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"Itineraries of Conflict in Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades*"

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Amatya, Alok. "Itineraries of Conflict in Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades*." *Environmental Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2019): 52-71. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7349407 .

This article studies the depiction of indigenous struggles against the grab of minerals, crude oil, and other natural resources by private and government corporations in works such as Arundhati Roy's travel essay "Walking with the Comrades" (2010). Roy's narrative of her journey across the dense forests of Bastar in east-central India re-articulates the significance of this contested environmental space from the perspective of the region's indigenous minorities. Traveling with a troop of indigenous rebels hailing from the Gond, Halba, and Muria communities for more than two weeks, Roy describes their armed struggle to a global English audience. Exploring Roy's role both as an itinerant narrator and a global cultural mediator, the author argues that descriptive accounts of travel through contested zones of extraction can foster a vocabulary of resistance that the author calls an itinerary of conflict. Drawing from Michel de Certeau's conception of the tour as a descriptive approach to space, the author posits the itinerary of conflict as a spatial trope produced in Roy's essay when the writer's embodied travel narrative is inflected by indigenous journeys and spatial practices, such as marches across contested zones and ritual processions to sacred sites. Itineraries of conflict enact a semiotic and political resistance to resource grabs conducted by state agencies and powerful corporations, exemplified by the usurpation of tribal lands rich in iron ore, coal, and other minerals in Chhattisgarh state. Further, itineraries of conflict emphasize the embodied presence of indigenous communities and their activists in areas demarcated for the extraction of minerals, timber, and other resources in the face of continued armed conflict or toxic pollution. More broadly, the author suggests that narratives of conflict over the extraction of natural resources can be studied as the corpus of "resource conflict literature," thus generating a global comparative framework for the study of contemporary indigenous struggles. (Text from author's abstract)

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