I focus of this aspect in the concluding section. This allows me to address my final sub-question: "How does the proposed mine impact the Cacereño/as' daily lives today?"

To understand the impact of the proposed mine on the daily lives of the residents of Cáceres, it is essential to consider the historical context of Extremadura. The region has a history of resource extraction to benefit other regions in Spain, leaving the Extremeño/as with minimal benefits and significant environmental degradation. This, pattern of exploitation has contributed to a deep sense of frustration and anger among residents, who feel their region has been treated as a mere "colony" or sacrifice zone existing solely for the advancement of central governmental interests (Henry, 2019; Dunlap, 2024). This history and other policy choices regarding Extremadura, have resulted in feelings of marginalization and resentment among the local population. The proposed mine is seen by many residents as a continuation of these past injustices and serves as reminder of the region's status as a marginalized and disregarded area, which contributes to feelings of frustration and anger. Furthermore, many are frustrated about the fact that decision-makers from the national government and European Commission, who do not have the same attachment to the place Cáceres, are making important decisions about life in Cáceres (Ferrarello, 2023). Additionally, there is a profound sense of betrayal among the Cácereño/as towards both their local government and the mining company, due to suspicions of bribery that further undermine trust in institutions. These feelings of being disregarded, betrayed, and distrust show the importance of Askland & Bunn's (2018) call to also consider the emotional distress caused by these processes, when talking about solastalgia. Moreover, the proposed mine has another impact on the daily lives of the Cacereño/as, as evidenced by their involvement in activism through the Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña.

Engaging in the platform entails personal sacrifice and emotional strain, resembling an additional job for many participants. They invest significant time and effort into researching the potential hazards of the mine, attending activist meetings, and educating

others. This commitment leads to stress and feelings of worry and sadness, for some resulting in a burn-out (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Furthermore, being an activist affects relationships outside the Plataforma, sometimes leading to conflicts and strained friendships, especially when there are significant ideological differences regarding the mine (Gilster, 2012; Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). Internally, the Plataforma also faces various challenges, including conflicts over its organizational structure, power dynamics, and decision-making processes. Disagreements on certain topics, such as support for other anti-mining groups, often lead to tensions within the group, making consensus difficult to achieve. These conflicts sometimes result in the departure of members, further complicating efforts to maintain cohesion within the platform. Despite these challenges, being an activist within the platform also brings positive aspects, such as a sense of community and hope. The diversity of participants enriches the platform, fostering meaningful connections and relationships among its members and he common goal of opposing the mine unites individuals across personal differences. Additionally, witnessing the impact of their efforts, however small, gives activists hope and motivation to continue fighting against the lithium mine (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Gilster, 2012; Moratis, 2021). Thus, the proposed mine impacts the daily lives of the Cacereño/as by intensifying feelings of frustration, anger, and betrayal due to the region's history of exploitation and marginalization, eroding trust in institutions and being an activist. The activism in Plataforma Salvemos la Montaña comes with personal sacrifices, emotional strain, and interpersonal conflicts, but also fosters a sense of community, purpose, and hope.

Having answered the sub-questions allows me to conclude that the Cácereño/as experience solastalgia in the context of the proposed lithium mine, as profound emotional distress caused by the anticipated disruption of their strong place attachment. This distress encompasses feelings of sadness, frustration, anger and anxiety about what is yet to come. The history of Extremadura, the process so far, the involvement of distant external actors who do not live in Cáceres and opposing the mine through activism further intensifies these feelings. Hence, this research demonstrates that place attachment is not static or passive but complex, fluid, and dynamic, deeply intertwined with personal and collective identities, daily practices, practical dependencies and emotions. This study complements existing literature on place attachment by shifting the focus from merely considering the physical resources a place provides to exploring place dependency through daily activities and interactions. By examining practices, lived experiences, and relational aspects, this approach helps to better understand how individuals engage with and form connections to their place, providing a more holistic view of place dependency beyond the availability of facilities.

For locals, an area can be a place imbued with meaning, identity, and connection, whereas external actors might see the same area primarily as a space or landscape to be used and exploited. This crucial finding resonates with Trujillo (2009.p.12, in Ferrarello, 2023), who argues: where the colonizers [and by extension mining, agribusinesses, oil and lumber interests…] saw a space-landscape, natives saw a place. This research therefore shows that a proposed mine is not just an industrial development but instead can be a fundamental threat to people's identity and belonging. Additionally, this study reveals that residents' frustration, sadness and anger not only comes from the expected place attachment disruption, but is also fuelled by distant, external decision-making processes that marginalize their voices and reinforce historical patterns of exploitation and neglect. This also illustrates that solastalgia cannot be disentangled from political and historical contexts, aligning with Askland & Bunn's (2018) point of view. This case study also highlights that proposed extractive activities can evoke a wide range of emotions among those who expect to be affected. The looming threat of the mine causes anxiety and frustration due to the anticipated impact. This underscores that solastalgia can extend beyond contemporary changes and can manifest even before physical changes occur, because of the anticipation of environmental and social disruption.

Recommendations

The distress experienced by the Cácereño/as highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the emotional dimensions in policies and practices related to resource extraction, something that is often overlooked within the energy transition debate. This study also underscores the necessity of adopting an inclusive approach to the energy transition. Engaging in meaningful dialogue with residents, acknowledging their concerns, and incorporating their perspectives into policies are essential steps toward a more just energy transition. This approach can help mitigate the socio-environmental and emotional impacts of resource extraction. However, as I focused on solastalgia in a mining context, I was not able to shed light on all the relevant topics that emerged in this research. Therefore, I recommend more research on this topic. First, the concept of degrowth emerged as a potential solution to the environmental and economic challenges posed by mining projects. Future research should delve deeper into alternative development models that prioritize sustainability over continuous economic growth. Focussing on this, could provide an answer the question 'what should we do?' (Köppel & Scoville-Simonds, 2024). Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) attitudes were also evident among the participants. Many locals oppose the proposed mining project specifically because of its proximity to their homes, despite recognizing the broader necessity of mining. Additionally, some did not want to support the anti-mining group 40 kilometres away, in Cañaveral, indicating NIMBY. Further research could explore the underlying motivations behind NIMBY attitudes. Additionally, I figured that information dissemination and the potential prevalence of fake news, by both the mining companies as the activist, play significant roles in shaping public perception of the mining project. It is crucial to study

how misinformation impacts these debates. Moreover, the level of trust in the government and the nature of government-citizen relationships turned out to be a very important factor regarding how the proposed mine is perceived. While I did pay attention to this aspect, further research should investigate perceptions of corruption, the effectiveness of government communication, and the interactions between government representatives and activists. I have contributed to understanding place attachment and solastalgia between the inhabitants of Cáceres and the proposed lithium mine. However, the emotional consequences of the potential mine and how these feelings drive place-protective actions need further exploration. Finally, studying the strategies of resistance employed by activists can provide valuable insights into effective methods of community mobilization. Addressing these areas in future research will deepen our understanding of the energy transition.

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Appendix

A. Research participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Setting	Gender
R1	Manuel	Coffeeshop	Male
R2	María	Coffeeshop	Female
R3	Lucía	Coffeeshop	Female
R4	Pedro	E-mail	Male
R5	Marta	Coffeeshop	Female
R6	Alejandro	Coffeeshop	Male
R7	David	Coffeeshop	Male
R8	Ana	Montaña	Female
R9	Sara	Coffeeshop	Female
R10	Elena	Coffeeshop	Female
R11	Javier	Teams	Male
R12	Alba	Sierra de la Mosca	Female
R13	Carlos	Sierra de la Mosca	Male
R14	Daniel	PO	Male
R15	Sofía	Sierra de la Mosca	Female
R16	Francisco	Sierra de la Mosca	Male
R17	Julia	Sierra de la Mosca	Female
R18	Alba	Information meeting	Female
R19	Nuria	Meeting municipality	Female
R20	Luis	Information meeting	Male
R21	Antonio	PO	Male
R22	Victoria	PO	Female
R23	Roberto	PO	Male
R24	Claudia	PO	Female
R25	Ángela	PO	Female
R26	Laura	Demonstration	Female
R27	Bruno	Demonstration	Male
R28	Irene	PO	Female
R29	Xavier	Demonstration	Male
R30	Lidia	Demonstration	Female
R31	Inés	Demonstration	Female
R32	Rafael	PO	Male
R33	Adrián	PO	Male
R34	Emilio	PO	Male
R35	Natalia	PO	Female

R36	Lourdes	Sierra de la Mosca	Female
R37	Óscar	PO	Male
R38	Silvia	PO	Female
R39	Xavier	PO	Male

B. Topic list

As I wanted to explore how the proposed mine relates to the experience of solastalgia, I made a topic list for the interviews. The topic list served as a guiding tool, and I tried to stay open to new directions during the interview.

Every interview started with me introducing myself and explaining more about the purpose of this research. This is also where I talked about confidentiality and consent, as I aimed to record the interviews. Then, I gave a short outline of the themes I wanted to discuss and after that the research participant could start introducing themselves. As I expected the mine would be the most sensible topic to talk about, I first asked questions about their live in Cáceres and how they relate to the city. This served as a warm-up to get used to being interviewed (Scheepers, Tobi & Boeije, 2016). After this, I introduced the topic of the mine. It is however important to note that there have been interviews which did not follow this structure.

My questions concerning both place attachment and solastalgia draws extensively from the research contributions of various scholars. Regarding place attachment, I have synthesized insights from the works of Hashemnezhad et al. (2013), Devine-Wright (2009), Marais et al. (2019), Sebastien (2020), Williams & Vaske (2003), Brown (2022), Philips & Murphy (2021), and Scannell & Gifford (2010). Similarly, in constructing questions about solastalgia, I have relied on the scholarly contributions of Askland & Bunn (2018), Egan, Sherval & Wright (2024), Tschakert, Tutu & Alcaro (2013), Brown (2022), and Moratis (2021).

Introduction

1) Can you introduce yourself? – Age, job, hobbies
2) Why did you choose to live here? How long have you been living here?
3) How would you describe living in Cáceres?
4) What do you like and what do you not like? Why?
5) When you are and walk through the city centre, how do you feel?
6) What are your favourite places to visit in and around Cáceres and why?
7) Do you feel at home here? Why?

Sierra de la Mosca

1) How would you describe the area of the proposed mine? You can draw if you want.
    i) How often do you visit Sierra de la Mosca?
    ii) Why do you go there? What do you do there?
    iii) With whom?
2) Do you have certain memories there?
3) Are there certain sounds, smells or sensations that describe the place?
4) How do you feel when you are there?

5) What changes do you experience in your body when you are there?

Valdeflórez project

1) When you think about the mine, what exactly are you thinking about? How do you feel?
2) How do you visualize the mine? Could you draw it?
3) What concerns do you have about the mine?
4) How would the mine affect your life or living in Cáceres?
5) How do you think the plans for the mine will develop? How does that make you feel?

The process

1) Why do you protest against the mine?
2) Do you think the external parties, like the government are listening to the platform? Why?
3) what do you like and what do you not like about being active regarding no a la mina?
4) What do you want people to know about your experience and how it has affected you?

Closing

1) Is there something else you would like to talk about?
2) Is there anyone else you think I should talk to for this research?
3) How do you think this research should be disseminated?
4) Do you have questions for me?