

Collaborative work by Entitle fellows

# POLITICAL ECOLOGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



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## ***Political Ecology for Civil Society***

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ENTITLE - European Network of Political Ecology

<http://www.politicaecology.eu/>

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CDCA - Documentation Centre on Environmental Conflicts

[www.cdca.it](http://www.cdca.it)

ICTA - Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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### **Authors:**

Diego Andreucci, María J. Beltrán, Rita Calvário, Creighton Connolly, Julie De Los Reyes, Salvatore Paolo De Rosa, Irmak Ertör, Melissa Garcia-Lamarca, Marien González-Hidalgo, Amelie Huber, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Santiago Gorostiza, Felipe Milanez, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu, Jonah Wedekind

### **Editors:**

María J. Beltrán, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu

### **Coordinators:**

Salvatore Altiero, Giacomo Dalisa, Lucie Greyl, Christos Zografos

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# Introduction

*Gustavo García López*





## Political ecology: The environment as a political issue

The study of human-environment interactions has a long history in many different disciplines. Political Ecology (PE) is an emerging **supra-disciplinary approach to study human-environment interactions** with a critical lens. In general, it is focused on how power inequalities relate to environmental changes, and to the distribution of the costs and benefits resulting from such changes. A central feature of political ecology is the **politicization of environmental problems**. This means that environmental problems are seen as problems of distribution and the exercise of political and economic power, marked by conflicts over alternative futures and by clashes between alternative values and imaginaries. Recognizing environmental problems as such, calls for attention to political and economic context: aspects and problems of democracy, of economic systems, of ideology, etc. Therefore, there is a crucial distinction between what PE calls political explanations of environmental problems and **apolitical** ones (also **apolitical ecology**).

Attempts to explain environmental degradation based on factors like “poverty” or “population”, for example, are understood as apolitical because they do not attend to the **root** causes of poverty or of population growth, nor do they consider the stark **inequalities** in resource consumption between rich and poor populations. It is therefore crucial for PE to re-historicize and re-contextualize problems in the socio-ecological sphere. This means looking at these problems as historical processes and with in a particular set of political and economic conditions that include national and international policies, balance of forces between different sectors in society, and conflicts. Some of the main theses studied in political ecology include the relation between socio-ecological marginalization and degradation, the causes, characteristics and outcomes of environmental conflicts; the relation between environmental conservation and government control over territories; and the role of social movements in achieving more just and sustainable socio-ecological conditions (Robbins, 2011).

### Why and for whom is this manual?

The European Network of Political Ecology (ENTITLE - <http://www.>

politicalecology.eu/) is a project funded by the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions initiative, to train and engage 15 doctoral and 7 postdoctoral researchers in Political Ecology. ENTITLE is coordinated by the Institute of Environmental Sciences and Technology (ICTA) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona sees the participation of 8 other Universities, 2 Non-governmental organisations and 1 Environmental consultancy.

ENTITLE has promoted inclusive and socially relevant research, inspired by an "organic intellectual" approach in academia.

The objective of the project was to develop an academic training program on political ecology. In particular, the project sought to study five key topics from a political ecology perspective: (1) democracy, (2) social movements, (3) commons, (4) environmental conflicts, and (5) disasters. Among other activities', the ENTITLE project had planned the development of a PE manual for Civil Society (CS), as one of its main outcomes, coordinated by the project leader institution ICTA-UAB and project partner CDCA – Documentation Centre on Environmental Conflicts. It appeared important to involve us, the young ENTITLE researchers as authors of the manual, as a concrete means to apply and further share our research and collaboration experiences.

Political ecology often remains an academic venture of theorizing and writing for a scholarly audience instead of practical engagements with existing political-ecological conflicts that resonate outside of academia. Moreover, the ever increasing market of handbooks on political ecology are not only geared to academics and students, but have outrageously inaccessible prices, leading some scholars to call for boycotts and for developing alternative platforms of open knowledge in the field. Political ecologist Alex Loftus has captured the political ecologist conundrum nicely:

*"Most of what goes by the name "political ecology" is written about and practised in universities. The research produced is nearly always published in academic journals and lengthy monographs. Only rarely do these writings serve as activist interventions of any kind. And the language spoken – laden with references to actants, anti-Malthusianisms, systems approaches and poststructuralism – is rarely the same as that spoken by activists. How then might we reconcile the fact that most of those who practise political ecology care deeply about intervening in the world with the difficulties that most also seem to encounter in prac-*

*tising activism?” (Perreault et al., 2015).*

That said, collaborations between researchers and activists have long been promoted and developed in the field, either as short-termed attempts or long-lived engagements. After more than 30 years of studies on and with civil society organizations across the world, the relationship between academia and social movements is becoming more dialogical and synergistic than simply observational. Along these lines, this book seeks to contribute to a dialogue, share experiences, findings and tools, and invite the cross-fertilization of ideas, concepts and vocabularies.

The manual follows political ecology’s vision that there are more just and ecologically sustainable ways of organizing our society (i.e. our political and economic system), or as political ecologist Alex Loftus puts it: *“a sense that something is not quite right in the world”*. Moreover, political ecologists depart from the observation that change is achieved through grassroots organization (communing) and struggles. Finally, political ecologists firmly believe in the power of narratives in changing how certain problems are viewed. Therefore, our role as scholars is one of supporting and collaborating with civil society in the discussion, critical analysis and imagination of transformative changes. There are several intentions to this book. The first is to serve as a manual –that is, a reference book– providing a basic introduction to PE, communicating some important insights from this field and seeing how these could be useful to the activities of civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of all kinds but also less formalized collectives and movements, as well as independent activists and practitioners who work on issues related to human-environment interactions.

The second is to serve as a conversation starting point between civil society organisations, activists and political ecology researchers who engage political ecology from an “activist-scholar” or “engaged-scholar” approach. As the anthropologist and political ecologist, Arturo Escobar, recently noted, there is an urgent need to establish the conditions and spaces of conversation between intellectuals, artists, and social movement activists. Political ecology has partly emerged from the accumulated learning *from* social movements, and today, it is again social movements that seem to be leading the process of identifying the structural causes of our social-ecological conditions, and imagining

alternative worlds to transform these conditions.

We believe that this publication will be a useful tool for civil society organizations. While there are multiple books on political ecology, all of them are oriented towards an academic audience, either as introductory textbooks (Robbins, 2012) or as comprehensive or partial compilations of state-of-the-art theory and research in the field.

#### PE State of the Art and Theory Readings

- Peet, R., Watts, M. (2004) *Liberation ecologies: environment, development and social movements*. Routledge
- Peet, Robbins and Watts (2010) *Global Political Ecology*. Taylor & Francis, 2010
- Keil, Bell, Penz and Fawcett (1998) *Political Ecology: Global and Local*
- Forsyth (2003) *Critical Political Ecology*
- Escobar, Gardner and Brodgen (2004) *Political Ecology Across Spaces, Scales, and Social Groups*
- Biersack (2006) *Reimagining Political Ecology*
- Zimmerer and Basset (2012) *Political Ecology: An Integrative Approach to Geography and Environment-Development Studies*
- Bryant (2015) *The International Handbook of Political Ecology*
- Perreault, T., Bridge, G., McCarthy, J., (2015) *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Routledge.

This manual is the first to explicitly introduce political ecology to a broader non-academic audience. In designing the manual, we were inspired by the work of others who have approached the issue of activism from a practical, educational and theoretical point of view to do similar work for related topics, including bottom-up research projects and post-normal science.

#### Pertinent manuals for Civil Society

- [Alternativas al desarrollo: La destrucción del planeta no es un destino](#)
- [Militant Research Handbook](#)
- [Ecological Economics from the Ground Up](#)

We, further, believe that PE offers added value to the work of civil society organisations, because it can support their efforts in explaining and drawing the connections between issues that might appear to be localized but have wider common sources and implications. In this process of identifying larger systems and processes while tracing their impacts on local populations, the claims of civil society organizations

become relevant for more people, beyond specific locality and for more than one “issue”. Whereas this process reveals multiple levels of complexity, it also opens up opportunities for building connections between and uniting struggles.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of this is manual is its potential usefulness in to reinforcing existing and developing new collaborations between civil society and academia for the purpose of transforming current unjust and unsustainable social-ecological arrangements. As Loftus puts it: “*doing political ecology*” requires “*being attendant to activist practices*”, it is a “*symbiotic*” relationship of mutual learning and reinforcement where political ecology can inform activism and activism can inform political ecology. Integrated projects bringing together academics and activists, such as ENTITLE can lead to very productive outcomes. For instance, recent research documenting the experience of the EC – funded project EJOLT – Environmental Justice, Liability and Trade ([www.ejolt.org](http://www.ejolt.org)), shows how concepts from political ecology and related disciplines, such as ecological economy, have been used by activists and even national and international politicians in recent years. It also shows, by the same token, how concepts developed through activism are being used in academia to develop and renew fields of analysis, or are being applied in the political field (Martínez-Alier et al., 2011).

This manual reflects on how different scholars have defined this scholar-activist relation. How research can really achieve such a symbiosis is an open question, which depends on the context and the particular scholars and activists involved, but it surely requires long-term commitment to a cause, relations of trust and reciprocity and a balance between informed critical scholarship and activist engagements.

By presenting selected case studies from a wide variety of locations, times and contexts, in this manual, we seek to amplify the voices of people who have been struggling for justice and democracy, inspiring further action and more fruitful alliances between academia and civil society.

## Structure of the book

This book is organized across five chapters recalling the 5 main themes of the ENTITLE project, axes of research, theory and activism with which ENTITLE fellows have engaged: environmental conflicts, disaster capitalism, social movements, commons, and democracy.

For each theme, we explain what is the contribution of a political ecology approach, we define key concepts and illustrate theories, methods and tools through case studies so to provide readers with accessible and transferable knowledge.

**(1) Environmental conflicts:** This first Chapter answers the fundamental question of what is an environmental conflict, as well as a reflection on the role of research in environmental conflicts. It seeks to expand the definition of environmental conflicts and how they can be addressed both in political ecology research and through civil society activism.

We shows how non-governmental/ civil society organizations, social organised actors and communities develop resistance strategies through socio-environmental conflicts and how they interact with other stakeholders involved and to what end. In this sense, the conflicts theme is closely related to that of social movements. The chapter also underlines the importance and pertinence of the knowledge of groups mobilised in environmental conflicts in informing research and policy making.

The environmental conflicts discussed here are of various nature latent or of various intensities and result from industrial activities developed at different scales such as industrial tree plantations in Chile, industrial aquaculture in Europe, swiftlet (bird nest) farming in Malaysian cities and mining exploitation in Spain.

Contributions include insight into methods for researching environmental conflicts in particular in the urban arena and also methods to increase the influence of civil society in the institutional and judicial arenas.

**(2) Disaster capitalism:** This chapter deals with the concept of disaster capitalism, concept applied to various fields and most known through Naomi Klein's (2007) work and seeks to unbundle it. In particular, we wants to tackle two main questions: a) How capitalism "creates" disasters and b) How capitalism uses disasters as openings for further

**financialization** and commodification of nature resources.

In this context we understand capitalism not as a mere economic process but rather as a socio-ecological one. There is not just a domination of economy over the “political” but rather a domination of capital accumulation over the imaginaries of different social relations and socio-natural transformation. Subsequently societies have to unquestionably accept **economic growth** as the only possible mode of accessing nature and **capitalism** as the only reasonable form of organizing socio-natural relations.

The chapter offers different cases’ review to illustrate such perspective: new modes of financialization in the gold-extraction industry ; legal and illegal strategies of profit making in waste ill management in Campania, Italy ; different forms of violent coercion against a various local social groups and local effects in Brazil, produced by global capitalism, depoliticization and de-democratization in the process of accumulation by dispossession in Greece.

**(3) Commons:** The chapter approaches interrelated civic and ecological commons emphasising they have become a symbol for grassroots practices from different domains, seeking to collectively organise, sustain or innovate around common resource access and use etc., but have also been contested by acts towards establishing property rights for the purposes of free markets or states. The chapter explains the concept of commons both as a type of **resource or good**, such as a forest, an urban garden, a fishery, water in an agricultural irrigation system or in a city, an open-source digital software or a **knowledge** database such as Wikipedia; and as the **collective governance arrangements** devised by groups of people (“commoners”) for managing, conserving, producing and reproducing these resources or goods. We review **“commoning”** as the process of producing and sustaining over time these collective governance arrangements as well as the common resources.

Through this chapter we review the declination of the commons in different disciplines and deepen the approach offered by political ecology, looking particularly into processes of commons’ enclosures and the role of social movement in putting the commons at the centre of democracy.

The chapter offers three case studies: the case of the enclosure and dispossession of the commons in Bolivia as part of historical,



resource-based processes of capital accumulation; the unique case of community forest governance in Mexico as a living example of the commons and its challenges ; and a short history of how different types of land grabbing of agricultural land under different political regimes (imperialism, socialism and neoliberalism) all had the same effect of enclosing the commons in Ethiopia.

**(4) Social movements:** In this chapter we are interested in social movements as **struggles for justice and egalitarian socio-ecological futures**. We introduce different strategies, tools and practices that have helped movements in advancing their goals in Italy, Spain and Puerto Rico and could provide transferable knowledge useful in other contexts. This chapter introduce us to various ways in which Political Ecology can bring new understandings on movements across the world: what seem to be local problems reverberate into global structural issues which concern all of us. Movements play a **fundamental role in the defence of the environment**, common resources and people's livelihoods, and in preventing processes of dispossession. Most importantly, they make visible the interconnections between political and ecological issues.

The section on historical narration shows how activists can re-articulate the struggle they are involved in, connecting the present with the past in shaping desired futures. The Puerto Rico case shows the interconnections between political ecology and suburban expansion into green spaces and offers an example of movement development for reclaiming not only the ecological but also the civic commons. The section on Campania Biocide shows how movements tackle the connection between local manifestations of structural processes, turning this framing into a political device for enlarging the scope of activism in connection to other issues and movements. Similarly, the section on energy poverty highlights how an alliance of social-ecological movements tackles the issue through struggle, education, legal and institutional mechanisms connecting the right to consume energy to the energy commodity of itself, a commodity that produces social and environmental costs for people elsewhere on the planet.

**(5) Democracy:** Social-environmental issues are often dealt with by mainstream political power as issues of specific expertise, for which public opinion does not matter or is not necessary. Political ecology shows that "expert" answers can never be impartial and for this reason, the needs, knowledge and concerns of affected communities shall gui-

de policy-making. Recognizing the inherent tension for conflict in the use and management of resources (both natural and social), political ecology examines **democratic processes** that will allow different opinions to be heard, communicated and negotiated in society, through non-violent and just processes.

The Democracy chapter brings forth cases of political ecology research from the Basque Country, Greece, Transylvania, the Indian Himalayas and Southern Vietnam to show how **core elements of democracy are often undermined and threatened**, even when democracy is proclaimed. The authors depart from identifying processes of **de-politization**. De-politization is a recurrent theme in many of the cases in this chapter (dam construction, gold-mining, health impacts of water pollution) but also relevant to processes of commodification, dispossession and accumulation, as described in the chapter on 'Commons'. By using the "scientific" mantle and the unquestionable imperative of capitalist economic forces, the injustices that such interventions and decisions produced are being justified.

Recognizing some of the pitfalls of representative democracy and identity politics, examples of social movements from the gold-mining resistance in Rosia Montana and from food cooperatives in Bezkaia and Greece bring into light how, through discovering new practices and new identities, solidarities can be formed towards a radical rethinking of democratic participation.

### **Some reading tips**

The manual has been developed on the basis of **cases studies** in order to facilitated on one hand the understanding of PE concepts, theories and tools and, on the other hand, to provide readers with tools and examples that could support and inspire other mobilisations.

Through **the table of contents**, readers can access directly one rather than another section or chapter, while in the text, words related to important concepts and information are in **bold**.

Furthermore, each section presents a **further readings** recommendation box that provide readers with reading suggestions to go more into depth of the issues and theories reviewed in the manual.



# Chapter 1.

## Engaging environmental conflicts in political ecology

*María J. Beltrán,  
Creighton Connolly,  
Irmak Ertör,  
Marien González-Hidalgo*

*Editor: María J. Beltrán*



## 1.1 Introduction

There are multiple views as to what constitutes an **environmental conflict** from a political ecology perspective. Le Billon (2015) identifies a number of scenarios: First, they can be a conflict *over* the environment, taking the form of struggle over access to, or control of, environmental resources (see 2.4 and 2.5 as examples of environmental conflicts over land and water appropriation). Environmental conflicts can also be a conflict *around* the environment, whereby environmental problems become rapidly politicized due to unequal power relations and the uneven distribution of burdens, benefits and risks (Robbins, 2004). In this way, environmental conflicts are closely related to **environmental justice**, which refers to the right of everyone to enjoy and benefit from a safe and healthy environment (Kosek, 2009). Environmental justice is in turn bound up with **cultural politics**, which considers the ways in which ecological, economic and culturally conflicting discourses influence the struggle for environmental justice via environmental conflicts (see contributions 2.2 and 2.3).

Environmental conflicts typically arise as a result of the unequal distribution of environmental and social costs precipitated by intensive resource extraction, appropriation of land and waste disposal issues (Martínez-Alier, 2002). Political ecological analysis of environmental conflicts therefore seeks to understand both the causes and consequences of these transformations. Moreover, environmental conflicts are not simply technical problems to be solved by 'experts' via top down approaches. On the contrary, environmental conflicts are political and social problems usually addressed by local communities and/or civil society actors (CSOs), including non-governmental organisations, NGOs. These groups also may have an important role in informing research and policy surrounding environmental conflicts, given their knowledge and expertise of the local environment. Therefore, environmental conflicts are highly related to - and often spark - **social movements**, and other forms of engaged activism (see chapter 6).

Environmental conflicts can also be defined as a specific form of social conflict that is associated either with struggles to gain access to natural resources or struggles resulting from the use of natural resources (Turner, 2004). Accordingly, Fontaine (2004) states that there can be no environmental conflict without a social dimension. Social re-

sponses that can take the form of public protests, or complaints in the media are thus signal to the existence of an environmental conflict. Instead, this chapter shows that environmental struggles take place through different social grassroots organizations, using a diversity of knowledge and strategies that are not always manifest clearly in the social arena. When environmental impacts do not give rise to a concrete social response, it is important to analyse the reasons underlying the absence of social protest. Considering environmental conflicts as if their existence only depends upon the existence of a social response ignores the strategies deployed by private companies or state authorities to avoid environmental conflicts. Therefore, the contribution of environmental conflict studies must be to analyse not only conflicts that have already manifest, but also to identify **latent conflicts** and potential strategies to overcome them (see 2.5).

This chapter uses a case study approach to demonstrate how NGOs, social actors and communities can develop resistance strategies through environmental conflicts. The four conflicts reviewed here focus on the impact of extractive and agricultural activities at different scales such as *industrial tree plantations and forest management in Chile; aquaculture and fisheries management in Europe; edible birds nest cultivation in Malaysian cities and mining exploitation in Spain*. Although these four case studies are all focused on a particular locality, we emphasize that environmental conflicts are not limited to local socio-environmental and political problems. As we illustrate, many of the conflicts emerge through extra-local power relations (based on global political-economic or environmental factors). Thus, resistances often include networks of different actors and alliances across time and space as well.

The contributions in this chapter also present methods for participatory research projects in the urban arena and tactics to increase the influence of CSOs in the political arena. Specific research methods discussed include narrative analysis, which is a useful tool for tracing connections between the various actors involved in a given conflict, and the various hierarchies at play; as well as participant observation that enables sustained engagements between researchers, CSOs and other key stakeholders, which can assist with lobbying and creating impact. Tools for increasing the influence of NGOs in the political arena include the publication of common position papers and the presenta-

tion of notice of appeal to different authorities. Another means by which we suggest political action can be taken is through the issue of press releases and reports signed by NGOs and CSOs, in order to enhance the role of civil society in decision-making procedures, as will also be discussed in the following cases.

#### Futher readings

Fontaine G., 2004. Enfoques Conceptuales y metodológicos para una sociología de los conflictos ambientales, in: Cardenas M., Rodriguez M. (Eds.), Guerra, Sociedad y Medio Ambiente. Foro Nacional Ambiental, Bogotá.

Kosek, J., 2009. Environmental Justice, in: Gregory, D., Johnston, R. Pratt, G., Watts, M. & Whatmore S. (Eds.), The Dictionary of Human Geography, fifth ed. Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Le Billon, P., 2015. Environmental conflicts, in: Perreault, T., Bridge, G., McCarthy, J. (Eds.), Handbook of Political Ecology. Routledge, London.

Martinez-Alier, J., 2002. The environmentalism of the poor: a study of ecological conflicts and valuation. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Cheltenham.

Robbins, P., 2004. Political Ecology. A critical introduction. Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA.

Turner, M., D., 2004. Political ecology and the moral dimensions of resource conflict: the case of farmer–herder conflicts in the Sahel. Political Geography. 23 (7), 863– 889



## 1.2 Co-Producing political responses to ‘swiftlet farming’ in George Town, Malaysia

*Creighton Connolly*

The tensions and controversies surrounding edible bird’s nest harvesting in Malaysian cities (or ‘swiftlet farming’ - see ‘case study’ box) is a clear example demonstrating the importance of engaging a wide range of stakeholders in responding to environmental conflicts (see also, Affolderbach, Clapp & Hayter, 2012). Within the on-going struggles over swiftlet farming in Malaysia, there has been a fundamental clash over the competing urban, economic and ecological imperatives at stake. This contribution draws on action research conducted in George Town, Penang, Malaysia in early 2014 to reflect on research methods that can be used to understand the variety of issues in environmental conflicts. This contribution reflects on the ways in which this analysis can then contribute to methods for addressing such conflicts at the regulatory level.



**Figure 1: Location of George Town within Malaysia. (Source: FCO, 2015)**

Moreover, in recognising the social character of knowledge (Owens, 2011), this contribution encourages the formation of stronger linkages between academics, urban policy makers, and civil society organisations in order to achieve these goals.

‘Co-production’ is the term increasingly used to describe these new forms of encounters and engagements, and is increasingly shaping research agendas, institutional practices, and forms of governance (Polk, 2015). This section will introduce three specific methodological tools that might be used by researchers and CSOs to work together on confronting socio-ecological conflicts. Specifically, this chapter explores **narrative and discourse analysis**, **participatory action research** (see

also, contribution 2.3), and **conflict mapping** in order to demonstrate how action-oriented research can utilise ethnographic methods to both answer research questions and achieve activist goals.

### Case study – Urban “Swiftlet Farming” - Malaysia

‘Swiftlet farming’ is a colloquial term which refers to the cultivation of edible birds’ nests through preparation of specially designed buildings for swiftlets to roost and nest. Edible-nest swiftlets are a small species of bird, native to Southeast Asia, which make edible nests entirely of their saliva. Birds’ nests are a Chinese delicacy which are believed to have a number of medicinal, therapeutic and pharmaceutical qualities, and consequently command upwards of US\$2,000 on the international market. Traditionally, nests were collected from caves by (mostly) indigenous peoples across Southeast Asia, where swiftlets would traditionally roost, but increasing price and demand for birds nest since the 1990s has resulted in the proliferation of urban swiftlet farming. Since many of the buildings used are converted shop houses in urban residential areas, the industry has generated considerable controversy over its impacts on heritage buildings, property values, and the urban environment.

This case study focuses specifically on the case of George Town (Penang), which has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008. Due to the international prestige and economic importance attached to this status, swiftlet farming was declared illegal in George Town in 2009, and the government has since (unsuccessfully) attempted to clear all swiftlet farms from the heritage zone. However, many CSOs have criticized the lack of action by the state government in controlling this industry, which they argue threatens both the (in)tangible heritage of the city and the health and safety of residents.

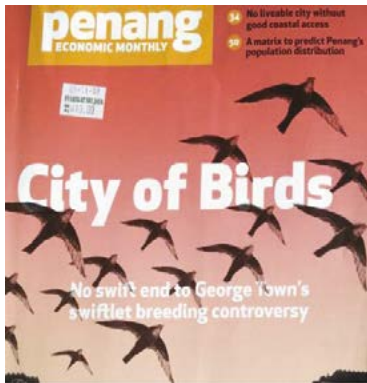
Moreover, there are conflicting business interests at stake, as swiftlet farming is perceived to affect the ability of other business owners to operate in a healthy environment.

### Narrative and discourse analysis

Narrative analysis involves the collection and examination of documentary or oral sources of information, which can be used to the study of any kind of discourse, from printed word to in-person interviews (Wiles et al., 2005). These include emails, letters, reports and presentations, individual and focus group interviews, as well as newspaper clippings, online articles and blogs. Such documents can help to identify the key actors involved, allowing further consultation with them during the research. Moreover, they make it possible to trace the webs of connections between the various actors involved in the conflict, and the various hierarchies at play. Official documents, such as government

reports, industry guidelines and press releases can also be instrumental in identifying the diverse issues at stake.

In examining the controversies over swiftlet farming in George Town, newspaper articles were particularly useful in that they allowed for the identification of key narratives circulating within Malaysia regarding swiftlet farms. In the 100 plus articles collected, dating back to the early 2000s, there was a diversity of sides represented, including that of swiftlet farmers themselves, the government's perspectives, CSOs like the Penang Heritage Trust and Sahabat Alam (Friends of the Earth, Malaysia) and of course residents affected by swiftlet farms. By piecing together the various stories in the articles, the key moments of conflict and contestation between these different groups began to emerge, which allowed the construction of an overarching narrative of the key tensions over time.



**Figure 2: Cover of Penang Economic Monthly, illustrating the public discourse regarding swiftlet farming in George Town. (Source: Chua, 2010)**

However, there are some limitations with using a pure narrative or discourse analysis strategy for researching environmental conflicts. For instance, most newspapers or other document-based sources do not cover the full range of voices or information that one may need in researching a particular case. Therefore, it is important to be cognizant of such limitations when using narrative studies, so that the missing information can be collected via alternative means, as will be discussed below.

### **'Participant observation': Co-producing knowledge and resistance between researchers and CSOs**

A third method used in the course of this research centred on a three month internship period undertaken with the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) during February - May, 2014. This is a form of 'participant

observation' in which the researcher actively works with those whom (s)he is studying (Buscher, 2006). Collaborating in this way allowed for the daily contact and knowledge exchange between the researcher and CSO members and the opportunity to coordinate joint action against detrimental socio-environmental practices. Moreover, the interests of the CSO members were able to guide data collection and research outputs to a considerable extent.

One of the primary activities undertaken was lobbying government officials and UNESCO representatives with regards to their position on swiftlet farming in George Town. Since this type of work is an integral part of most CSO work, it will not be greatly elaborated on here, however, key points from this case merit brief consideration. First, the researcher being an 'outsider' in Penang, as both a foreign national and non-resident, allowed for a different type of interaction than the PHT council members had achieved in the past. Second, the key to working with the local authorities required pitching the research in a way that would also be useful to them. For instance, some municipal officers admitted (mistakenly) to perceiving the researcher as an 'expert' in managing swiftlet farms in urban areas, which facilitated knowledge transfer between the CSO members and government officials so that they could improve enforcement practices.

### **Conflict mapping**

A final component of this research involved surveying the heritage zone (1.6km<sup>2</sup> area) for active 'swiftlet houses'. In order to do this, previous records of active swiftlet houses in the inner city were consulted, which had been conducted in 2008 and 2011 by individuals from the PHT, University Sains Malaysia (USM), and the Penang municipal council (MBPP - Majlis Bandaraya Pulau Pinang). All counts were conducted manually, and locations were recorded on a base map of the city, as well as on a spread sheet to record details and observations about each site. The revised count proved that despite the State Government's announcement that they had been successful in clearing all remaining active swiftlet houses from the World Heritage Site by the end of 2013, this was not necessary the case. In 2011 there were estimated to be around 174 active swiftlet houses within the heritage zone,

but as of May 2014, there are still at least 42.

The resulting map of active swiftlet farms (see fig. 3) was useful in several ways. First,

and most importantly, it was used to put additional pressure on the state government to fulfil their promise of removing all illegal swiftlet houses from the heritage zone by the end of 2013 (see 'case study' box, above). Updating the numbers and locations of swift houses also added important data to the existing CSO records regarding the numbers of swiftlet farms in the city,



**Figure 3: Locations of active swiftlet farms in George Town's World Heritage Site as of May, 2014 (Source: Connolly)**

which allowed for the identification of patterns over time and clustering of swiftlet farms in certain areas.

## Conclusion

Though the details of this contribution have been focused on a particular case, it has intended to shed some light on how researchers and CSOs can work together in co-producing knowledge on and resistance to environmental conflicts. The methods and tools discussed in this section have been used to understand the causes of environmental conflicts and how different stakeholders make both sense of and represent the issues at stake. This contribution has also demonstrated the importance of democratic participation in the resolution of environmental conflicts, as their causes and thus solutions necessarily requires the cooperation of NGOs, industrial alliances, different levels of government and other actors with competing interests (Affolderbach et al, 2012).

The collaboration among research and CSOs members for this research involved not only sharing co-produced information with relevant

authorities in a constructive manner to aid their enforcement work, but also engaging with government officials to understand and overcome the challenges that they faced in doing so. Although the conflict was not fully resolved, the additional pressure put on the state government to uphold their promises did result in an improvement of the situation. In sum, this contribution has stressed the necessity of making deep connections between academics, CSOs and other stakeholders, in order to tackle complex environmental conflicts such as the case presented here.

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### 1.3 Building alliances to influence decision making in the European Parliament and the European Commission

*Irmak Ertör*

#### **NGO and CSO collaboration to influence the outcomes of environmental conflicts**

This contribution focuses on how NGOs (Non-governmental Organisations) and other CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) may build strong networks of communication and collaboration in order to respond to **environmental conflicts** and influence relevant **political decisions**. By reflecting on two public campaigns initiated by NGO and CSO networks, it aims to highlight the ways in which these networks have engaged with actors on local, regional, national, European and global levels, and how they developed joint positions and arguments.

Additionally, it will present and analyse several tools, methods and activities that have been used by the campaigns in order to increase their political influence on the outcome of both environmental conflicts and the decisions taken by national authorities, European Parliament and/or European Commission. In this way, it will elaborate the lessons learned from successes and challenges for future **collaborations of NGO and/or CSO networks**.

The observation of –and the participation in– both campaigns has been realised while working in a Barcelona-based environmental consultancy and NGO (ENT Environment and Management/Fundació ENT). Fundació ENT has been a partner entity of two NGO networks called Ocean2012 and Seas at Risk. Both of them aimed to influence conflicts –one over fisheries and the other over aquaculture– through building strong alliances among NGOs and different civil society actors and through their participation in national and European level decision-making.

#### **Fisheries and aquaculture conflicts**

The two examples at hand represent the involvement of NGO and

CSO networks taking position in two **environmental conflict** arenas. The first conflict regards **capture fisheries** in European waters. The European Union has had a Common Fisheries Policy since 1983 that failed to ensure the sustainable use of the stocks in European waters. Europe's fishing fleets became too large, increasingly unprofitable and reliant on public subsidies, which also harmed coastal communities and small-scale fishing (EC Green Paper, 2009). In order to change this trend, a substantial reform was debated in the European Commission and the European Parliament on the subsequent Common Fisheries Policy that would come into force from 2014 onwards.

In this context, the [Ocean2012](#) campaign pushed European legislators for the establishment of stringent regulations through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to prevent overfishing. The Ocean2012 coalition was created in 2009 and included 193 member groups from 24 EU member states and some international ones. It consisted of both large and small environmental NGOs, cooperatives of small-scale fishermen, scientists, development agencies, consumer and development organisations, dive centres or restaurants, as well as any social actors that were negatively affected by overfishing.

Through this network disparate actors discovered common interests, established a strong joint position and ultimately convinced European parliamentarians to take steps towards ending overfishing. They also agreed on a commitment to end overfishing by 2015, where possible, and by 2020 at the latest, thereby setting a legally binding target. New policies in the new CFP include reducing discards<sup>1</sup> and by-catches<sup>2</sup>, **restoring the fish stock** in European waters, using transparent criteria (including social and environmental criteria) when allocating fishing quotas, rejecting a proposal for compulsory transferable

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1 Discard is the portion of catch that is thrown overboard, but which may be of important ecological or commercial value. Discard typically consists of "non-target" species or undersized specimens (so that it does not get counted within the allowed quota for captures).

2 By-catch refers to fish and/or other marine life that are incidentally caught while capturing the targeted species. Most of the time bycatch is discarded at sea.



fishing concessions<sup>3</sup> and an appropriate allocation of funds (e.g. that do not allow an increase in fishing intensity or fleet volume, but rather support sustainable ways of fishing).

The second **environmental conflict** presented here is over the development of **aquaculture** in Europe. Due to increased demand for seafood and stagnant global catches, in the last two decades aquaculture has grown remarkably throughout the world. However, the sector has stagnated in the EU since 2000s (FAO, 2012; JRC, 2012). Through the **Seas at Risk** (SAR) network, NGOs from different countries with different expertise on marine issues intended to establish a common position about the development model of aquaculture in Europe and related legislations. While European authorities like the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) encourage the growth of the aquaculture sector (EC 2012), many NGOs, fisher people, angler societies, local people and tourism representatives, are concerned with the **negative social and ecological impacts** of such development. Most of them complain about an increased amount of sedimentation and pollution in the sea, the use of chemicals and antibiotics that easily spread to wild species, the intrusion of invasive species through escapees and diffusion of illnesses.

Although the policy-making scene was dominated by European and national public administration and aquaculture sector representatives, building a strong network enabled Seas at Risk to make NGOs' voice heard. Members of the SAR network participated in all possible national and European meetings and workshops on policy changes and strategies for aquaculture. SAR participants shared their opinions, expertise and experience with each other, and used these communications to publish a joint position paper, "Priorities for environmentally responsible aquaculture in the EU" (SAR, 2014). The proposals were

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3 "A **Total Allowable Catch** (TAC) is defined for each fishery and divided among the individuals of the fleet according to "historical" fishing records, usually over the past five years, during which the most informed fishers have been "racing for quota," catching as much as possible and targeting strategic species. With Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ) or Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFC), individual access rights to a common resource are transformed into a tradable commodity." While the very existence of ITQs and TFCs is already a controversial issue, many actors argued that making them compulsory would enable a total commodification of the sea.

presented in the European Commission workshops on the development of a guidance document about the implementation of European aquaculture in line with the WFD (Water Framework Directive) and MSFD (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)<sup>4</sup>. Thanks to this joint effort, the network’s position document has become a key reference in the guidance document of the EC and voiced NGOs’ **common demands and alternative proposals** for aquaculture development in Europe.

**Comparison of two campaigns: strategies, involvement and methods**

Comparing the two cases, the Ocean2012 campaign included many more local actors and associations ranging from diving centres to fisher people’s cooperatives or to local CSOs than the SAR network. Furthermore, through careful national and European coordination with meetings and events where members periodically came together, they managed to discuss and establish a common position.



**Figure 4: Children’s paintings and involvement in the Paint a Fish.**

Some of the tools and strategies used by this campaign were: (i) establishing direct NGO pressure at European Parliament, which inclu-

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4 The WFD and the MSFD establish the standards in order to have good ecological and chemical conditions of aquatic ecosystems in Europe.

ded analysing the positions of relevant parliamentarians from different countries and trying to convince them through face-to-face conversations, and; (ii) organizing many public and participative activities including small-scale fisher people, CSOs and NGOs, families and children. For instance, Ocean2012 members organized “Paint a Fish” activities in many locations, which involved both protests and festivals with families and children. Social activities were organized to raise awareness about fisheries policy and to make more marginalized voices heard. Images of people creating a fish figure, carrying posters of the campaign or fish drawings of children that were taken during these activities were spread through social media. Postcards with children’s fish drawings were sent to the European parliamentarians in order to affect their opinion and votes about the Common Fisheries Policy reform. These postcards had policy messages and were written from a child’s perspective demanding the protection of seas and the survival of fish. Related activities included forming a kind of human chain in the form of a fish in front of the European Parliament.



**Figure 5: Paint a Fish postcards and activities in Brussels.**

The SAR network on the other hand, is composed of actors working at European or national and regional level rather than local level. Its activities were much more focused on shaping policy-making by using scientific investigations conducted by NGOs or independent research centres. They have been mostly relying on tools such as the publication of common position papers, press releases and reports signed jointly by European NGOs, and participation in discussions and workshops organized by EC in order to enhance NGOs’ role in decision-making procedure.

## Challenges and successes: benefits of alliances

In both cases, politicians and fisheries and aquaculture sector representatives attempted to undermine NGOs and CSOs by claiming that they are NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) initiatives. Both networks and their campaigns helped to show how these conflicts are not affecting some specific people, but the society at large. The social actors opposing overfishing or aquaculture's harsh development were not only focused on their locality, but rather having bigger arguments and demands regarding the use of European waters and natural resources. Due to the large number of members involved, including NGOs, local initiatives and national or international CSOs, both networks have become capable of influencing the outcome of the conflict by underlining their demands and the importance of local-level participation and decision-making.

For both networks, a significant challenge remained as far as how to reach an agreement on demands and positions related to fisheries and aquaculture development, i.e. to what extent to oppose which part of these activities such as whether to insist that tradable fishing permits should be completely abolished or whether first it has to be stopped from being obligatory. A related challenge is to understand whether working as a large network and aiming to find common ground decreases the potential of protests and NGO campaigns, or if coalition building silences more radical arguments. The desire to reach consensus may eliminate some of the demands or alternative proposals of participating groups, or some of the groups may want to leave the network.

However, the benefits of establishing a joint position, including the legitimacy and strength it gave to the campaign and to the network turning them into powerful social actors in policy-making, was crucial for the success of campaigns. Both campaigns succeeded in agreeing on common demands and positions with fast and collaborative organization and coordination, good communication among members, and repeated meetings where they shared opinions about each step.

The successes of both networks had other common aspects, including good timing, and diversity of strategies. First, although campaigns tend to be mid- or long-term oriented, it is important to note that they became quite **successful when they increased the number and intensity of their activities just before important European public**

**decisions** were made, including votes on the CFP or the publication of guidelines on aquaculture, for example. Secondly, diverse strategies ranging from the presentation of scientific data to direct conversations with parliamentarians in the European Parliament, organising massive public festivals and protests, awareness raising, increasing public attention to the environmentally conflictive arenas, and providing alternative solutions contributed to the success of both networks, and enabled them to **influence the outcome of the environmental conflicts**.

Building alliances helps to **situate environmental conflicts in the bigger socio-political, economic and ecological context**, and shows their connections with each other. In both cases explained above, it has become clear that not only the amount of fish caught by some small-scale fishermen in one village has been decreasing rather overfishing has caused an intense environmental deterioration and had social consequences. A rise in the fish farms' production in order to compensate the loss in the fish stock has its link with overfishing and the pursued more profitable development model as well. Therefore, establishing strong NGO and CSO networks is an important step to underline that these **environmental conflicts are not limited to locally focused claims of some interest groups**, on the contrary that they include **environmental justice demands** for many actors in varying regions (Ertör and Ortega, 2015). This underscores the importance of developing a **joint position and common demands** in order to show the **relevance of environmental conflicts** regarding environmental politics and **participatory policy-making** and moving towards a more just, participatory and sustainable society.

## 1.4 Ecologies of Conflict: between dispossession and resistance amidst tree plantations in Southern Chile

Marien González-Hidalgo

### Tree plantations: old and new forms of dispossession

Tree plantations are monocultures of a single tree species, typically fast growing species such as eucalypts, poplars, acacias and pines, designed to supply external markets for wood, charcoal, logs and pulpwood. In recent decades, tree plantations have expanded in Latin America, Africa and Asia to satisfy increasing demand for wood-based products, especially for urban populations in the Global North. Chile now has three million hectares of Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*) and *Eucalyptus* spp. plantations, concentrated in its central and southern regions. In 2013, Chile's US\$5 billion in forestry exports were primarily sent to China, USA and Japan. Tree plantations are an efficient form of forestry **extractivism** given their large scale, intensive exploitation, orientation towards exportation and low industrial processing needs (see 1.4, 2.3, 3.4).

As is the case with many of the world's tree plantations, the state



**Figure 6: Left: Map of situation of tree plantations in Chile (source: author's illustration using cartographic data of GADM and CONAF. GRS WGS84, Datum WGS84). Elaborated by Marta Borrós. Right: Photograph of tree plantations in Chile**

has been a significant actor in the expansion of monoculture forestry in Chile. Subsidies and cheap credit were given to forestry companies to facilitate infrastructure creation (such as sawmills

and cellulose plants) and to grow the resource itself: between 1974 and 1994 the government paid 75% of pine and eucalyptus forestation costs, spending about US\$50 million (Bull et al, 2009). As a consequence, forestry enterprises were able to accumulate vast tracts of land, and in the process squeezed out other agricultural activities as well as small landholders, peasants, agricultural-estate labourers and indigenous communities. Individual and communal landowners were also subsidised to plant trees, in order to enlarge the industry's supply of raw materials. Alongside these financial interventions, state **violence** and the criminalisation of protest were also important tools for increasing the number of hectares under cultivation. The largest expansion of the timber industry occurred during Chile's 1973-1990 bloody military dictatorship, as was the case in Brazil and Indonesia, or in South Africa under apartheid (Gerber, 2011). Dispossession of the commons (land, water, forests) as well as long-lasting impacts on livelihoods (reduced quality and quantity of water, pollution, forced migration and lack of work opportunities) have framed mobilisations of, mainly, peasant and indigenous populations. Worldwide, these conflicts are expressed by means of lawsuits and demonstrations, side-by-side with direct action such as land recuperations, which can include material damages and blockades to the industrial forestry activity. Therefore, state-run special security forces are used to protect corporate tree plantations, which in many cases has militarised the conflict. In Chile, several indigenous people have been jailed and tried under anti-terrorism laws or assassinated during the occupation of their ancestral lands.



Figure 7: Upper left - “Look how they want to paint capitalism green!” Right: “There [in indigenous territory]... it has been green for quite a long time now”. The thought bubble depicts how tree plantations, bribery and state security force uniforms are all ‘green’ (Source: OLCA).

As Figure 7 shows, states and private sector actors have used varied strategies for legitimising extractivism. For example, tree plantations in Chile were and are justified as a way to con-

control soil erosion and to prevent native forest degradation. However, tree plantations have replaced native forests, pastures and agriculture lands, while failing to control erosion because the creation of large scale plantations requires extensive clear-cutting (see figure 6, right). Recently, forestry enterprises have deployed the language of “environmental values” such as carbon capture<sup>5</sup> and sustainable development<sup>6</sup> to prove that their practices are socially and environmentally responsible. Some local communities have denounced this “greening” of extractivism as a way in which corporations seek to be internationally legitimised while maintaining land control through violent practices. The provision of wage labour for marginalised communities is another argument that states and corporations use to legitimate forestry extractivism. However, labour opportunities are scarce in sawmills and cellulose plants, while in rural areas forestry employment is rare, outsourced and temporary. The practices of forestry extractivism facilitate the accumulation and concentration of capital, land, and especially power—known as **accumulation by dispossession** (Harvey, 2004; see also Chapter 4. Commons). This concept explains how dispossession is made possible by the appropriation of public and communal resources for the benefit of capital accumulation. In Chile this has happened through direct state subsidies to land owners for planting and by the privatisation of the cellulose factories and paper mills established by the state between 1964 and 1973. As a result, indigenous peoples, the working class and the environment have been subordinated to the imperatives of capital and power which has been concentrated in the hands of a select few.

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5 Carbon credits are financial instruments that can be internationally traded by governments, industries or individuals. Under the assumption that planting trees reduces carbon emissions, some forestry corporations sell carbon credits related to energy generation upon forest biomass. Since 2007, Arauco Corporation has counted for two million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions “reduced”. In the carbon market, every ton of CO<sub>2</sub> is around 7 Euros.

6 The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an organisation that certifies the socially and environmentally responsible management of the world’s forests. Surprisingly, main forestry corporations in Chile are certified by the FSC.



## Ecologies of conflict

### *Resistance framed by the indigenous grassroots: Autonomous Territorial Recuperation*

Globally, indigenous people tend to be at the forefront in conflicts over tree plantations, due to large-scale private landholdings that concentrate power, displace local residents, incur water shortages and skew local uses of natural resources (Gerber, 2011). The extractivist forestry model in Chile has been primarily contested by indigenous Mapuche. The Mapuche see forestry enterprises as the third wave of colonisation of their territory, after the Spanish in the 16th century and the Chileans in 1861.

In their historic struggle for the recuperation of ancestral territory and sovereignty, (self-referred to as “in resistance”) Mapuche communities perform what they call “**land recuperations**” since the 1990s. These land occupations of corporate forestry plots are effective exercises in retrieving territory by means outside formal proceedings and legality as defined by the state or private forestry corporations. These actions have been accompanied by other strategies to regain control of indigenous territory, including claims for the restitution of ancestral lands filed under Convention 169 of the UN’s International Labour Organisation<sup>11</sup>, negotiating with state representatives and forestry enterprises to reach agreements where the state buys privately held land then hands it over to the Mapuche, and road blockades and/or material damages to corporate properties.



**Figure 8: Beans now grow where before grew Eucalyptus sp. in the areas slowly recuperated by Mapuche communities (Source: author).**

In performing territorial recuperations, Mapuche express their spiritual worldview of connection to the land by socialising throu-

gh customary and traditional forms of community-making, based on kinship and friendship. When a plot is recovered, communities organise themselves either collectively or by household and plant potatoes, wheat, beans and peas on a small scale, recuperate their extensive livestock practices, collect fruit from the remaining native forest and decide to what extent they want to engage with tree plantations. The process is both physically and emotionally exhausting, especially as they are often exposed to violence and criminalisation. Sustaining recuperated lands is not easy given the precarious environmental conditions in terms of water availability, soil fertility and biodiversity after conversion into tree monocultures. Difficulties are also expressed in the inability of impoverished Mapuche communities to fully express their own worldviews which depend on spiritual, emotional and livelihood relationships with native forests. Yet, the active resistance of Mapuche communities in certain areas in Southern Chile is discouraging private corporations to continue or expand their extractivist activities.

*Resistance framed through policy: reforming the Water Code to transform the forestry sector*

The [Agua que has de beber](#) (water you have to drink) initiative uses another strategy for contesting the impacts of forestry extractivism. Developed by the Association of Forest Engineers for Native Forests (AIFBN) and funded by the European Union delegation in Chile, the initiative seeks to join diverse social actors to influence and implement public policies that prioritise human uses of water over industrial applications. Tree plantations (and specially *Eucalyptus spp.*) capture rainwater retained in soils, causing a decrease in flow rates and runoff during summer periods. Long term impacts regarding quality and quantity of water have been documented in several countries after the establishment of tree plantations (EJOLT, 2012).

The initiative is seeking to put to reform of the Water Code on the agenda of recently re-elected Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. The current Water Code, signed during the Pinochet dictatorship in 1981, created a system of **water rights** that can be traded with few restrictions. While other extractive industries such as mining or agriculture profit from the accumulation of water rights, forestry extractivism instead seizes water through the physiological activity of trees. This means that the discussion on water rights could have no effect on what happens in areas where tree plantations are extensive. Therefore, in Sou-

thern Chile, the role of the “Agua que has de beber” initiative has been to analyse and publicly criticise institutional solutions to mend seasonal water scarcity such as providing water to rural communities by tank trucks or building new infrastructure like wells and reservoirs. These governmental proposals to solve water scarcity are disconnected from spatial planning policies - neither the temporal nor long term solutions consider the varied land ecologies. The dissemination of academic publications about the relationship between tree plantations and water shortages that confirm local rural knowledge has been crucial to argue against state and private discourses that seek to legitimate extractivist forestry.

### **Lessons for the political ecologist mobilisation regarding tree plantations**

These examples of strategies to contest forestry extractivism in Chile show the complexity of these conflicts, with an overlap of present and historical political issues at different levels. In the face of this, expressions of both dispossession and resistance are varied. Tree plantation conflicts in Chile can provide some lessons or tools useful for movements facing similar environmental, land or forestry conflicts in the following fields:

- Denouncing and disseminating the impacts of tree plantations: differentiating **forests and tree plantations**, see WRM and Friends of the Earth [statements](#); see also EJOLT’s [video](#); denouncing the relationship between the expansion of **tree plantations and physical and structural violence**.

- Reporting impacts** of tree plantations to nature and livelihoods, see *periódico Resumen’s* [video](#) “Planting Poverty, the forestry business in Chile”.

- Empowering land sovereignty through peasant and indigenous practices: fostering gatherings to discuss the impacts of the forestry industry, while **connecting them to others forms of extractivism**, see OLCA’s [work](#); **coordinating action with workers of the tree-farming industry** and including their demands as part of the struggle against tree plantations, see Fundación Sol’s [report](#); **revitalising and maintaining the expression of indigenous and peasant knowledge** to the

land, via their native languages, legends, arts, spirituality, etc. These serve to strengthen local communities' [cohesion](#) and enables creative, emotional and embodied engagements for resistance.

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### **On denouncing and disseminating the impacts of tree plantations**

[Plantations are not forests](#)

[The difference between a forest and tree plantations](#)

[Araucanía, Chile y la violencia del latifundio colonial – forestal](#)

[Planting Poverty, the forestry business in Chile](#)

### **On empowering land sovereignty through peasant and indigenous practices**

[Somos alternativa al extractivismo, Memoria Encuentro Aguante la vida 2013](#)

[Victims of the Chilean Miracle. Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet era. 1973-2002](#)

[Informe Industria Forestal, Cuadernos de Investigacion](#)

[Araucanía, Chile y la violencia del latifundio colonial – forestal](#)

## 1.5 Latent conflicts in mining activities: water appropriation in Cobre las Cruces copper mine

*María J. Beltrán*

The empirical case of the use of water resources in the Cobre Las Cruces mining project (CLC) demonstrates the importance of considering **latent environmental conflicts** as part of the study of environmental conflicts. Fontaine (2004) states that there can be no environmental conflict without a social dimension. But what if environmental conflicts are not socially manifested due to strategies deployed by private companies with the blessing of governmental institutions? This contribution shows silenced conflicts created by mining activities and the factors influencing the absence of social response among the population. This section aims to analyse and expand the concept of environmental conflicts by elucidating strategies that are deployed to avoid and silence conflicts, understood as if its existence depends upon a big and highly visible social response.

### Case study – Cobre Las Cruces mining project - Spain

The CLC mining project is located in the easternmost area of the Iberian Pyrite Belt in the south of Spain, in the province of Seville (Andalusia), one of the most important metallogenetic provinces in the world.

The mineable ore reserves are estimated at 16 million tons with a 6.2 percent copper average grade. The deposit is a very profitable one since average grade copper deposits are considered very profitable when their grade is over 2.5 percent. Besides, the deposit of this mine is quite special because it is located beneath an aquifer, making the project extremely sensitive to water management.

The project is the largest operating open-pit copper operation in Europe. The mine has been owned by First Quantum Minerals, a Canadian firm, since 2013.

## The Cobre las Cruces mining company and its strategies to silence conflicts

Copper is an important global commodity but its extraction usually entails massive ecological consequences. Significant environmental impacts arising from copper mining include **excessive water use** and **water pollution** (REFS around the world). On the one hand, the operations involved in this activity require large volumes of water, and on the other, in relation to the quality of water, large amounts of acid mine drainage (AMD) are generated.



**Figure 9: Location of Cobre las Cruces mining exploitation (Source: Andalusia Regional Government, 2009).**

During the 20th century, global copper consumption reached 18,000 million tons and this figure is expected to double in the next 30 years (International Copper Study Group, 2012). In Europe, most of the copper consumed is extracted, melted and refined outside the continent. However there have been various extraction sites in Europe historically. One of the largest deposits of copper in Europe is the Iberian Pyrite Belt in southern Spain.

In the past, copper mining in Andalusia has led to environmental conflicts. For instance, the “battle of smoke” in Rio Tinto in 1888 or what was known as the “Aznalcollar disaster” in 1998, which resulted in large-scale water contamination.

The Cobre las Cruces mine is in a particularly precarious ecological zone. Much of the copper is situated directly below an aquifer that is an important source of water for the region. Although the aquifer is not officially overexploited, net extraction of water is prohibited by law. In addition to mining, water from the aquifer is also required for agricultural irrigation during the summer, for industrial supply and for emergency supply of the nearby city of Seville during periods of drought. In order to gain access to the deposit without disrupting the aquifer, a complex water management system was designed and implemented. Immediately after its start-up phase in 2008 this system failed and affected the quality and quantity of the aquifer’s water resources. Legal proceedings

were started and are still pending to date. The company is accused of the **non-authorized withdrawal of 75.000 m<sup>3</sup>** of water from the aquifer and **drilling 20 unauthorised boreholes**. Further, the failure of the water management system resulted in the **discharge of arsenic** and other AMD polluting substances (Guadalquivir Hydrographical Confederation [GHC], 2008).



In order to avoid further damage, the regional administration closed the operation and demanded a new water management system.

Figure 10: Open Pit CLC project. October 2007. (Source: [www.ecologistaseleccion.es](http://www.ecologistaseleccion.es))

In that specific phase of the environmental conflict, the impact over water resources was followed by social collective response in the form of social protest. In order to restart the copper extraction, CLC presented a new water management plan to the Andalusia Regional Government in 2009. The previous water management system, following the water concession presently in force, allowed the company to use 18,3 m<sup>3</sup>/hour of water from the aquifer. The main change introduced by the new plan was the modification of the volume of water stipulated in the water concession by allowing the use of 157,83 m<sup>3</sup>/hour of what they called “mine water”, some 876 percent higher than the amount originally authorised. This concept, introduced through a hydrogeological study that the mine company commissioned to a group of experts, claim that the volume of water considered as “mine water” is water from the bottom of the pit that emerges “naturally” as the pit is dug deeper and it does not actually come from the aquifer. In this way, the introduction of this scientific term legitimised the use of more underground water than previously with no modification of the water concession. In this sense it is worth to mention that the modification of a water concession in Spain may take up to ten years. The Regional Administration accepted this argument as valid and subsequently approved the plan, thus avoiding any social response to this environmental damage.

## **Latent conflict and the factors influencing the absence of social response**

The NGO Ecologistas en Acción has reported that the argument put forward by the hydrogeological study to introduce the concept of “mine water” was a successful strategy to avoid any (negative) social responses regarding possible environmental damages to the aquifer. **The conflict remained silenced because the users of the aquifer water are not aware of that the political decision to approve the new water model** -apparently in order to repair environmental damage- has resulted in the authorization for substantially more withdrawal of underground water, bypassing the existing regulations.

Since the beginning of the project, Ecologistas en Acción have closely followed mining activities. The NGO successfully petitioned to be named as an affected party in the ongoing lawsuit, thus gaining access to court documents that have allowed for more in-depth monitoring. In order to increase their influence in the proceedings, Ecologistas en Acción presented notices of appeal to the GHC (the basin authority in charge of the aquifer) to influence future decision making regarding the aquifer in collaboration with scientists. In addition, the mining company's irregularities have been explained in detail through press releases and reports available in the NGO's website (see [www.ecologista-senaccion.es](http://www.ecologista-senaccion.es)).

Similar to the Aznalcollar disaster pollution episode, regional authorities and local communities both reacted to the environmental impacts after the damage was already done. Two factors have been identified influencing the absence of social response. First, the **historical dependence** of the local population to the mining activity and second the **community's belief** that the authorities will supervise and punish the mining company in case of further pollution events. Almost twenty years later the local population's perception of the mining activity has not significantly changed. Faced with the evidence of the Aznalcollar disaster, they recognize the potential impacts of the mining activities, however, the two aforementioned factors firmly influence the perception that the authorities will supervise the mining activity and will avoid possible damages.



## Lessons learned

Environmental conflicts occur as the result of the **high environmental and social costs** of the increasing capital driven resource extraction and waste disposal. However, unevenly distributed environmental and social costs are silenced if more powerful actors legitimise resource appropriation. In this case, it was the intervention of scientists legitimising the concept of “mine water” that has enabled the mining company to access and control the common water resources. **Political ecologists can collaborate with NGOs to denounce the top-down, technocratic version of science that silences environmental conflicts.** This can be done collaborating in presenting notices of appeal to different authorities, writing collaborative reports and disseminating the results in different arenas. Finally, this case shows that an environmental conflict study must contribute by analysing not only the conflicts already socially manifested, but by pointing out the silenced conflicts and the strategies deployed to avoid social responses to environmental conflicts.

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# Chapter 2. Conceptualising Disaster Capitalism in Political Ecology

*Julie De Los Reyes  
Felipe Milanez  
Salvatore Paolo De Rosa  
Giorgos Velegrakis*

*Editor: Giorgos Velegrakis*



## 2.1 Introduction

'Disaster capitalism' became part of public lexicon following Naomi Klein's widely successful book *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). Klein deployed the term to capture how elites have taken advantage of moments of shock-disasters, wars and crises-to advance free market ideology and reforms. Cataclysmic events such as the Iraq War, collapse of the Soviet Union, and Hurricane Katrina, she argued, have been important opportunities for profiteering that enrich the elite class.

For movements across the globe, 'disaster capitalism' has been a powerful rallying concept, providing a frame to connect local and disparate forms of encroachments that often dovetail calamities, warfare and economic crises, to something bigger. That capitalism is to blame brings much-needed attention back to the system-and that ultimately, any meaningful action must be directed at countering it.

The contributions in this chapter extend this tradition, but also seek to refine it. Disasters, crises, both social and 'natural', we argue, are themselves the result of capitalism's insatiable **quest for accumulation** even as it harnesses these to fuel its expansion. We focus on two inter-related processes: *capitalism's use of disasters as openings for further financialization and commodification of natural resources*, and *capitalism's tendency to 'create' disasters*. Drawing from examples of its interface with forests, wastes and mining, we documents its expansion deeper into 'nature', spawning new forms of **enclosures**, new modes for realising higher profits, and the new **socio-environmental crises** and disasters that it generates.

Such disasters and crises create new kinds of tensions and struggles. We hope that such tensions will continue to lead to social movements that challenge and say "no" to the forms of disaster capitalism, as described above. We also hope that these short articles on one hand shed light on this process, on the other hand bring together an entire series of localised responses to the symptoms of disaster capitalism into a broader struggle that actually confronts the disparities and inequities that permit such system changes in the first place.

Furthermore, it is not by luck that the chapter includes case-studies both from the "**Global North**" and "**Global South**". We believe that the task for radical social scientists as well as for the social mo-

## DISASTER CAPITALISM SPEAK:



vements is, among others, to challenge this dichotomy and to search for theories, policies and practices to re-establish the values and priorities for social and spatial **justice locally and globally**. As political ecologists often argue: “There instead are many souths in the north and vice versa”.

Figure 11: Disaster capitalism speak. (Source: Daily Blog)

We will illustrate how economic disasters, such as the 2007 financial crisis, can open up opportunities for profiteering. In the gold mining industry for instance, **speculative investments** in the wake of the crises have fuelled the **intensification and expansion of gold mining** activities into new territories, bringing about heightened contestations on the ground. In this context, this contribution aims to provide inputs and definition of concepts, trends and mechanisms fundamental to understand the financial aspects of mining as an essential part of (disaster) capitalism. Furthermore, questions for the civil society groups and socio-environmental movements around the globe are brought up: conflicts over extraction are never only local. This crucially courts a rethink of extractive complex and the strengths or shortcomings of existing forms of resistance to challenge the larger configurations that take place beyond the borders of the nation-state.

This chapter, focusing on the interplays between capital's accumulation and local/environmental violence, will also present local effects of global capitalism turned into different forms of **violent coercion** against a great diversity of local social groups. Market pressure is not the only element that produces local violence, but in many cases it is the main driver. There are world trade commodities like diamonds, wood, timber and many others that are organized through violent process of extraction locally to be circulated in the global markets. NGOs and social movements have succeeded in part in denouncing widely the crimes associated with it, although the violence of these “extraction processes” is still being played.

This chapter also documents the waste conflict in Campania, Italy

as an explanatory enactment of strategies of profit making that blur the demarcation between legal and illegal economic practices that produce disastrous consequences for local communities. These insights, in the form of facts-based accounts and interpretations, focus on hazardous waste management issues, but they illustrate an underlying tendency of contemporary business corporate behaviour and of market-oriented governance. Where most of the mainstream accounts of **illegal economies** refer to this process as an anomaly in the smooth functioning of market economy, this contribution invites to look at their current fundamental role in maintaining and reproducing capitalist **accumulation cycles** and **power hierarchies**.

Finally, the case of **gold-extraction project in Halkidiki, Northern Greece** since 2011 brings up further questions on capitalism's tendency to create disasters in order to ensure **capital's accumulation**. The case of gold-extraction in Halkidiki is only one chapter in the book of dispossessions in Greece during the crisis period. Land dispossession is not a simple outcome of Greece's obligation to repay its debt. In fact, land in Greece is a social asset that is being targeted by domestic and international speculative capital and through the intensification of land privatization over vast areas of the country. The result of such a strategy is myriad tensions, conflicts and movements that try to tackle it. This strategy is here conceptualised as a constant process of **depoliticization** and **de-democratization**.

By foregrounding the profit objectives, the capitalist entities and the neoliberal strategies that played a critical role in the making of disasters, these contributions move us away from seeing disasters as 'naturally-occurring'. They are the result of the reorganisations that take place to organise socio-natures in particular ways. Capitalism is an 'irreducibly socio-ecological' project (Moore, 2011). Disasters, in this sense, are a manifestation of its internal contradictions and its attempts to overcome it.

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## 2.2 Who owns the world's largest gold mining companies and why it matters?

*Julie De Los Reyes*

Beginning in early 2000, highly capitalised financial players, like hedge funds and pension funds (referred to as *institutional investors*), have increasingly moved into investing in extractive industries. Interest in commodities as a particular 'asset class' saw institutional investments move towards oil, precious metals, and gas. This found its way in speculative platforms like the notorious derivatives markets that led to volatile movements in commodity prices.

In the case of gold, institutional investments were also channelled to the stock markets at the start of the boom, with large investors turning to owning (through stock ownership) the companies that own the resource. Holding gold mining stocks was perceived to be a convenient and profitable way of cashing-in from future price increases in gold. Owning the miners, that hold big reserves of gold, was expected to bring a higher investment return than owning the physical bullion itself. In the course of the commodity boom, the investor base within gold mining companies shifted. Barrick Gold, Newmont Mining, and Goldcorp, exemplify some of the highest institutional investor ownership among the world's largest gold mining companies, with institutional investors as majority shareholders.

In this context, this text aims to contribute to an understanding of key developments in the past commodity boom, especially in the area of **mining finance**, and to provide points of reflection for those who struggle on the ground as the mining industry becomes more deeply intertwined with financial markets. **Financialization** - used here to refer to the recalibration of mining operations around financial goals-heralds another form of disaster capitalism. Geared as it is at squeezing ever greater financial value from mineral extraction, it tends to amplify tensions that surround mining activities, leading to 'disastrous' consequences for economies, the environment, people and their livelihoods.

## Financialization in gold mining

Institutional investors are a particular class, known in the financial world for their 'activist' approach to their investments. By the sheer size of the capital that they manage, holding at the minimum \$100 million, these investors are more inclined to take an active role in the way companies are run than individual investors. As they concentrate large sums of investment in a company, they have strong bargaining power (and indeed voting power) to lobby management on issues like shareholder value creation. **Shareholder value creation** refers to the push for the prioritisation of stock performance and dividend returns to shareholders as the guiding principle for the activities of the firm. Under this framework, institutional shareholders expect a greater share of the profit of the company from dividend payments and an appreciating stock price, achieved through a more disciplined allocation of capital within the company.

The adoption of the 'shareholder value' framework is said to herald the 'financialization' of the corporation, with its activities being increasingly aligned to the financial interests of its institutional investors. Company managers shift the focus of the company towards profitability over market share, ensuring that sufficient cash flow is generated from their activities to support dividend returns. For gold miners, this means that company operations, and indeed, the portfolio of mines and projects under their belt are able to satisfy new thresholds on returns to investment and are sensitive to the risk tolerance of their shareholders. As institutional shareholders often move in herds and cannot leave without driving share prices down, companies are disciplined to pay greater attention to engaging them. Companies that deliver greater shareholder value are rewarded by stock appreciation, improving their chances to raise funds in open markets.

Some of the large financial players that were drawn to the gold mining industry include high-profile hedge funds such as Blackrock and Paulson Co. which hold significant holdings in the world's largest gold companies including Barrick Gold, Goldcorp, AngloGold Ashanti, Yamana, Harmony Gold and Kinross Gold. Paulson and Co.'s big entrance in the gold sector in 2009 started with a large purchase of a stake in AngloGold Ashanti, making it the largest institutional shareholder at 7 per cent ownership, in addition to large positions in Kinross Gold and



Gold Fields. The top 8 gold-producing firms are now predominantly owned by institutional investors.

### The changing face of extraction

As the push for ‘shareholder value creation’ intensified with the decline in commodity prices, new metrics have been rolled out by the industry in response to investor pressure for capital discipline. The fixation on cost cutting, and the drive across firms to meet lower cost metrics, signal their commitment to hand back cash to shareholders throughout the commodity cycle and their firm’s continued attractiveness as an investment asset. In an environment of lower gold prices, this required squeezing out cash flow from existing operations through reorganisation. The sale of non-core mines and the laying-off of workers have been the preferred response, executed in a way that is not only responsive to decline in mineral prices but also sensitive to what it could contribute to stock market valuation. Emblematic of these moves are those made by the industry’s largest: Barrick Gold, Anglo-Gold Ashanti, and Kinross. As a strategy, the sale or closure of mining projects also allowed companies to generate immediate cash from the sale. The proceeds from these have been re-allocated to developing ‘core’ projects and handing money back to shareholders.



**Figure 12: Spilling of 40,000 cubic meters of sulfuric acid into the Sonora and Bacoachi rivers by the Cananea gold and copper mine (Mexico). August 9, 2014 (Source: <http://olca.cl>)**

The shareholder value model moreover carries important implications for the financing of mining projects, as it assesses jurisdictions along cost

and political risk criteria. The focus in **South America**, for example, is not just a function of the geological attributes of the region but also by

investor perception of its relative geopolitical stability. As one industry executive explained, 'securing mining finance for Latin America is easier as the political environment and permitting procedures are well understood by both North American companies and predominantly North American institutional shareholders'. The position of established mining states in the region, perceived to be mining-friendly, with sufficient state support for the industry (particularly relevant for keeping down infrastructure and electricity costs, etc.) and for foreign investments become solidified as areas of concentration of mineral investments.

### Challenges for the movement

Such developments carry important ramifications for countries that follow an **extractivist model** for development, and crucially, those pushing for a shift away from this model. The 'value' generated from extractive activities, for instance, must accommodate shareholder demands, amid already heightening and competing claims coming from labour unions, affected communities, and the state, in the form of increased wages, compensation, taxes, and royalties. At the same time, companies push for realising profits that can simultaneously allow them to finance future investments. The distribution of value thus becomes a contentious terrain that companies must negotiate. But as the industry becomes even more tied to financial markets and its health gauged on the basis of its investment potentiality and returns, the competition across (and the survival of) firms increasingly rest on being able to slosh greater value back to financial markets. This becomes even more apparent in light of the gold industry's history of dividend payments, which in the decades prior to 2000 have been negligible.

Herein lays a gap in the configuration of struggles against mining, as the primarily local effects of mining activity means that much of the contestations around it are directed at the community or national level. Environmental degradations, around which many protests are organised, mainly impact the local communities at close proximity to the mining site, and are thus treated as local, and at best national, concerns. The state, seen as the main arbiter of relations between corporate entities and local communities, becomes the key rallying site for the resolution of struggles on the ground.

This presumed scale where struggles and conflicts are imbricated needs to be re-thought and re-scaled. As illustrated here, the institutions that prop up this extractive model, that move and shape extraction in particular ways, are located in places far from where physical extraction takes place. Yet the interventions of these actors and their particular motives are critically transformative of livelihoods, environment and people.

That '**conflicts over extraction are never only local**' (Bebbington and Scurrah, 2013: 194) rings true, as the capital deployed and the value it generates are entangled in processes of financial accumulation in core capitalist countries. This crucially courts a rethink of extractive complex, and the strengths or shortcomings of existing forms of resistance to challenge the larger configurations that take place beyond the borders of the nation-state. The building of **alliances** between civil society organisations and movements **across regions** (e.g. between Latin America and North America) should be integral to this strategy to bolster local campaigns and help deal head on with the global dimension of mining, powered as it is by stock exchanges in Canada, London, New York, and Australia.

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## 2.3 Violence and Capitalism: when money drains blood

*Felipe Milanez*

### **Blood and money**

What's the colour of gold? Does gold has the same colour as diamond, or timber?

We may initially think that gold is yellow; diamond is transparent, timber is brown. However, in fact they all can have the same colour, which is also the same colour as soya, or just like the colour of a smartphone, or even the energy that is lightening your house: the **red colour of blood**.

How do these entire different commodities can have the same “red blood” colour? They do through their mode of extraction, production, transport or even their waste disposal.

This statement may be too generic, and many other questions appear from this short and general idea. Why a distant market does influence a local system of violence? How commodities and resources chains can have a direct impact in local violence, very often perpetrated by local elites against traditional communities?



While in some parts of the world environmental concern has become an institutional political issue, such as in rich countries in the global North, as well as a hegemonic concern, in other parts of the world environmental leaders, who struggle for collective rights to environment, are the target of local political violence.

**Figure 13: Chico Mendes, Brazilian Environmental activist. 1988 (Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)**

Many of these popular environmentalists have already **paid with their own life** the political coherence of their position in defending the environment - defending the environment as a life concern.

One can have already heard about the story of Chico Mendes, the

rubber tapper union leader in the Amazon that was killed by gunman in 1988; or Ken Saro Wiwa, the Ogoni leader who was hanged by Nigerian government in 1995, together with another eight activists from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP); or one may have never heard the names of more 908 different people killed between 2002 and 2013 worldwide for similar reasons. This is the number presented by international organization Global Witness, in its *Deadly Environment Report* (2014), a study of violence against environmentalist for the first time produced in a global scale.

Some key concepts and empirical cases can help to understand or to visualize the circuit of this **deadly engine of capital accumulation** are presented. Knowing how violent social environmental conflicts are associated with economic process can be a first step towards understanding processes of violence that can help to produce a more peaceful human condition.

### **World system and local violence**

Industry and technology are a form of fetish. They hide their process, what they really do in the process of transformation: not really improving the transformation, but rather displacing to different territories the burdens of industry. A fetish as something that people are fascinated and though away from seeing the truth behind it, as Karl Marx defines the idea of commodity fetishism in *Capital*, in which the economic relationships between the money and commodities exchanged in market trade hides the social relationship embedded.

As the anthropologist Alf Hornborg (2006, 2015) argues, technology is, in this sense, a cultural category fetishizing social relations. The author describes in his work the circulation of material in a world system that interconnects places of industrial production to sites of extraction of raw material and the working class used during this process. In a very simple way: the industrial revolution in England has been made possible thanks to the displacement of slaves from Africa into large territory in the United States, where indigenous groups have been dispossessed.

Industrial production is a complex worldwide network, functioning in a world system (Wallerstein 1974) that cannot be ignored when we see a local extraction. But one would have a hard time finding everything

that is used in the chain to produce one good, and its impact on the poor in the South, while buying something at a supermarket in a nice city in the global North.

Extractives systems, in the example provided by geographer Stephen Bunker (1984), has contributed to technical and financial advances in industrial nations, “while leaving the Amazon desperately impoverished”, damaging the environment and many societies that lives there (Bunker 2005). It means that costs and benefits are unequally distributed worldwide. In general, the local conditions of extraction shape international strategies to export.

## Environmental Violence

Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts have described violence associated to socio-environmental conflicts, in a book collecting global works presented in a conference in Berkley at the first year of this century, in what they have named “**violent environments**”. Violence, in their definition, is “a phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations, also connected to transnational processes of material change, political power relations, and historical conjuncture” (Peluso and Watts, 2001).

There are different explanations seeking to provide a framework to comprehend how supply chains can produce violence in local sites of extraction of raw material or in the industry. These conflicts follow the sequence, as argues the economist Joan Martinez Alier (2002): **social metabolism** is increasing in the world, in energy and materials; there are ecological distribution conflicts, such as resource extraction, transport, waste disposal conflicts, at the “**commodity frontiers**”. The increase of world metabolism needs raw material and energy. Even the improvement of technology will need new types of raw material, and produce new types of socio-environmental conflicts, such as tropical forest rubber for tire, or just for fashion, like jaguar skin, diamond, gold, etc.

Violence can be structural and direct, according to Galtung (1969), or it can even be slow, as described by Rob Nixon (2011), without taking much attention by the media. To find the **systemic violence**, as writes Slavoj Zizek (2008), “we need to perceive the contours of the

background which generates such outbursts”, once objective violence is “invisible”.

It is not easy to uncover the causes of systemic violence, and Zizek gives the example of a story published at Time magazine on the “deadliest war in the World”, and it came with a story about violence in Congo, offering a “detailed documentation on how around 4 million people died in the Democratic Republic of Congo as the result of political violence over the last decade”. The author comments: “*The Congo today has effectively re-emerged as a Conradian ‘heart of darkness’*”.

Here is a central point to our argument: by the time Joseph Conrad wrote the classical novel “The Heart of Darkness”, was Congo just a wild violent zone of savage tribes killing each other, or was the violence a product of colonialism and the expansion of capitalism through the extraction of rubber during king Leopold II rule in Belgium?

Jean Luc Vellu answers this question: Conrad have offered a romantic view to the West of the deep Africa, a place with phantoms, fear and the evil, but he has left outside the main point to be exposed, the brutal violence of colonialism associated rubber economy. It was Edmund Morel who made public with the book correctly naming rubber as “red”: *Red Rubber: The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906*.

Same as the violent rubber extraction in the Congo was the system in the Amazon, the biggest producer of rubber in the world by that time. The “British Congo” in the Amazon denouncing extreme violence against indigenous people first appeared in the magazine Truth, in 1909, with a series of articles by the American engineer Walter Hardenburg entitled “The Devil’s Paradise: a British Owned Congo”.

The United Kingdom sent right after the diplomat Roger Casement, who has met Conrad in Congo, to investigate the crimes. The “Casement Putumayo Report”, presented to the House of Commons and published in 1913, is what we can call today the very start of the “**boomerang effect**” in modern economy, and a work that have inspired many political and economic pressures by organisations worldwide in defending human rights and the environment. Casement present in 136 pages report after seven weeks of travel in 1910 in the Amazon along Putumayo river, details of “terror and tortures”, as explains Tausig, together with “Casement’s explanations of causes and his estimate of the toll in human life”: “For twelve years from 1900, the Putumayo

output of some 4,000 tons of rubber cost thousands of Indians their lives. Deaths from torture, disease, and possibly flight had decreased the population of the area by around 30, 00 during that time” (Taussig, 1987: 474). Terror and violence was associated with and organized by Peruvian Rubber Company, owned by Julio Cesar Arana that was trading rubber with the UK.

**Market pressure** is not the only element that produces local violence, but it is the main driver. There are other world trade commodities, such as diamonds and timber, for example, that are organized through violent process of extraction locally, and which have international demand. In some cases, like Hardenburg in the past, NGOs have succeeded in denouncing widely the crimes associated with the extraction of these goods.

### Conflict Diamonds

Global Witness was amongst the first organisations to bring the world’s attention to the problem of conflict diamonds, also known as ‘**blood diamonds**’. Global Witness’ ground-breaking report, *A Rough Trade*, released in 1998, exposed the role of diamonds in funding the civil war in Angola. This thrust the secretive practices of the global diamond industry into the spotlight for the first time.



**Figure 14: Catoca Diamond Mine, Angola. Fourth largest mine in the world and owned by a consortium of international mining companies including Endiama, Alrosa, and Odebrecht. (Source: <http://www.rubel-menasche.com>)**

The organization describes conflict diamonds as “diamonds that are used to fuel violent conflict and human rights abuses”. They name their working as “*breaking the links between international supply chains and violent conflict*”.



“Revenues from the extraction and trade of these natural resources can give abusive armed groups the means to operate and can provide off-budget funding to State security forces and corrupt officials.”

Lightweight, valuable and easy to mine and smuggle, rough diamonds have been responsible for fuelling some of the worst armed conflict in Africa—from Sierra Leone and Liberia to Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

For over a decade the Canadian NGO called PAC has been at the forefront of a global campaign to stop violence in diamond producing areas and create a responsibly managed diamond supply chain. Diamonds are often used to shore up threatened political elites, perpetuate corruption and deprive state coffers of much needed revenues.

After the situation of violence was exposed, a protocol called Kimberly Process was signed under the United Nations.

### **Tropical Blood Wood**

Bloodwood is a type of Amazon wood. It has the red colour and it's used in furnishing, electric guitars, etc. But it is also an expression of blood in the same sense of the blood diamond: **timber extraction** in conflict zones that produce different forms of violence against the environment and local populations.

In 2014 Greenpeace has released an international campaign against illegal timber extracted from the Amazon.



**Figure 15: Jose Claudio Ribeiro da Silva, Brazilian Environmental activist. (Source: <http://whoami-whoareyou.blogspot.it>)**

The report “The Amazon’s Silent Crisis” shows that the Brazilian timber control system is flawed and allows illegal timber to be laundered with official documentation and sold: “Illegal and predatory timber destroys remote areas of forest, drives deforestation and is linked to the violence against traditional forest dependent com-

munities such as indigenous people”. It was named: license to launder. The meaning is the different mechanism loggers found in Brazilian legal system to turn illegal timber into legal to reach internal and international markets. But it is not just an economic and market problem, or a juridical one: it has an intense use of violence in the system against the ones who are living of the forest.

Some references was the story published in 2007 called *Blood Wood* (“Madeiras de Sangue” by Felipe Milanez), in Rolling Stone magazine, where it was exposed that the violence and killings in Colniza, the most violent place in the entire Amazon, was related to the extraction of timber to supply national and international markets. Official data reported that **165 per 100.000 people were killed every year**.

The main target in the Amazon has always been the same, as when Chico Mendes was killed in 1988: popular environmental activists. In a very simple way, José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva, a traditional Brazil nut gathers, explained in a TEDTalk: “I denounce, and they think I should not exist.” José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and Maria do Espírito Santo were killed by two gunmen in 24 may 2011. José Cláudio advices to the audience were: do not buy any goods from the forest illegally produced.

## Conclusions

The process of capital accumulation and the expansion of capital are a violent process **dispossessing people worldwide**. The practices of primitive accumulation can serve as a transition from a structural violence based on inequalities, to a direct and fatal violence. International political institutions can provide a regulatory framework towards a more peaceful condition of human existence and of capitalism. At least, less deadly.

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The Kimberly Process

## 2.4 Waste and money: on the driving forces of illegal waste disposal

*Salvatore Paolo De Rosa*

### Prologue

The **Pellini** Group is a family-run company managed by the three Pellini brothers, active in the sector of waste management and disposal. Headquarter is in the town of Acerra, an agricultural town near Napoli, in Campania region, Southern Italy. The company began its activities in the 1980s: at that time, it was a small firm dealing with wastewater from sewage system. Throughout the years, the Pellini increased the size and the scope of their business. In the early 2000s, people in **Acerra** remained quite puzzled after seeing the Pellini brothers crossing the town in Ferrari, and the confusion became real shock when they started flying around in their own private helicopter. After all, they were only dealing with garbage. How could they become millionaires in such short time?

The answers were to be found in the police investigations uncovering in 2006 the role of Pellini Group in a network dedicated to the illegal management and disposal of industrial waste. Even though engaging in an illegal activity, this network involved several legal corporate entities: from respectable industries of national relevance (the waste producers), to shipping firms and treatment facilities (the transit segment), to dumping sites (the final stage of the cycle, and the Pellinis' task). The involvement of corrupted police officers and government control bodies was fundamental to the traffic. They would close both eyes when the hazardous waste was wildly dumped in sand quarries, agricultural fields and water channels. Mafia-type organizations were also involved: smoothing the process, establishing the connections, overseeing the operations and receiving tributes. The clients who benefited from their services were legal industries from Northern Italy, in particular from Tuscany and Veneto regions, which cut the costs of expensive procedures of correct waste disposal by handling the scraps from their production processes to the Pellinis, thus adding up profits on their corporate balance sheet. Prosecutors estimated the quantity of industrial waste "tre-

ated” by Pellinis in one million ton, generating a turnover of 27 million euro.

When the trial against Pellini ended in December 2013, the fall of their stinky economic empire was a bitter victory: only 4 years of jail to each and the right to keep their assets. This was a slap on the face of thousands people that for decades to come will suffer the outcomes of the poisons stuffed in the earth by Pellini.

## **Criminal Capitalism**

The story of Pellinis’ rise and fall is not at all a folklorist account of Southern Europe’s underdevelopment. Rather, it exemplifies a recurrent praxis within contemporary global capitalism: the **intertwining and the mutual benefits of legal and illegal economies**. In other words, crime is becoming a customary tool for legal businesses to engage in lawless profiteering and to beat competitors (Hudson 2013). The main features of this practice are the search for maximization of profits and the shifting of “negative externalities” onto less powerful actors and communities through the circumvention of laws and regulations (Martinez-Alier 1994).

In this contribution, the case of Campania is used as an explanatory enactment of strategies of profit making that blur the demarcation between legal and illegal economic practices and that produce disastrous consequences for local communities. These insights will focus on hazardous waste management issues, but they illustrate an underlying tendency of contemporary business corporate behaviour. With this piece, there is an attempt to provide an analytical tool for activists, NGOs and civil society: where most of the mainstream accounts of illegal economies refer to these processes as anomalies in the smooth functioning of market economy, the contribution invites to look at their fundamental role in maintaining and reproducing **capitalist accumulation** cycles and **power hierarchies**.

## Toxic waste colonialism

The global production of hazardous waste from industries is increasing, both in developed and in developing countries. Recent research points to the fact that, since 1940, the amount of industrial waste produced worldwide has increased from 10 million tons to more than 400 million tons per year (Sende, 2010). Most of this waste is not treated in proximity of the places where it is produced. The process of globalization and the liberalization of international trade policies precipitated a North to South trade in hazardous waste that often causes widespread contamination in the receiving countries. Only a fraction of the international waste shipments comply with the legal procedures. Indeed, much of this trade is illicit. Scholars and activists have labelled the transnational hazardous waste trade, in its legal and illegal forms, toxic waste colonialism.

Money is the key motivating factor for toxic waste colonialism. When compliance costs in developed countries are coupled with an increased quantity of waste and local opposition to disposal, they generally produce drastically increased disposal costs for hazardous waste (Pratt, 2011). Therefore, the shipping of waste to countries that lack strict regulations and enforcement schemes becomes a profitable economic solution. The international community began tackling the issue in 1989 with the Basel Convention, which regulates transnational shipment and disposal of hazardous waste. However, still today, countries in the South continue to be the illegal recipients of growing amounts of waste produced in the North: the rules are easily circumvented and a highly lucrative black market of hazardous waste has emerged. When the illegal waste shipment routes toward less developed nations are detected and dismantled by police investigations, industries in the developed world increasingly turn to intranational traffic and disposal routes.

## Industry calls, Mafia responds

Italy can be seen as a case of a “Global South” dynamic in the “Global North”. In this country, the presence of organised crime and mafia-like groups mainly based in the Southern regions, together with the presence of industrial districts that produce a large amount of toxic waste, mainly based in the Northern regions, has nourished the rapid development of an extensive domestic illegal market for the toxic waste.

The importance of the role played by mafia groups in waste trafficking in Italy is reflected in the neologism *Ecomafia*, a word that was first coined by the Italian environmental organisation Legambiente in 1994. According to the environmental NGO, annually at least 15–20% of waste in Italy disappears between production and final storage or disposal. This ‘ghost waste’ fuels a rich illegal economy: in 2013, earnings produced by the illegal management of hazardous and non-ha-

zardous waste in Italy have been estimated at almost 3.1 billion Euros (Legambiente 2014).

Trafficking in toxic waste has developed in Italy since the second half of the 1980s. Progressively fuelled by the growth in the waste production, and because of the high profits and low, almost non-existent risks, this highly lucrative market has expanded rapidly. The region of **Campania** in the South of Italy has been one of the main terminals of the toxic waste trade. For at least thirty years, complex networks involving legal corporate entities, criminal organizations and government officials cooperated in the dumping of thousands tons of hazardous materials in unsuitable places throughout Campania, turning the environment into a **toxic landscape**.

When the case exploded in the media, thanks to the social mobilizations of civic associations from Campania, the narration that emerged in national and international accounts of the issue posited the **camorra** (the mafia-type organization historically rooted in this region) as the main driver and accomplice of the trade. This rhetoric's aim was to downplay the involvement of legal industries in the traffic, depicting them as victims rather than drivers.

A closer look at the police investigations that in recent years uncovered the illicit traffic reveals a different story: the main actors seeking the services of *camorra* were distinct executives with no criminal background but eager to pay half of the price, compared to the legal market, for getting rid of the hazardous waste from their industries. Moreover, only the existence of political protection, of **white-collar** participation, and the involvement of entrepreneurs from transport sector to landfill management, made this business possible. By crossing their declarations with the facts uncovered by police investigations, we get a more nuanced picture of this traffic and a better assessment of the shared responsibility of the actors involved.



Figure 16: A special unit of Italian fire-fighters analyse an illegal waste dump uncovered under cultivated fields in Caivano, near Naples, on September 2013. In the photo on the right, it is possible to read the label of one of the barrels unearthed from the illegal dump: it says “Milano”, an industrial centre in Northern Italy. Source: Corriere della Sera.

## Garbage is gold

Italian prosecutors learned that **domestic hazardous waste** trafficking was something more than an occasional crime in 1992. During the course of the first high profile investigation in the issue, codenamed *Adelphi*, the former Neapolitan mafia boss Nunzio Perrella simply told them “*I don’t deal with drug anymore. Now I have another business. It pays more and the risk is much less. It’s called garbage. For us, garbage is gold*”. Going further into the investigations, prosecutors realized that illegal hazardous waste management was an expanding market fuelled by the increasing demand of the corporate sector and relying on the cooperation of State officials.

The *Adelphi* investigation opened the Pandora’s Box. On the basis of the evidence collected, prosecutors arrested the former environmental councillor of Naples Province, Raffaele Perrone Capano. His contribution to the traffic was the issuing of landfill authorizations, for which he was receiving compensation based on the quantity of incoming waste. All the landfills authorized by Perrone Capano were used throughout two decades for disposing illegally hazardous waste from Northern Italy. Among these, the Resit landfill, in the municipality of Giugliano, represents probably the most dangerous dump of the eco-criminals’ legacy. According to a geological assessment commissioned



by the DDA (Anti-Mafia District Directorate) in 2013, the Resit is filled with hazardous waste to such an extent that by 2064 the weight of the waste will break through the subterranean layer of tuff penetrating the underground aquifer, thus threatening all life forms in an area of at least twenty square kilometres.

The owner of the Resit is a lawyer and entrepreneur recently charged of “environmental disaster” and currently in jail. His name is Cipriano Chianese, and he is considered by prosecutors the *inventor* of the illegal toxic waste trade toward Campania. During the 1980s, Chianese built a wide network of friendships with powerful people in Campania and elsewhere in Italy. According to the declaration of several informers, it was him to bridge the connection between the *camorra*'s clans and members of the Freemasonry in touch with the most prominent legal productive forces of the nation.

In 1989, around the same table, *camorra*'s bosses, owners of waste facilities and shipment companies, and the referents from the Italian industrial sector, made a dirty deal: hazardous waste would travel toward Campania on the routes set up by the network of entrepreneurs near to *camorra* and it would end up in their facilities or wildly dumped; in exchange for the support of the mafia organization, entrepreneurs would pay a tax to them that would also fuel the corruption of public officials; industries would have their waste “treated” at half of the price and on papers everything would look “clean”. Finally, the falsification of accompanying certificates and the distribution of bribes would smooth the entire process. This deal allowed for the turning of Campania into a waste-land, while *camorra*, criminal entrepreneurs, complicit professionals and corrupted officials all gained illegal profits. The social and ecological costs of these operations have been shifted on the people and the ecosystems that are still waiting for land remediation projects which appear arduous and expensive.

What seems to differ from the traditional interpretation of mafia groups as economic parasites in the actual logic of the illegal waste trade, is the fact that *camorra* does not get profits through threats or violence toward the entrepreneurs, as in more classical schemes of racketeering. Rather, it appears that **industries themselves seek the help of *camorra***, and the same goes for many other entrepreneurs and professionals, eager to offer their services for participating in the business. The police investigation codenamed *Houdini* has shown that the

market cost to properly dispose certain kinds of toxic waste imposed prices ranging from 21 cents to 62 cents per kilo, while the eco-criminal network provided the same service at 9 or 10 cents per kilo. Ultimately, companies engaging in illegal disposal will do much better in terms of economic performance. Yes, it is a polluted market, but it is still a market.

Once police investigations collected evidences, arrested criminals and seized facilities, the ordeal passes to tribunals and magistrates. In Italy, the crime of “illegal waste traffic” has been codified in law in 2001; that of “**environmental disaster**” only in 2014. According to activists’ groups and NGOs these laws still need improvements: by strengthening the sanctions for traffickers; by allowing the seizing of all assets earned through the criminal activity; by implementing polluters pay schemes. The legislation dealing with environmental crimes is of prominent importance in order to create the basis for effective repressive strategies of the waste trade but to weaken further the corporate crime behaviour, laws improvement should go together with the involvement of the productive sector into partnerships and procedures aimed to the transparency, tracking and improved certification schemes for all phases of the production process.

## Final thoughts

This contribution aimed to show the leading role in the illegal hazardous waste trade taken by legal corporate entities seeking to save money. The need of the productive sector for cheap disposal met with the predatory economic behaviour of criminal organizations, more as a gentlemen’s agreement rather than as a case of extortion. The **congeries of actors** revolving around the business (transport companies, chemical laboratories, state officials and so on) were **all fundamental** to the traffic, trying to get a scrub of the rich toxic pie. Therefore, it is misleading to talk about the environmental disaster of Campania only in terms of mafia crimes, giving the leading role to mere actors in what is better understood as an organized corporate crime.

It is indeed more fruitful to focus not only on the characteristics of the offenders, but also, in particular, on the techniques used to perpetrate these sorts of crimes. Evidence from police investigations shows

how these actors often demonstrate the same illegal know-how. At the same time, **mafia-type organizations** are increasingly reinvesting capitals from illegal activities into the legal market, often constituting successful business entities and becoming **undistinguishable from their legal partners**. Moreover, in times of economic crisis, mafias have access to unregistered cash flows that become funds for the credit system and the financial markets. Investigation and trials point to an ongoing **incorporation of illegal economies into legal ones** (Massari and Monzini, 2006).

This is an invitation to look at what is hidden behind so-called organized crime: it may reveal nothing more than a criminal, underlying tendency of (disaster) capitalism itself in its search for cutting costs in any conceivable way.

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## 2.5 Tales of dispossession in times of crisis: Lessons from Greece

Giorgos Velegrakis

*“They don’t violate merely against our bodies. They violate against our dignity, our beliefs, and our common struggle to save our land and environment, our attempts to build a different future.”*

Rania V., activist of the anti-gold socio-environmental movement, Halkidiki, Greece

*“Politics as public management, then, stands in contrast to the political as the sphere of agonistic dispute and struggle over the environments we wish to inhabit and on how to produce them. There is a tendency for the first to suture, and ultimately disavow or foreclose, the former.”*

E. Swyngedouw, Depoliticization (“The Political”) in “Degrowth: Vocabulary of a new era”

In Halkidiki, northern Greece from 2010 on, local communities have been resisting the transformation of their land into an **open cast gold extraction mine** for the Canadian company Eldorado Gold. Cassandra mines, in the area of Halkidiki operate since 6th century BC and from 1950 up to the present date, national and international consecutive companies continue the extraction of metals mainly in caves. Mining activity was tolerated by local communities, as it created employment locally. Yet the present case is different. In 2011, following a long story of ambiguous government decisions and scandalous agreements the Greek state agreed to long-term contracts for the exploitation of the deposits for a ludicrously small sum-ceding 31.000 ha. The new extraction method is problematic too: Open-pit gold copper ore mine together with flash melting that can lead to the implementation of **cyanide**. The method creates irreversible and negative consequences on local environment. These consequences together with the social and economic consequences have mobilised thousands of local communities’ residents to fight against the project.

The case of gold-extraction in Halkidiki is only one chapter in the

“book of dispossessions” in Greece during the crisis period. The exploitation of land, natural elements and public infrastructure nowadays in Greece comprise investment targets for local and international speculative capital at some unprecedented extent, intensity and geographical spread. Land dispossession is not a simple outcome of Greece’s obligation to repay its debt. In fact, there is a significant change in governing socio-spatial relations within the current debt crisis. A new pattern is currently being created and is radically different from the traditional pattern that covered the long period between the end of the Greek civil war in 1949 and the beginning of the public debt crisis in 2009. The new form is based on big foreign and domestic investments, land grabbing through privatization schemes, and efforts to extract monopoly rent.

Are these processes part of what could be described as disaster capitalism? We argue that the social and ecological catastrophe which local and international elites imposed upon Greece is a systemic process to make sure the European neoliberal model could be sustained. In this context disaster capitalism is translated into specific policies that are “justified”, “legal” and almost “natural”, so that homo economicus in the neoliberal era can go on with **business as usual**. In this sense we face capitalism’s tendency to “create” disasters: new forms of enclosures, new modes for realising higher profits that contribute to renewed socio-environmental crises.

Is this strategy unchallenged? In Greece within the crisis period intense socio-ecological movements (such as the anti-gold initiative in Halkidiki) have showed up to tackle this rationality and not only fight for but “**produce radically new environments** against the dominant ones”. These movements and protests brought up a significant change against the neoliberal “There Is No Alternative – TINA” framework: They are keeping democracy and “the political” alive. The new social and socio-ecological movements under certain circumstances have a threefold importance: a) they put into practice democracy and **democratic procedures** at all levels, b) they **challenge power relations** and alienation that capitalism produces and c) they fight for an “**open future**”: a desire for the world to be radically different. And as Loftus (2012) argues this desire is “a commonplace one: nearly always more a stifled anger than a revolutionary cry, the challenge, surely, is to understand the movement of this anger, to learn from it, to build on it, and transcend it in both humble and democratic ways.”

## Socio-ecological relations at stake...

In Greece, since 2010 and the first bailout program between Greece and its creditors (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund), urban and rural space is being actively remade through a double devaluation of labour and nature. As a result, land and environment dispossession is rapidly increasing. For example, land and housing values have lost 20–35% of their commercial value since 2008 (Hadjimichalis, 2014a); at the same time, the devaluation of land is linked to policy changes proposed through austerity packages that specifically imposed massive public land privatizations. The majority of new laws implemented to drive this strategy, are a direct product of the monetary fiscal policies implemented by the creditors to “stimulate development”. This has been achieved through:

- the elimination of legal provisions for the protection of the environment,
- the constant weakening of the already feeble environmental governance and spatial planning framework,
- the rapid approval of large-scale private investments on land with irreversible consequences on local environments and
- the undermining of the protection status of ecologically precious natural areas.

In addition, a programme involving **mass privatization of state-owned assets** is being imposed. A big part of these assets consists of real estate. The process is managed by the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF – in Greek TAIPED). TAIPED was legally established in 2011 under the so-called ‘medium-term fiscal strategy’. This law allows project-led planning inside the boundaries of TAIPED properties, distinct from plan-led planning system in the rest of the national space. In particular, the intensive land uses applied to TAIPED properties are shaped to facilitate the implication of an investment plan. Investors see this as the biggest advantage of the new legal framework. In sharp contrast with previous development planning, which centred on small-scale land owners and small building projects, the new projects by international or domestic investors focus on larger land parcels, and the fortification of segregated spaces as privileged enclaves emerging in contrast to more humble urban and rural environments. As a result, the **extraction of monopoly rent from new real estate investments**

is becoming the dominant source of general rent in Greece.

The aims of spatial cohesion, environmental protection and socio-economic justice, are rejected in the spirit of “new investments” to overcome the crisis.

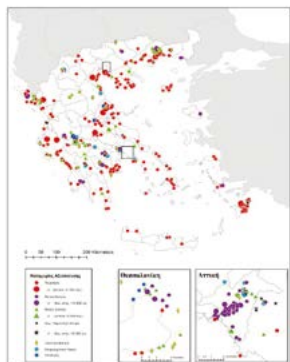


Figure 17: Assets of Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF – in Greek TAIPED) including public land, buildings and infrastructures for sale. (Source: Hadjimichalis, 2014b)

The ongoing Greek tragedy shows that aspects of the nowadays disaster capitalism is the intensification of neoliberal shock therapy and the promotion of the TINA ideology. When it comes to space and socio-spatial relations, a new **paradigm shift** for land and local, urban and regional development is put in place to promote capital accumulation regardless of the effects on local societies and environment. Therefore, we should conceptualise (disaster) capitalism as a constant process of **depoliticization** (Swyngedouw, 2015) and **de-democratization** (Brown, 2013) in order to unquestionably accept economic growth as the only possible mode of accessing nature and capitalism as the only reasonable form of organizing socio-natural relations. There is not just a domination of economy over the political but rather a domination of capital accumulation over the imaginaries of different social relations and socio-natural transformation. This context is both de-politicized since there is a tendency to make the ecological and social crisis manageable with the help of mere technical and organisational adaptations and de-democratized since there is a replacement of the subject who chooses its ends and means with one who has only one end, namely to enhance its value as human capital.

### ... And the struggles for alternatives

The TINA ideological and political framework has been challenged by very intense social and environmental struggles all over Greece. These struggles have their origins in different social strata, geographical scales, political views and perspectives. Nevertheless, they have

succeeded into giving voice to Greek citizens who “can and must decide their future and maintaining that despite declarations by European Union officials, and their allies in Greece, “there is an alternative”. Such initiatives and social movements are:

- the solidarity networks (including food initiatives, social clinics, groceries and pharmacies) all over the country,
- the water and sewerage anti-privatization movement in Thessaloniki,
- the anti-gold extraction movement in Halkidiki,
- the movement against house evictions in different neighbourhoods in Athens,
- the initiative for a metropolitan park at the former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens,
- the environmental movements against large scale windmill projects on different Greek islands,
- the environmental struggle against landfill projects in the greater metropolitan area of Athens
- the occupation of the VIOME factory (under workers’ control) in Northern Greece

There are debates on whether those initiatives present a continuation or a change of the pre-2010 anti-austerity mobilizations or the anti-globalisation movement between 2000 and 2010. Nevertheless, it is obvious that apart from a “traditional” progressive stance towards development to overcome the present framework, alternative ideas are coming to the fore regarding, democracy and alternatives. The social mobilisations, movements and initiatives at the moment in Greece:

provide an immediate response to the needs of those mostly affected by the crisis, and therefore prioritize social needs as the essential starting point for thinking about any alternative

- provide structures of social solidarity and spaces for new democratic procedures
- challenge power relations
- put the questions of justice, welfare state and human rights
- experience self-management
- relate directly to ecological concerns and socio-ecological transformation
- challenge the current patterns of production and consumption





Figure 18: Pictures from different mobilisations and protest during the Greek crisis period: a) “SOS Halkidiki” anti-gold social movement, Northern Greece b) Social movement against house evictions in Athens, c) “People’s assembly in Syntagma Square, Athens, d) The logo of “VIO-ME factory occupation”, near Thessaloniki, Northern Greece

Furthermore, these counter-hegemonic experiences and practices re-politicise and re-democratise the debate about development, justice, decision making processes and power relations. Furthermore they question economic growth as the only possible mode of accessing nature and capitalism as the only reasonable form of organizing socio-natural relations.

## Conclusions

The uneven spatiality of TINA produce a sharpened process of uneven development where the concentration of wealth that sits at the top 0.1% rather than an already hideous 1%, recognized elsewhere. What is also clear (not only in the case of Greece) is that the current policy repertoire to tackle this pattern of development is inadequate: unemployment increases, the gutting of the welfare state, and the privatization of public land and infrastructure. We cannot overstate how, essentially, the EU project is dominated by political economic elites, who are attempting to create and prioritize a new space of European accumulation, namely Greece.

The result of such a strategy is myriad tensions. Let’s hope that such tensions will continue to lead to political movements that challenge and say “no” to the forms of uneven development, as we describe above. As Hadjimichalis and Hudson argue (2014) “The task then [for radical social scientists and social movements] is to search for theories and policies beyond neoliberalism, to re-establish the values and priorities for social and spatial justice”. We would add, there is also a chal-

lenge to bring together an entire series of localised responses to the symptoms of uneven development into a broader political programme that actually confronts the disparities and inequities that permit such system changes in the first place.

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Chapter 3.  
Struggles over  
the commons: Between  
enclosures and commoning

*Gustavo García López  
Diego Andreucci  
Jonah Wedekind*

*Editor: Gustavo García López*

### 3.1 Introduction

The concept of the “**commons**” is becoming more widely deployed in diverse setting, spanning academia and civil society, governments and international organisations. This chapter introduces the commons from a political ecology perspective. Our aim is to show how commons are central to grassroots, solidarity-based cooperation in struggles for alternatives to the **hegemonic** state-market organization of our society and our ecology; and to situate the commons in the current political economy of capitalist ‘**development**’. We propose that a political ecology approach can help civil society organizations identify the processes through which commons are enclosed (with)in the capitalist economy. Conversely, a political ecology approach can also help to understand the manifold and ingenious actions to protect and reclaim commons, and to situate these actions within a wider project of social, political-economic and ecological change.

#### What are the commons?

The term commons originated in England to refer to lands (“common lands”) which, regardless of who owned them<sup>7</sup>, were open to villagers for traditional access and use rights such as livestock grazing and collection of firewood, before they were gradually privatized (“**enclosed**”) with the expansion of individual property rights beginning in the 16th century. Similar commons existed in other parts of Europe, and all across the world. In fact before colonization indigenous groups mostly managed lands and other resources as commons, and many continue to do so today.

The meaning of “commons” has been extended in several ways over time. Some authors define the commons as shared (or “common-pool”) goods or **resources** that are used by many individuals, such as forests, fisheries, water, the air, and even knowledge. Others emphasize that the commons refer to not just resources, but two other inseparable dimensions: the **communities** that have longstanding re-

.....  
7 Most in fact were owned by the English Crown and large feudalist landowners

lations to these resources (the commoners), and the social practices of **cooperation** (the act of “commoning”) and collectively defined and enforced rules (“**institutions**”) that allow these communities to manage the resources sustainably for collective benefit. As David Bollier put it: **Commons = Resources + Communities + Commoning**. In addition, commons operate in a particular *territory*, which as explained by anthropologist Susana Sawyer, is not just “the physical and material contours of a region” but actually “encompasses moral-cosmological and political–economic complexes that shape identity and social relations” (Sawyer, 2004, p.83).

Contemporary examples of commons include seed-sharing cooperatives; communities of open-source software and hardware programmers; alternative currency groups; indigenous and peasant communities collectively managing forest lands, fisheries, and other resources for subsistence livelihoods; urban vegetable gardens and community-supported agriculture projects; and cooperative housing. These practices often embody cooperative and autonomous self-organization of groups of individuals that seek to address common issues beyond the bureaucratic solutions of the state or the market. These initiatives usually operate at the local level, though oftentimes they also form part of regional, national or global networks.

### **The commons as “tragedy” versus commons as possibility**

The **hegemonic** view since the 17th century has been that self-interest prevents people from coming together to sustainably manage common resources. This view has been strongly influenced by the economics model of “rational egoist” individuals, in which individuals always act in pursuit of a calculated maximization of their own interests, usually without consideration of others. Biologist Garret Hardin (1968), following this view, argued there was a “**tragedy of the commons**”: people using a “common resource” (e.g. fishery, grazing land) would be compelled by their own interest to extract as much as possible in the short-term until depleting a resource, because if they did not do so,

other users would<sup>8</sup>.



Figure 19: Illustrations by James Yang. Source: <http://sharinglab.dk/theimportance-of-the-commons/>

The same narrative is present today, in **discourses** that fixate on the idea of “**resource wars**” as an inescapable result of increasing resource scarcity. This is an example of a classic **apolitical** narrative of ecological degradation, where the causes are natural or biological: in this

case, a purported inherent egoist competitive ‘nature’ of human beings, coupled with a population boom and the ‘wrong’ type of legal property regime. This view provided support to a process of **enclosures** (see below) of many commons around the world that came in parallel to the globalization of capitalism. According to this logic, the only way to avoid increasing and worsening tragedies brought on by unregulated access to resources is through strong state control or private (market) ownership over resources and populations. Hardin, as most mainstream thinkers then and today, preferred private property, which was seen as the most ‘efficient’ use of resources as well as the most individual ‘freedom’ to citizens— an idea that had become hegemonic since at least the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Code in the 18th century.

Important critical scholars throughout history have challenged this view, from Marx to anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin. Citizens themselves have also challenges this through acts of overt mobilizations and resistance to enclosures as well as through every day practices of commoning. Commons, in fact, have never ceased to exist, despite the attempts to erase them from history. Over the past two decades, howe-

.....  
8 Hardin drew on the writings of British economist W.F. Lloyd, a central figure in the intellectual justification of the enclosure of the commons in England in the 1800s.

ver, scholarly and practical challenges have become more pronounced, as accumulated history and current events show that around the world, people do organize to collectively protect and sustainably manage their **territories, commons**, and lives. This renewed interest is related to many social struggles across the world that have sought to reclaim the commons. In academia and policy circles, it is usually associated to the work of the late political scientist Elinor Ostrom. She and other scholars showed that more often than not, communities developed rules (“**institutions**”) that allowed them to control egoistic interests and sustainably use collective resources. They also identified characteristics of diverse institutional arrangements, which Ostrom called “design principles”, in long-lasting sustainable commons governance. These principles include local autonomy to design, monitor and enforce institutions; a level of equality between costs and benefits of participation; and integration (“nestedness”) of local commons into organizations at multiple levels, e.g. regional or national. Finally, institutional scholars have underscored the central importance of deliberation, trust and reciprocity between people in overcoming individual interests to cooperate.

The Ostrom school, however, still operates within a mainstream



Figure 20: Illustrations by James Yang. (Source: <http://sharinglab.dk/the-importance-of-the-commons/>)

paradigm of “rational choice”, where individuals’ main objective for cooperation is maximizing profit and institutions emerge as a beneficial solution to all participants. A political ecology approach instead focuses on how power, inequality, and capitalist **political economy** in general, affects

the possibilities of creating and sustaining commons.



## The tragedy of enclosures

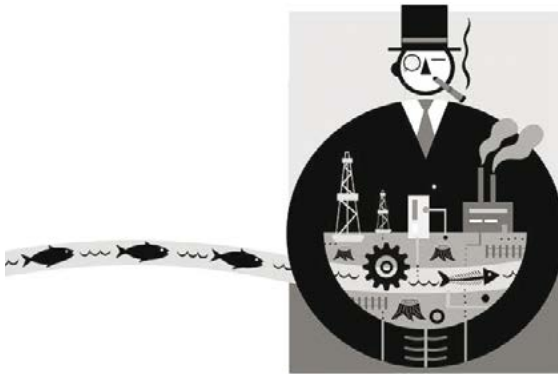
Along with other disciplines, a political ecology approach rejects the “tragedy” discourse, as referred to in the introduction, while recognizing grassroots cooperation in the commons; however, political ecology emphasizes different dimensions of commons.

First, political ecology provides an understanding of the **political economy** in which commons are situated. It emphasizes that the over-exploitation of commons is not, at its root, a consequence of people’s inability to collectively self-manage, but of larger political-economic forces that often privatize lands, displace communities, foster inequalities and elite dominance, and plunder resources. Commons have historically been subjected to **enclosures** by the state and private actors to facilitate capitalist ‘**development**’ (for instance, mega-dams, transportation, mining, timber and agricultural plantations), and for human-excluding nature conservation (protected areas). Enclosures are forced – often violent – separation of commoners from their means of production and subsistence through: physical displacement, regulating away certain traditional usage rights, or contamination which renders commons unfit for subsistence activities. Such a separation has a double objective. It “frees up” land and assets for private appropriation and inclusion into circuits of capital accumulation (“**commodification**”). It also forces those people who can no longer access their means of subsistence to become ‘workers’ (sell their labour) in the capitalist economy in order to survive (“**proletarianisation**”).

The English agricultural commons were progressively enclosed from the 16th century onward – first to pave way for the expansion of more intensive, export-oriented agriculture (for sheep wool, for instance). By the 19th century the European commons had been reduced to small areas of mountainous lands. Karl Marx labelled this enclosure as part of what he called “original” or “**primitive accumulation**”, linked to the emergence of capitalism. Marx in *Capital* had already noted how these processes at the origin of capitalism were not restricted to Europe, but closely related with colonialism, to “the discovery of gold and silver in America”, the enslavement of local populations, and “the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins”.

The enclosure of the commons has continued to be central to the process of capital accumulation throughout the history of capitalism.

Geographer David Harvey labelled this “**accumulation by dispossession**” (see 1.4). It reflects that commons in general, and nature in particular, have become a key “accumulation strategy” of contemporary capitalism, distinct from the “normal” capital accumulation (based on labour exploitation), and that this strategy has often (though not always) been violent. A common case is the concession of mineral and oil deposits, forests, agricultural and other common resources to private companies for their large-scale, intensive exploitation, which critics have called **extractivism** (see 1.4, 1.5, 3.2, 4.3). Enclosures are also associated to privatisation of water services, patenting of genetic materials, and carbon trade schemes, among others. Two of the most important facets of this new wave of enclosures, particularly in the “global South”, are an intensification of **extractivism** and the associated theft, purchase or lease of land for large-scale agriculture and biofuels but also for conservation (called **land grabbing**).



**Figure 21: Enclosure of commons.** (Source: <http://www.utne.com/environment/history-of-the-commonszm0z13mjzbla.aspx>)

In the following sections we provide further analyses of the processes of enclosures, extractivism and land grabbing, focused on the historical and on-going dispossessions from mining activities in indigenous territories Bolivia; the history of enclosures and commoning in Mexican forests; and on the trajectory of land grabbing of agricultural land in Ethiopia. These three cases in this chapter show that different forms of enclosures can happen under different political regimes, even when progressive political elites or states claim to access and use resources collectively, for the greater common good. For instance, in Ethiopia, enclosures happened under the royal (kingdom), socialist, and (the current) neoliberal regimes. In Mexico, forest enclosures have happened both under a dictatorship and a supposedly revolutionary pro-peasant

regime; while in Bolivia, enclosures for mining characterized both neo-liberal and the current ‘pro-indigenous’ presidency of Evo Morales. Accumulation by dispossession is thus shown as a recurrent feature of the developmentalist, growth-based capitalist system, even in supposedly anti-capitalist regimes like that of Morales.

The cases also show that extractivist/land grabbing enclosures primarily affect indigenous and peasant communities for two reasons. Firstly, as extractive frontiers expand increasingly into marginal areas (e.g. the Amazon, the Andean mountains), the overlapping with territories titled to indigenous and peasant communities become higher. Secondly, these communities often depend for their livelihood on natural resource-based subsistence activities such as small-scale agriculture, fishing or hunting and gathering –often managed communally. By exploring dispossession across these axes, political ecology scholars have emphasized that enclosure is a form of “**environmental injustice**” (see Chapter 1. and Chapter 4.)

### Resistance and alternatives through “commoning”

A second contribution of political ecology to the topic of the commons is showing the central importance of **social movements** that emerge to resist enclosures and defend and recover the commons (see Chapter 5.). Social resistance and open rebellions in Europe as well as in the colonized territories of America in fact accompanied original enclosures.

“England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons...”  
*Gerard Winstanley, 1649*



Figure 22: The Diggers rebellion in England, 1649. (Source: <https://libcom.org/history/shadow-glorious-though-strange-goodthings-come-ranters-libertarian-communism-english-ci>)

Political ecologists often link this to a defence of local identity, autonomy and their territory and resources. Joan Martínez Alier identifies these manoeuvres as part of an “**environmentalism of the**

**poor**". These struggles can be seen all around the world, for instance those of the rubber tappers, landless rural workers, and indigenous peoples of Brazil to protect and reclaim their Amazonian commons from agribusiness, mega-dams and other destructive projects (see Chapter 2.); and the communities of Campania in Italy struggling against toxic wasting of their territories by the mafia and the state (see Chapter 5.). As new forms of **enclosure** have proliferated around the world, counter-movements have multiplied, leading to new forms of **commoning**.

The cases discussed in this chapter also highlight that histories of enclosures have a parallel history of counter-movements for the commons. In Bolivia, social movements' mobilisation for water following its enclosure in Cochabamba and other regions were one of the key events that brought Evo Morales to power. Ultimately, this led to the state-sanctioned doctrine of rights for nature, as well as of indigenous groups in the country's new constitution. Yet as is discussed below, in both of the national indigenous confederations, CIDOB (lowlands) and CONAMAQ (highlands), part of the members were co-opted and were used to forcibly replace the legitimate leadership (and create parallel organizations by the same name). This was a violent process involving expelling them from their offices, even beating them up, with police force backing them. They were also denied legal personhood, and therefore funding. In Mexico, redistributing land was an important goal of the revolution in the 1910s; the right of peasant and indigenous groups to forest and agricultural commons were recognized in the post-revolution constitution. Following the revolution, social movements fostered many communal forestry institutions and garnered state support for these new modes of forest management. While many were also co-opted or marginalized after the 1930s by the pro-peasant revolutionary regime, in recent decades there has been a renewal of resistance to dispossessions across the country.

In recognizing the centrality of social struggles to the protection and expansion of the commons, we can see that commons are not just a set of organizational procedures and institutions to sustainably manage 'resources'; nor are they the result of isolated local experiments of solidarity. Rather, many political ecologists insist we should analyse commons also for their potential as grassroots social and economic alternatives to the **hegemonic** political economy and the construction

of real **democracy**.



Figure 23: 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. (Source: Light Brigading/flickr/cc <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/02/19/young-people-have-power-rally-others-createpositive-change>)

Some call it a radical form of democracy, based on the principle of self-governance or what Henri Lefebvre called *autogestion*: a process of self-organization that carries a deep political commitment, intense debate and deliberation, and constant renewal, in which a group refuses the imposition of certain conditions of existence and rather seeks to take control of them. Commons and democracy are therefore central pillars of a transformation towards a post-capitalist society that emerge from grassroots social struggles and practices.

In the next sections, we detail these cases of commons in Bolivia (3.2), Ethiopia (3.3), and Mexico (3.4).

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## Civil society organizations and institutions working on the Commons

[On the Commons \(USA\)](#)

[Commons Strategies Group \(USA, Germany\)](#)

[Commons Transition Platform \(USA\)](#)

[Digital Library of the Commons \(USA\)](#)

[Commons Law Project \(USA\)](#)

[Commons Abundance Network](#)

[Commons Blog \(Germany\)](#)

[Heinrich Böll Foundation \(Germany\)](#)

### 3.2 Extractivism, commons' enclosure and dispossession in the Bolivian highlands

Diego Andreucci

'**Extractivism**' is a critical term emerged in recent years in Latin America, in the context of debates around the increased dependency of the region on the export of natural resources. The political ecologist Eduardo Gudynas defines it as a type of natural resource extraction which a) is large scale and/or very intensive; b) is primarily export oriented; and c) entails little or no industrial processing (Gudynas, 2013). Extractivism is associated with considerable negative political, economic, social and ecological outcomes. It is historically embedded in relations of (ecological and economic) '**unequal exchange**' at the global scale. Writing in the early 1970s, the great Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano famously described this primary export-based development model as a form of 'pillage' to which Latin America had been condemned by colonial and then industrial nations throughout its history (Galeano, 1971).

The expansion of **extraction 'frontiers'** is caused by declining availability and quality of natural resources, as well as by the intensification of extraction enabled by technological developments (such as open cast mining). Political ecologists have associated the expansion of resource frontiers with highly disruptive socio-ecological outcomes and an increase in related conflicts (Özkaynak and Rodríguez-Labajos, 2012; Bebbington and Bury, 2013). This last aspect is most closely related to the issue of commons' enclosure. In this section, we use the case of mining in the Bolivian highlands to describe some of the ways in which extractivist-led development results in **communities' dispossession**.

**Bolivia** is a traditionally extractivist country. Since colonial times, its integration in global capitalism has been **historically dependent on the export of a few commodities**. The silver from Potosí's *cerro rico* ('rich mountain'), for instance, was fundamental to the expansion of the Spanish empire from the 16th century onwards and to the successive development of manufacture in Europe. It was also, however, responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands indigenous people forced to work in the *cerro*'s mines. Successive 'boom and bust' cycles, typical

of primary exporting countries, have made a few people rich and left the country largely poor, by transferring most of the extracted wealth abroad.

In the last decade, growth in global demand and high commodity prices fuelled another **mineral export boom** for Bolivia. At the same time, however, a wave of social struggles led by indigenous and peasant organisations created the conditions for a progressive shift in the way the country's natural wealth is managed. These include popular mobilisations against the **privatisation of water** resources in the city of Cochabamba in 2000 and struggles to include environmental and indigenous rights provisions in the 2005 Hydrocarbon Law. The election of Evo Morales in December 2005, a leader of the coca-grower union movement of indigenous Aymará descent, brought to the fore long-neglected questions of social, environmental and indigenous rights. The government and the social movements' coalition which supported it—particularly, the 'Peasant-Indigenous Unity Pact'—proposed ambitious plans for a more just resource exploitation, including democratic-communitarian participation, redistribution of revenues, respect of indigenous territorial self-determination and protection of the 'rights of the Mother Earth'.

Unfortunately, however, many of these principles and plans have not been translated into concrete measures for their implementation. The Morales governments' dependence on extraction rents, as well as a close alliance with the mining sector, has worked as a political disincentive to improve socio-environmental management. Moreover, the progressive marginalisation of indigenous organisations has reduced communities' ability to mobilise in defence of their territories. As a result, the intensification of resource exploitation has resulted in the worsening of the conditions of many peasant-indigenous communities in extraction areas. Among these, the basin of the **Uru-Uru and Poopó lakes** in the highland region of Oruro has been affected particularly badly, generating high levels of ecological degradation and community dispossession.



## Mining and contamination in the Poopó lake basin

In the Andean highlands, where the climate is semi-arid, mining is in competition with agricultural and subsistence activities for the use of land and water. The legislation in place gives mining title-holders full right to exploit-free of charge-all resources found on their concession, including unlimited use of water and the possibility to change the course of water bodies. The systematic **dispossession of water** exasperates the water scarcity problems faced by rural communities (Perreault, 2013). These legal principles were established under previous, neo-liberal, governments, particularly in the Mining Code passed in 1997 by then Bolivian president (and mining magnate) Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. The new Mining Law approved in May 2014 has not redressed this imbalance in the distribution of water and land rights.



Figure 24: Poster for the presentation of a book on extractivism in Latin America. (Source: Bolivian Centre of Documentation and Information - CEDIB)

The growth of mining in the Andean Highlands has led severe **contamination** of soil and water with commensurate **negative social impacts**. The Poopó lake basin contains fragile ecosystems and internationally protected wetlands, where fishing and peasant communities of Uru, Aymara and Quechua indigenous nations once thrived. Today, it is one of the country's most contaminated areas. Due to expanding mining operation with little or no environmental mitigation measures, the Poopó Lake receives enormous quantities of toxic chemicals and heavy metals-including zinc, arsenic, lead and cadmium. With the fishing population disappearing, so are the ancestral Uru fishing cultures of the lake that now face the threat of rapid extinction. The *campesino* (peasant) and *originario* (indigenous) communities around the lake's shores are also heavily affected by mining. **Lack of clean water** sources forces communities to either limits their agricultural activity to the rainy season or to use contaminated water from the rivers or lake. Crops are losing productivity as a result. Animals, a central part of the local economy, get sick and occasionally die

from drinking unsafe water. Humans are affected too, suffering from gastric, dermatological and neurological maladies brought on by constant **exposure to toxic dust and contaminated food and water**. Eroding socio-economic and health conditions are forcing a large part of the population in working age to migrate either to mining centres nearby or to larger cities in Bolivia and abroad.

Despite many years of organised resistance, a sense of hopelessness is pervasive among many who live in this area. The state is largely complacent with the environmental devastation created by mining companies. Not only is the law permissive, the state **lacks qualified personnel and resources** to effectively control and monitor the activities of corporations. The general sense is that-at all levels of government-the priority is not to alienate mining interests. This is partly explained by the economic importance of mining in certain areas. In Oruro, for instance, small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry are the most important sources of livelihood for rural families. Yet, according to study funded by the European Union, they only account for 4% of the region's economy, while mining contributes as much as 35% (Vargas, 2013).

The argument that local subsistence practices may be sacrificed for the good of local and national, mining-driven development-a widespread argument in mining conflicts around the world-should be rejected (see Chapter 4.). Besides impacting the environmental and public health, mining's contribution to development in Bolivia is questionable.



Figure 25: Urus protesting against mining in the Popo basin. Source: <http://subversiones.org/archivos/25589>

The **net contribution of the mining sector** to state revenues at the national level has been calculated to be around **11% of the total value of exports**. For the year 2011, out of \$3.5 billion USD in mineral exports, only \$420 million USD benefited the country. Moreover,

regions where mining production is highest—such as Oruro and Potosí—also have the highest levels of poverty (in the Poopó basin, poverty levels reach 85% of the rural population). As Pablo Villegas, a mining expert at the Bolivia Information and Documentation Centre in Cochabamba (CEDIB) remarked, “[mining] royalties which do not compensate for the [socio-environmental] damage and are not sufficient to promote development are an economic absurdity”.

### **Enclosure and dispossession**

This brief description of the Bolivian case highlights various forms of dispossession related to extractivism (Bebbington 2012). First, there’s **dispossession of monetary value**. At the national and regional level, as we have seen, the revenues from mining are hardly enough to compensate for the negative socio-environmental impacts of mining itself. Locally, communities are also dispossessed of monetary value; loss of crop and livestock productivity due to contamination, for instance, reduces the already thin income of *campesino* families.

Second, there’s **separation of communities from their means of subsistence**, related to commons’ enclosure. Direct cutting off from water and land access are favoured in Bolivia by a legal framework, which, as we have seen, has traditionally been overly generous towards mining operators. Indirect separation of communities from their sources of livelihood is also widespread. Because of contamination, for instance, essential resources such as fish or clean water and soil are slowly rendered unavailable or unusable for communities.

Third, **immaterial forms of dispossession** accompany or are a consequence of the rest. As communities are forced to abandon their traditional economic practices, the cultural and value practices attached to them are also lost.

Fourth, there is a **dispossession of individuals’ and communities’ rights**. These include, for instance, the rights of indigenous peoples to territorial self-determination, recognised by international human rights law. Besides adopting these principles, the Bolivian Constitution of 2009 recognises for everyone the right to a healthy environment and to participate in the benefits of extraction. Yet, in mining areas, all of these principles are dismissed or violated systematically, generally with

impunity. All this leads to the last form of dispossession - the **dispossession of everyday security** and, ultimately, of communities' future.

### Externalising costs

The **lack of environmental and social protections** is a way for mining companies to save money and thus 'externalise' the cost of their operations. In Bolivia, the weak legal framework for mining designed during the 1990s aimed to create favourable terms for private (especially foreign) investors. According to Emilio Madrid, a researcher at the Oruro-based Collective for the Coordination of Socio-Environmental Actions (CASA), this legislation creates a system of environmental regulation largely based on **companies' 'self-control'**. This means that environmental monitoring is left to the company itself; the state should verify the information contained in the company's environmental reports, but does not have the resources- or perhaps, much willingness- to do it. To the unregulated activities of large mining corporations, one must add the mushrooming small-scale, self-employed miners-known in Bolivia, misleadingly, as **mining 'cooperatives'**. These work without environmental licenses (with state endorsement) and explicitly admit to not complying to socio-environmental standards because it would significantly narrow their profit margin.



Figure 26: Vice-President Alvaro Garcia Linera celebrating with the Federation of Mining Cooperatives (FENCOMIN) leadership in the entity's 45th anniversary, where he declared "We are a government of the people, and so what?". (Source: <http://www.vicepresidencia.gob.bo/Garcia-Linera-Somos-un-gobierno>)

Last but not least, the greatest single polluter in the Poopó basin is the state itself, whose re-nationalised operation, the Huanuni tin mine, has admittedly no functioning tailings dams or any environmental safeguard at all. This case shows, then, the intimate **connections between extractivism and commons' enclosure**. Here we have briefly shown that extractivism operates as a form of 'accumulation by dispossession'. In many parts of the world, extractivism is one of the most aggressive forms of capitalist expansion. Such an expansion, however, hasn't gone unchallenged. There are an increasing number of ongoing conflicts and instances of struggles against accumulation by dispossession and for environmental justice. Demands for a profound **re-thinking of development emanating from peasant and indigenous movements** must be integrated further with a global critique of the political economy of capital and its increasingly untenable 'growth imperative'.

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### **Civil society organizations and institutions working on mining conflicts**

Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts

Centro de Documentación e Información de Bolivia (CEDIB)

Centro de Ecología y Pueblos Andinos (CEPA)

Observatorio de Industrias Extractivas y Derechos Colectivos (OIEDC)

Colectivo de Coordinación de Acciones Socio Ambientales (CASA)

### 3.3 A Short History of The Enclosures in Ethiopia: imperialist, socialist and developmentalist land grabs

*Jonah Wedekind*

The 2007/08 financial crisis which saw rising food and fuel prices has been accompanied by a rush of investors for agricultural land in the global South. This has been called ‘the global land grab’ or ‘the new enclosures’ of commons (Wily 2012). Mainstream economists argue that land grabbing and its negative consequences occur where states are too weak to enforce **property rights** that clearly define ownership and use of land, so that land may be legally transferred to investors, economic benefits captured and social ills avoided (Deininger et al. 2011). Yet such a view does not help us to understand the dynamics of land grabbing in a country like Ethiopia, where the state has been a strong agent in manipulating property rights and enclosing the commons to grab control of land and peasants.

Political ecology not only assesses the property rights that are in place in a certain context, but also analyses **property relations** – the social struggles that take place over access to and use of property such as land – as well as how power relations change across time and space (Ribot and Peluso 2003). By tracing the history of enclosures in Ethiopia we learn how common property was first turned into state property that now ironically enables the transfer of land to private investors. While enclosures served to build the state from above, they also always unleashed struggles for the commons that challenged the state from below. In retelling Ethiopia’s history of changing property relations we can uncover a remarkable continuity of enclosures and resistances under different political regimes, under imperialism (1870s–1974), socialism (1974–1991) and developmentalism (1994–2000s). While specific to Ethiopia, such analysis of property relations can be usefully applied to other settings.

## Feudalist Imperialism

Ethiopia's imperial, feudalist regime was formed during the 'scramble for Africa' in the late 19th century. While European colonizers enclosed other African territories, Emperor Menelik II expanded his rule from the central highlands of Shewa north and southwards to establish a modern Ethiopian state (Donham and James 2002). Through integration and conquest of rival chiefdoms and peasantries, the Ethiopian state formed into an empire that was able to maintain independence from colonizers in the early 20th century. While Ethiopia did not experience colonial enclosures as elsewhere in Africa<sup>9</sup> the external presence of colonial powers meant that there were limits to further territorial expansion of the imperial state. Instead, imperial elites looked within their peripheries to transform the commons into state property and impose feudal relations, which would allow them to tax peasants and fund the imperial state (Markakis 1974).

In the densely populated central and northern highlands, various peasant communities historically practised a regionally diverse **customary property system** called *rist*. It gave community members the right to access and use land, according to family or community ties. The expanding state soon declared the highlands as property of imperial landlords so that peasants eventually only had individual use-rights to the land they once had customary rights to. Although highland peasants were not physically evicted, they were legally dispossessed from their rights to land. While the *rist* officially remained in use it was subjected to a **feudal tax system** called *gult*, through which landlords taxed peasants for using the land (Crummey 2000). Because the state was unable to fully abolish the *rist* and many peasants' communities were unable or unwilling to pay land taxes, some imperial elites became warlords and looked southward to exploit the lowlands for profit and power (Donham 1986).

The southern lowlands were considered by imperial elites as "unused" or sparsely populated by "primitives" – even though they were inhabited by indigenous peasant and pastoralist communities with customary property systems based on seasonal or shifting cultivation.

.....  
9 Apart from a brief but violent Italian occupation (1935-1940).



Through violent forms of land grabbing the warlords enclosed the southern lowlands, often physically dispossessing indigenous peoples, sometimes taking them as slave labourers (Donham and James 1986). The warlords began imposing a **feudal property system** called ***gabbar***, which forced peasants to pay taxes or work as labourers on the land they had once owned collectively; yet warlords rarely settled in the lowlands, ruling in absence through local chiefs (Donham 1986). In the mid-20th century, Emperor Haile Selassie legally enforced the enclosures of the southern lowlands by declaring ‘all property not held or possessed in the name of any person as state domain under imperial law’ (Constitution 1955). Thus imperial administrators (often former warlords) began privatizing many southern lands suitable for large-scale farming. This way Ethiopia’s south was turned into a periphery for cheap resources and strengthened political power of imperial elites (Makki, 2012).

### **Centralised Socialism**

Peasants and workers challenged the enclosures of the commons under imperialism across Ethiopia. To avoid taxation various northern and central highland peasant communities retreated into **subsistence production** (Rahmato, 2011), while others retreated into **clandestine production and trading** networks to avoid taxation (Zewde, 2002). Across southern Ethiopia, the dispossessed even turned to banditry for survival (Ferryhough, 2010). From the 1940s – 70s many peasant movements challenged the state. In the north, the **Woyane movement** fought a long-lasting peasant war to challenge centralization of the imperial state and aim for autonomy and self-governance (Young 1996), and across the central highlands too various peasant uprisings took place (Tareke, 1996). **Resistance** to feudal property also emerged **in the cities**. Students and workers, many of who had rural backgrounds, declared solidarity with the peasantry with slogans like ‘land to the tiller’ and demanded land reforms to end feudal property relations (Markakis 1978). Finally, the **social revolution of 1974** overthrew the feudal regime and a new political elite of progressive intellectuals and military leaders emerged. Together they formed a centralized socialist state, which set out to abolish feudal property relations that proclaimed ‘all rural

lands ... [as] collective property of the Ethiopian people' and pledged 'any person ... willing to personally cultivate land shall be allotted rural land' (Land Act 1975). In theory, this gave all peasants equal rights to land – in practice the land reforms were experienced unevenly<sup>10</sup> across the north and south of Ethiopia (Makki 2012).

The **northern peasantries had hoped for autonomy** after the revolution in order to re-establish customary property systems. Yet precisely because peasants now had 'equal' rights to state land, the regionally and culturally uneven rick systems were not prioritised by the state. The state planners created rural Peasant Associations and staffed these with bureaucratic administrators rather than peasant community elders in order to implement the land reforms as fast as possible. Soon after the first wave of land reforms, the central state quickly ran out of revenues – due to stagnant agricultural productivity – and ordered Peasant Associations to tax the peasantry again. The effect was that northern peasants soon found themselves having the **same tax obligations to the administrators of the socialist regime** as they previously had to landlords of the previous regime (Rahmato, 1984).

In the south, land reforms initially provided relief, especially for landless peasants who managed to regain access to farmland (ibid.). Yet, by the 1980s the state made collectivized agriculture in the south a **priority for development**. Like the imperial elites, the socialist planners considered the low-density lowlands and their peasant or pastoralist communities “unproductive”.



**Figure 27: EPRDF Propaganda for Agrarian Transformation. (Source: Jonah Wedekind, East Hararge, Ethiopia 2013)**

The state converted private capitalist farms into state farms and collectivized peasant farms into **producer co-operatives** (ibid.). The labour force required for agricultural collectivization was mobilized through massive resettlement projects, including the

10 See the contribution of Garcia-Lopez (this chapter), where comparable radical land reforms were carried out.

**forced resettlement of poor highland peasants** to southern producer co-operatives and the movement of landless peasants or pastoralists across the south into wage-labour camps near large state farms. By 1990, a huge section of Ethiopia's rural population had experienced **land grabbing**, displacement and famine as a result of the radical land reforms and resettlement projects (Pankhurst and Piguët, 2009).

## Federalist Developmentalism

The **agricultural** policies of the socialist planners were **unsuccessful and unpopular** as agricultural output was low and famine a constant risk. Particularly, the suppression of cultural diversity and ethnic identity like practising customary property systems lead to rural unrest. Various **rural liberation movements** formed across Ethiopia, mobilising their own ethnic communities and forming coalitions with other ethnic movements in other regions. This multi-ethnic coalition was led by the northern **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**, which coordinated rural insurgencies against the socialist military. After years of struggle, the movements took power in 1991, forming a coalition of ethnic parties, the **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)**, in which the TPLF remains the most influential on the politics of the federal state (Young 1997).



**Figure 28: Enclosure of Land, Edible Oil Factory.** (Source: Jonah Wedekind, East Hararge, Ethiopia 2013)

The Ethiopian **federalist state** is **decentralised** through its division into **different ethnic regions** and a constitution according to which *'the right to ownership of rural and urban land is exclusively vested in the state and the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale'* (Constitution 1994). Ethiopia's decentralized property system was thus designed to respect the cultural diversity of the various customary property systems. The constitution also follows a **developmentalist logic**,

according to which the state strongly regulates industrial development and (in theory) gradually **privatized agriculture** to avoid the massive peasant dispossessions of the previous regimes (Lavers 2012). The decentralized developmentalist state declared that its main task was to transform Ethiopia from a primarily agricultural economy to a modern industrial country. The strategy to do so was first based on providing peasants with technologies (credits, fertilisers, seeds) to boost their productivity in order to then shift agricultural surpluses into industrial development (Rahmato, 2008). Yet over the years the peasantry failed to become as productive as the federal political elites hoped, and the state soon revised its development strategy, preferring instead to **attract foreign investors** who could provide capital to boost agricultural productivity and industrial growth (Rahmato, 2011). Again, such investments lead to centralisation of land control and **uneven development** across the north and south.



**Figure 29: Land Clearance and Land Conflict in the Lowlands. Source: Jonah Wedekind, East Hararge, Ethiopia 2013**

between peasants as they compete with each other, eventually causing poorer peasants to give up farming, often leaving their farmland (**proletarianisation**). The state still does not fully privatize land, fearing that this will lead to massive dispossessions. However, by directing investments into peasant agriculture and thereby promoting the **commodification** of their subsistence and production, the state gradually contributes to the destruction of customary property systems in the highlands (Lavers, 2012).

In the central and northern highlands, the state now directs investments into peasant agriculture to commodify their production activities. These investments encourage subsistence farmers to produce a surplus to sell on markets for export. The effect of direct investments into peasant agriculture in the highlands leads to a slow process of **economic dif-**

In the southern and western peripheries, the state identified **investments zones** where foreign and domestic investors may establish large-scale farms **for food and energy production**. The land is leased to investors and the state mobilises the required labour force for the investors. Like the two previous regimes before it, the political elites of the developmental state claim that the lowlands are “underused” by “unproductive” peasants and pastoralists (Makki, 2012). To make way for agricultural investments, the state resettles or claims to compensate indigenous communities, and in some cases pastoralists are forced to settle-down to make space or work as labourers for the new large-scale investment farms (Abbinck et al., 2014). In recent years, it has become clear that the state is stretching to its final frontiers in order to grab lands for capital accumulation and state formation (Markakis 2011), thereby displacing the commoners and enclosing the commons in Ethiopia.

### **Lessons from Ethiopian History**

Land grabbing has different faces in different global settings (GRAIN, 2014). The above historical political ecology of changing property relations, though specific to Ethiopia, provides analytical tools that can be applied to any context – in order to comprehend and counteract the global enclosures of the commons. Individuals and organizations involved in social struggles for land rights, might learn from such an historical analysis the following. First, it is always vital to **understand histories of property relations** - their changes and continuities - in order to identify the coercive and consensual strategies through which state (and market) actors can manipulate property rights in order to legally enclose the commons and physically grab land. This is important, to comprehend and **challenge processes of commons’ enclosures and land grabs** that are taking place globally. Second, progressive **states**, even when promising to act in the interest of a marginalised collective, **must be held accountable** by a strong civil society, in order to serve commoners rather than political or economic elites. Currently there are few CSOs inside Ethiopia that are able to push for common land rights for culturally diverse commoners, despite a rich history of movements, revolutions and progressive state agents (see 3.2) striving for common access to and use of property such as land. It is therefo-

re fundamental to strengthen CSOs **knowledge** on the potentials and perils of **past social struggles** against the enclosures and for the commons.

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### **Civil Society organizations and institutions working on land grabbing and/or in Ethiopia**

[Farmland Grab](#)

[Oakland Institute](#)

[Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#)

[Land Matrix](#)

[Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia](#)

[Anywaa Survival Organization](#)

[Melca Ethiopia](#)

[South Omo Research Center \(SORC\)](#)

[Forum for Social Studies, Ethiopia](#)

### 3.4 A political ecology of forest commons in Mexico

*Gustavo García López*

The experience of community forestry in Mexico, a global pioneer in common property institutions over forests, highlights the possibilities of **commoning** as alternative forms of social organization, economic production and ecological protection. At the same time it underscores, on one hand, the challenges of commons within an **extractivist, developmentalist** system that continually pushes for commons' enclosures, and on the other, the necessity of social struggles to defend and rebuild those commons. The case has interesting parallels with some of the cases discussed in other chapters, such as that of Chile's extractivist regime of Eucalyptus plantations in indigenous Mapuche land (see Chapter 1.); the cases of struggles around waste contamination in the region of Campania, around the recovery of urban spaces in Barcelona (see Chapter 5.) and the case of social economy initiatives in the Basque Country and Athens (see Chapter 4.).

#### Mexican forest commons as a model of sustainability



**Figure 30: The temperate pine forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range in the state of Durango. (Source: Gustavo Garcia Lopez, Durango, 2010)**

Approximately 52% of Mexico's entire territory and 70% of its temperate forests - the highest percentage in the world - are estimated to be under **collective property regimes** known as ***ejidos*** (peasant communities) and ***comunidades*** (indigenous communities) (Bray, 2013). Approximately 14 million people live in more than 8.000 forest's communities and most of their



livelihoods depend on forests resources. About 20% of these communities currently manage forests on their own for timber, while many others do so for non-timber forest products, ecotourism, and conservation, among others.

In collective properties, decisions are taken collectively through the general assembly, the primary decision-making body of the community, which in most communities holds monthly meetings. Every three years, the community elects a governing council (*comisariado*) that officially represents the community, and an oversight council (*consejo de vigilancia*) in charge of monitoring the governing council, forest management activities and overall rule compliance.



**Figure 31: General assembly of forest association.**  
(Source: Gustavo Garcia Lopez, Durango, 2010)

Communities that engage in forestry activities are legally required to hire a certified forester (a sort of private ‘extension service’) to develop a management plan to be approved first by the general assembly and then by the government’s environmental ministry. The **forest management plan**, usually for a period of 10 years, establishes a maximum allowable volume of timber (or non-timber product) to be harvested every year, with the goal of sustaining output in the long term. It also identifies the areas to be conserved for other uses and ecological restoration activities to be carried out, such as reforestation, soil conservation, and fire prevention. The economic benefits of timber harvesting and other economic enterprises (e.g. ecotourism) are shared equally amongst the community members. In this sense, the operation resembles small cooperatives.

In many ways, Mexico’s community forestry has been a successful experiment, leading some to call it a global model and for its replication in other countries. Research has shown that communities that have developed an active social and economic activity around forestry (e.g.

timber extraction, ecotourism) have lower levels of deforestation than government-run protected areas as well as other non-communally managed forests. Community forestry has also contributed in some regions to reduction of poverty and to the development of strong social ties (Duran et al., 2011). Moreover, through social solidarity and livelihoods, **forest commons** have helped communities to adapt and respond in creative ways to the challenges posed by the **political economy** they inhabit, often resisting pressures for enclosures. For instance, researchers in the state of Michoacan (Barsimantov and Navia-Antezana, 2012) analysed forest communities' responses to the expansion of avocado crops (the 'avocado boom'), grown for export to the USA, fostered by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Communities engaged with timber harvesting activities for the most part did not cut their forests to plant avocado, while communities that had no forestry activities deforested almost everything. Meanwhile, in the state of Guerrero, researchers found that a region where communities had developed community forestry and strong monitoring and enforcement around forests had avoided the problems of illegal timber harvesting and violence that marred a nearby region in the same state.

### **Beyond the local: Multi-level commons**

The case of Mexico also shows the importance of **connecting local commoning experiences with different levels of governance** beyond the local for sustaining the commons. These connections include inter-community organizations as well as collaborators from outside the communities, such as researchers, civil society organizations, and development agencies. These entities can provide political and economic support that fosters less dependence on the state.

Inter-community organizations that coordinate between multiple communities in a given region, help forest communities through political representation, channelling resources from government programs, pooling member resources for developing collective timber enterprises, and harmonising ecological protection activities. For instance, in Oaxaca, with the longstanding support of a local CSO (GAIA) and financing from the Global Environmental Fund and the United Nations Development Program, the *Community System for Biodiversity* (SICOB)

brought together five forest communities from the southwest region in 2001 to establish regional watershed-level initiatives to improve livelihoods and better conserve land, water and biodiversity. With this project, member communities have been supported in developing community territorial plans and improving land management practices. Aside from



**Figure 32: Tree nursery of forest association in Durango. The association provides saplings at a low cost for member communities' reforestation activities. (Source: Gustavo Garcia Lopez, Durango, 2010)**

strengthening community forestry, SICOBI has also helped establish pesticide-free agroforestry and shade-grown coffee initiatives to diversify local production while also conserving traditional maize as well as forestlands.

At the same time, national peasant forest organisations that provide a unified voice, such as Red Mocaf, as well as allied civil society organizations, such as the Mexican Civil Council for Sustainable Forestry (CCMSS), have played a crucial supporting role in demanding changes in federal policies and programs to guarantee support for, and defend the rights of, forest communities.

### **A turbulent history: Between enclosures and resistances**

The successful development of the commons in Mexico was not a conflict-free process. Forest commons emerged and evolved as a direct result of a revolutionary process and the social mobilizations, which peasants and indigenous groups have recurrently used to expand and defend these commons and pressure the state to support them. The initiatives that can be observed today, including the Zapatista movement, are part of a much longer history of struggle.

During the **Porfirio Díaz dictatorship** (1884-1911), Mexican forests suffered the classic fate of enclosures for large-scale economic

projects by powerful corporations. Díaz sought to promote substantial investments by private foreign (mostly US) capital. For this purpose he passed a law in 1883 which declared all “unproductive lands” (*bal-díos*) as property of the state to be ‘developed’ by private investors for large-scale **extractivist** projects such as mining and timber – the same strategy used in Europe during the original wave of commons’ enclosures. Many of the lands declared as unproductive were inhabited by indigenous groups and peasants.

The **Mexican revolution** (c. 1910-1920) –the first in the world in the 20th century– led to the largest and longest-standing land reform process of the century, embodied in the Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution. Over a period of 60 years, the state distributed millions of hectares of land in collective property to groups of landless peasants and indigenous communities. The Mexican state’s recognition of common property regimes in the Constitution and a series of federal laws, as well as programmatic support providing capacity building and resources for the development of community forestry activities, were crucial for today’s success of community forestry.

However, this state support was not automatic, but another aspect of the revolutionary struggle. While the Revolution opened the door for the collective land grants in the 1930s under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, land reform quickly faced obstacles with changes towards more conservative presidencies after Cárdenas. The government’s strategy for managing forests quickly became anti-commons: a combination of conservation areas where any kind of community use of the forest was prohibited; and industrial-scale **extractivist** concessions given first to private corporations and then to public ones. This system proved a total failure in sustaining either forests or rural livelihoods.

Peasant struggles across the country led to the reigniting of significant **land reform in the 1960s-70s**; to a series of government programs to support community forestry; and to the **end of the timber concessions in 1986**. Many community forestry enterprises and inter-community forest organizations emerged in this period; they established the collective organizational basis of what today is considered a model initiative.

Yet as in the rest of the world, the 1990s brought **neoliberal reforms to agrarian and environmental laws and policies**. Common property was perceived as inefficient; privatization was promoted as the

only 'solution' to 'modernize' the agricultural sector. Land reform was officially ended and *ejidos* were allowed to privatize their land. Free trade agreements with Chile (MCFTA) and with US and Canada (NAFTA) opened the door to the influx of cheaper forest products into Mexico. Despite a large community forestry program developed by the Mexican government with financing from the World Bank and the Global Environmental Fund<sup>11</sup>, in the balance, the political economy of the new neoliberal regime has proved a great challenge to the forest commons.

**Deforestation continues** at high levels in many regions<sup>12</sup>, and social, political and economic conditions for rural communities continue to deteriorate. Most forest communities still do not have organized self-management of their forests; many are under *rentismo*, contracts under which private corporations harvest timber with little economic benefit for locals. Land tenure conflicts and associated **illegal logging** from timber mafias also persist; in places like Michoacan and Guerrero, **community leaders have been killed** for defending their forests, as is happening in many places around the world (see Chapter 2.). Communities across the country have also started to de-collectivize forest management activities, forming what are called work groups (one of the institutions promoted by the neoliberal reforms), and to divest their collective forestry enterprises, selling off their timber processing infrastructure (e.g. sawmills). This is in significant part due to increasing costs of inputs and decreasing timber prices, strongly related to competition from the industrial timber plantations of Mexico's 'free trade' partners; but also to government over-regulation of community forestry and lack of sufficient subsidies. A recent study by the CCMSS calculated that complying with all relevant regulations can cost a community forestry enterprise hundreds of thousands of dollars and take up to two years.

.....

11 The program sought to promote stronger community forestry enterprises, and did succeed in doing this, though it has been criticized for among other things, emphasizing too much the commercialization aspect of forestry rather than the social organizational component, and allocating too many resources to hiring of private foresters to provide technical assistance to communities. Moreover, the program, in its own neoliberal World Bank framing, failed to foresee that only a very limited number of communities can really compete in a ('free trade') forestry market dominated by large corporations and timber plantations.

12 Between 2000 and 2012, almost 2 million hectares of forest were deforested.

Another study by this CSO showed that the vast majority of government funding for forestry goes to timber plantations and reforestation activities, and not to community forestry.

In the last decade, the state's response to these challenges has increasingly been one of **neoliberal conservationist** policies: most of the forest budget now goes to reforestation activities and payment for environmental services (PES) programs; and to increasing timber production through timber plantations and more intensive harvesting. This failed response is coupled with new processes of **enclosure** by the State and its corporate allies for large-scale extractivist activities (mainly mining and hydropower). Challenges to these new forms of dispossession have often been violently repressed. These challenges remind us that the commons require a structural change in order to flourish, and that meaningful state support comes through the pressure of social struggle.

In some regions, communities have faced this challenge through organized struggles to demand political and economic changes and continue to build grassroots alternatives. The best publicised is the Zapatista struggle, which emerged alongside **NAFTA** to challenge neoliberalism as the only possible form of governing. They sought to reclaim and defend the commons of the indigenous nations of Mexico by kicking out the government and political parties and recovering their traditional decision-making systems, where electoral processes are substituted by appointed positions deliberated in community assemblies. In Oaxaca, which has the largest indigenous population in Mexico, communities have similarly fought for recovering these traditional systems, and today indigenous communities autonomously govern more than 70% of the state's 570 municipalities<sup>13</sup>. These communities often portray a rather **different vision of ecology** than the **Western development model**: nature is seen as Mother rather than product, development as a circular process between humans and ecology, rather than a linear process of 'growth'. Oaxaca's indigenous autonomy has served to support the durability of community and inter-community forestry organizations that in turn have sustained their forests and livelihoods for decades. In these

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13 In contrast, in the entire country of Bolivia there are only 11 recognized autonomous indigenous municipalities.

struggles, we see that the recovery of the commons is also reclamation of community, territory and grassroots democracy.

### **Lessons from the Mexican forest commons**

The history of the Mexican forest commons debunks the hegemonic **“tragedy of the commons”** narrative; on the contrary, it shows marginalized communities are often at the forefront of protecting these commons. It also highlights that a broad **redistribution over rights to land and its resources is an essential basis for commons**. The Mexican revolution and subsequent peasant mobilizations that pushed the state to act made an important contribution in this regard –creating the institutional (legal, property) basis for commons initiatives. At the same time, we saw that even a ‘revolutionary’ pro-peasant state can have a tendency towards commons enclosures to facilitate capital accumulation; a process that has intensified under neoliberalism. Hence, there is a need for continuing struggles that go beyond the local and connect at regional and national levels to achieve structural changes. The participation of civil society organizations in these struggles can be pivotal, but it requires long-term involvement, dedication, commitment to mutual learning, and in-depth analysis of the structural constraints to commoning and the ways to transform them.

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Consejo Civil Mexicano de Silvicultura Sostenible (CCMSS)

Red Mexicana de Organizaciones Campesinas Forestales (Red MOCAF)

Grupo Autónomo para la Investigación Ambiental (GAIA)

Grupo de Estudios Ambientales (GEA)





# Chapter 4.

## Socio-ecological Transformations and Struggles for Real Democracy

*Rita Calvário*  
*Amelie Huber*  
*Panagiota Kotsila*  
*Irina Velicu*

*Editor: Irina Velicu*

## 4.1 Introduction

*Obviously the multi-party democratic system that we have, no longer can adequately represent or capture the level of social discontent [...] the eternal marriage between democracy and capitalism is approaching a divorce.*

Slavoj Zizek, contemporary philosopher (2011)

*Ecological issues are politicized through local and regional conflict, and political questions and conflicts are increasingly cast in ecological terms.*

Paul Robbins, Professor of political ecology (2011 p. 200)

### Democracy & Political Ecology

A variety of issues, ranging from land use change, waste management, agricultural production and environmental pollution to public health, the extraction of natural resources and environmental policy in general, are often presented solely as techno-managerial questions; that is, as questions that can only be answered through the specific expertise of engineers (economists, geneticists, material or biomedical scientists etc.) and the regulatory power of central/high-level institutions (like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, national governments or international agreements). The problem of presenting environmental issues in this way is that science and governance institutions are mistakenly seen as independent entities. Political ecology can highlight how environments, and conflicts over them, are in fact affected and shaped by diverse interests and **power relations** in society.

Decision-making processes are closely related to the question of which knowledge is to be considered valid and, thus, what kind of science becomes the visible, credible and legitimate basis for legal action and **policy making**. Political ecological research has aimed to show that it is exactly because of power asymmetries, economic interests and political gains that certain scientific truths are rendered more valid than others. Some people's voices, forms of knowledge and ways of organizing livelihoods are being dismissed as irrelevant or invalid during this process (see the work of anthropologist James Ferguson

on pasture management practices in the South African region of Lesotho, (Ferguson, 1990)). As a result, undesired environmental, economic and other impacts are unequally distributed, both geographically and socially.

Political ecologists speak about how natural resources are being extracted, allocated and exploited in ways that are not only ecologically unsustainable, but also socially harmful and undemocratic. Such processes are often **de-politicized** through discursive practices that posit them in the realm of technical expertise instead of public debate (see sections 4.2 and 4.3). Development projects often avoid or obstruct true **participation** by proceeding behind a democratic façade. In reality, these projects generally empower state bureaucracies and market institutions, rendering the realities and opinions of those whose livelihood and well-being are really at stake, practically unheard (see also sections 4.4 and 4.5).

Political ecology sheds light on these aspects and emphasizes that “expert” knowledge and policy decisions are never neutral, but always political. Not only is the result of techno-politics (Mitchell, 2002) undertakes this to be “the kinds of social and political practice that produce simultaneously the powers of science and the powers of modern states”) an unequal exposure of people to environmental harms, like pollution, infrastructural damage, livelihood destruction, or disease, but also a withdrawal of these issues from the political space. It further asks, who sets the terms of negotiations around access to common goods, natural resources and desirable environments and how are decisions on these issues made (see chapter 3.). Political ecology, thus, shows the importance of **re-politicizing**, re-historicizing and **re-contextualizing environmental issues** and the everyday problems that people face in local and global scales, at the same time striving to enable transformation within a socio-ecological “collective”.

### **But what is Democracy?**

The democratic ideal is an old aspiration of the oppressed, arising from confrontations with elitism. However, political power is no longer reserved exclusively to a group of individuals defined by their social status and has become a universal right of individuals regardless of

their conditions of existence. Democracy can be understood as a process and a political system in which the **'rule of the people'** replaces the 'rule of an individual' or the 'rule of the elites'. The state is, thereby, separated and independent from economic powers and social classes, becoming a neutral entity to negotiate and balance different interests. According to the Marxist critique, this separation is only relative. Abstract equality, through the attribution of individual rights, hides the inequalities produced by the capitalist order and, as a result, economic elites end up exercising political power in determining who gets what and under which conditions. The socialist alternative revolves around equal access to means of production – as opposed to the liberal idea of equal rights.

The goal of democratic processes is often portrayed as a means to avoid social conflict through negotiation or by achieving consensus. Although neither of the latter processes is per se apolitical, in a neoliberal globalised world they risk of becoming so, when the adversarial nature of politics is denied or hidden under the cloak of techno-bureaucratic expertise. In this sense, critical thinkers see **political conflict** as a necessary process that democracy should expect and be able to handle, rather than avoid. The Belgian theorist Chantal Mouffe (2009), calls this characteristic of democratic conditions, agonism. **Agonism** could be seen as the beginning of democratic politics and has been thought of distinctively by many other scholars (dissensus for J. Rancière (2012), conflicts for J. Martinez-Alier (2014) or discord for W. Connolly (2002, 1985), to name a few). Renowned political ecologist Erik Swyngendow speaks of the political as essentially and structurally different than politics. According to him, the political is the only moment in which equality can exist in a democratic configuration, where anyone can occupy the space of power and for which agonism is a precondition. In sum, exposing the exclusions, the silencing, the subjugation and the manipulation that often take place, even in contexts of consensual politics, is considered by many critical thinkers as a prerequisite for democracy. In this sense, struggles for **'real democracy'** must involve political conflict for re-distributing power and for ensuring the control of the economy from below.

Does democracy mean reclaiming the state or should we rethink democracy beyond state representation? Many of the forms in which democracy has been attempted seem to have failed on many fronts.

Nonetheless, the practices of resistance, solidarity and collective action continue to challenge and re-invent the meaning of democracy, power, control and participation, shifting the nature of dialogues and organisations. In response to disillusionment with formalized democratic institutions, people around the world are articulating **political alternatives**. After a rebirth of leftist movements in Latin America (Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador) and the Arab Spring, a new wave of street protests swept over an increasing number of places, from Athens to New York and from Tel Aviv to Moscow. They had in common their disagreement with a democracy that is only defending the interests of the elites (the “1%”) on this planet. In face of neoliberal globalisation and increasingly authoritarian states, these movements reclaim ‘real democracy’ as a demand still to be met. At the same time, many social movements have managed to take power in their own hands and build alternatives despite or beyond the reflexes and responses of the state (see also the chapter 5.).

## Case Studies

Despite the different ways to approach, analyse and act towards democracy, few would disagree that there is no specific ground, condition or circumstance for democracy to land on; democracy can only become as we constantly come together. It is, therefore, a concept that needs ceaseless scrutinizing and which also requires both conflict and cooperation, both consensus and *agonism* (see also chapter 1.). By necessity, the contributions in this chapter cannot be fully representative of all debates on democracy by political ecologists; indeed, they are not the only contributions in this book that are relevant to such debates. Nevertheless, they exemplify research on how democracy is criticised, constrained, reinvented, or claimed in a variety of contexts. They aim to reveal how questions about changes taking place in socio-ecological spheres are ultimately questions of democracy.

How **capitalist development, in the form of large hydropower dams, fosters fundamentally undemocratic environmental governance processes?** Through de-politicization and the casting of dam construction as clean development, controversies surrounding these large water infrastructure projects are side-lined and affected populations excluded from environmental decision-making. In response, citi-

zen groups are pushed to reinvent their political identities and understanding of democracy, in an effort to protect their environments and to make their voices heard.

How democracy and **environmental justice** are at stake in the **struggles and alternative practices of people** who were faced with the prospect of one of the **largest opencast gold mines in Europe**? Through studying the success of the movement, the issue behind claims of “democratic participation” and the limits of identity politics arise and **democratic politics appears not only as a practice of contesting power but also of performing alternative ways of being.**

How does the field of **public health experiences processes of de-politicization**? Development panaceas such as water supply and sanitation constructions cannot induce health benefits, unless the formulation and implementation of policy is in concert with the worldviews, concerns and needs of those whose health is at stake. Communities need to **recognize and re-gain control over the factors that affect their health.**

How **solidarity economies help to challenge dominant political and economic powers that structure agrifood systems**? Through the case of alternative agrifood movements, this chapter stresses the **importance of complementing such initiatives with more ‘classic’ forms of protest-type practices in order to move from fragmented to collective action.** It also highlights the role of ideology and organisation in processes of re-politicisation and social mobilisation.

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## 4.2 'Green' Development and its Threats to Democracy - Hydropower and Conflict in the Eastern Himalayas, India

Amelie Huber

### Democracy in the Green Economy

Over the last decades climate change has set an imperative for economies around the world to revise their development models, aiming at more sustainable and 'carbon-neutral' energy production. This is also opening up new spaces for capitalist development to exploit. Often, new profitable technologies are promoted as green and ecologically sustainable, while accompanying environmentally destructive processes, or socially and ethically prohibitive outcomes are obscured. This process is commonly known as '**greenwashing**', and large hydropower dams make for an excellent example of this form of depoliticization.

Hydropower has long been promoted as a clean energy technology by governments, donor agencies, private sector companies and even big green groups across the globe. These promotions have persisted despite the negative impacts of hydropower dams on people and the environment, exposed by civil society campaigns since the 1980s. By the 1990s the World Bank, largest international hydro-financier, had withdrawn most of its support for dam construction. Yet as **climate change** policies have made celebrations of hydropower as an energy model cleaner and greener than fossil fuels more relevant, the large dam has made a comeback. What is being largely overlooked in the process – deliberately or not – is that social and environmental impacts are *still* controversial, and that practices with which dam construction is pursued locally are rather dubious.

The biodiversity and landscapes in the footprint of large dams are often home to indigenous and/or agricultural societies who claim rights to these territories as their ecological, ancestral and spiritual commons. Their way of valuing nature (i.e. as invaluable heritage) is radically incompatible with that of hydropower proponents (i.e. as a commodity). Thus, as with many other 'green' technologies, in addition to depoliticizing 'greenwashing' discourses they are often accompanied by fun-



damentally undemocratic means of governance. This may include the *deployment of exceptional laws*, or the **repression of democratic and fundamental human rights** through state actors and armed forces.

### Political Economy of Hydropower Development in the Eastern Himalayas

In India, the revival of large dams has led to a sudden expansion of hydropower development activities in the Eastern Himalayan border region, known as India's "water towers" and the nation's last untouched hydropower 'frontier'.



Figure 33: Plans for multiple large run-of-the-river hydropower projects in Sikkim will leave virtually no stretch of the Teesta river flowing free (Source: Sanctuary Asia / Vagholikar and Das, 2010).

Between 2003 and 2010, the governments of the two states Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim signed over 160 agreements for hydropower projects, mostly with private companies. The capitalist relations underpinning these hydro ventures are evident, as private developers anticipate huge profits and ample opportunities for financial speculation in the stock market. Local political elites, in turn, are benefitting by way of kickbacks.

The state earns 12% of the power or revenue generated for a period of 35 years, after which it becomes the owner of the project. The communities whose land is acquired for dam construction are entitled to only 1% each from the state and the power developer. For downstream areas or other areas adversely affected by the project, where land has not been acquired, there are no compensation or rehabilitation provisions. In the long term, the agricultural and forestland purchased is effectively transferred from private and community ownership to the state. As such, hydropower development represents a form of **enclosure of the commons** (river, land, forest) for purposes of capital accumulation.

## Contradictions of Hydropower Development and Challenges to Democracy

The **commodification of the Eastern Himalayan Rivers** is legitimized as the only way in which these peripheral states can generate revenue, become financially independent, and enhance local development. Since this is a less-developed mountain region with serious infrastructure deficiencies (particularly for transport, electrification and health care provision), the discourse of development is used as justification for the construction of dams. Dam enthusiasts also claim that the projects serve the national interest. Finally, by labelling the projects “run-



**Figure 34: Damaged building above reservoir of 510 MW Teesta V project (Source: Amelie Huber)**

of-the-river”, a technology, which is neither supposed to affect the flow of the river nor to cause significant submergence and displacement, promoters claim that these dams are low impact.

The reality differs quite a bit. Existing projects are diverting almost the entire river flow through underground tunnels (up to 20km long), which are dug by blasting. Commu-

nities on the land above the tunnels experience **declining availability of water sources**, a lowering of the groundwater table, and a **degradation of arable and forestland** through landslides and subsidence. This affects agricultural production and residential buildings and can lead to displacement even after project completion. It also creates anxieties about potential future impacts, including from projects yet to be implemented. What will happen, for example, if a flash flood or an earthquake damages a dam upstream? Could it cause a domino effect? And how will the arrival of hundreds or thousands of workers from other parts of the country impact local cultures, politics and economies? The choice for **hydro-based development is a political choice** that calls for public debate and negotiation, involving all concerned actors, yet

the process to date has been anything but democratic.

### **Depoliticization through discourse and state-sanctioned illegality**

In the process of publicizing and promoting projects, uncomfortable facts oftentimes remain untold, or understated. For example that underground tunnelling impacts the land and water resources above; or that a barrage is able to dam and store water, even though its technical design is different from a dam. Instead of clarifying and accounting for inconveniences and technicalities with unpleasant consequences, government and company representatives often share one-sided project information to appease affected communities with promises of employment, local infrastructure development and at times even free electricity. This is a form of depoliticization that **undermines public debate** and democracy.

To the local populations it becomes evident only at the stage of construction, or even only after project completion, that employment opportunities tend to recede with the completion of construction activities; that promised health, education and communications facilities often do not materialize, or do not meet locally specific needs; or that the promised electricity is not for free after all, and can only flow if transmission lines are installed. The market town of Dikchu near the 510MW Teesta V hydroelectric project in Sikkim faces almost daily, several hour-long power cuts, seven years after project completion.

The 97MW Tashiding project in West Sikkim is one example where public consultation and the eliciting of consent were largely sidestepped. The mandatory public hearing was so poorly advertised that many thought it never took place. Despite a stay order issued in 2012 because mandatory approval by the National Board of Wildlife had not been obtained, construction works continued and millions of rupees were invested since.

## Suppressing democratic freedoms

Where communities stand up to contest hydropower development and the procedural injustices it is fraught with, they face **heavy-handed responses by the state**. One common way of suppressing dissenting voices is by cutting off so-called ‘benefits’ to the concerned persons and/or their families. In Sikkim, teachers in particular have been ‘punished’ through transfers to new assignments across the state, including to remote locations. In the Dibang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh, civil society groups and dam-affected people successfully blocked the mandatory public hearing for the 3000MW Dibang Multipurpose Project for



**Figure 35: Members of the indigenous Idu Mishmi community blocking the road in protest against the Dibang dam project (Source: sandrp.wordpress.com)**

six years. In response, the state government mobilized paramilitary forces, which resulted in violent clashes. In one incident the police fired at a group of students during a religious celebration.

This heightened fears and the activists eventually resigned, permitting the public hearing and confining their demands to improved terms of compensation.

## Reclaiming Democracy

Citizen groups who contest hydropower plans in the Eastern Himalayas undoubtedly face formidable obstacles: local civil society and affected communities often **lack the political self-determination** and experience to mobilize against the state or the private sector. Due to the greater political and economic power of the latter, many people

fear being targeted and economically marginalized. The Himalayan geographic and cultural landscape also makes it difficult to mobilize across natural and ethnic-cultural boundaries. Different ethnic groups often compete against one another for the resources and opportunities provided by the state, and are therefore reluctant to cooperate. Other times they are simply too far apart. Nevertheless different anti-hydro movements have emerged and have challenged project proponents – in context-specific, strategic ways.

### **(Re-)claiming identity**

In North Sikkim a group of **indigenous Lepcha activists** – the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) – staged one of the earliest examples of resistance against hydropower development. Several years of street protests, protracted hunger strikes and persistent legal activism have been effected the scrapping of four out of seven proposed projects within their ‘tribal reserve’ Dzongu. Two projects are still being challenged in the courts. As a major mobilizing tool, ACT used and ‘re-invented’ their distinctive identity – a ‘vanishing’, endangered tribe. This issue had more traction with the government, because the ruling party had won its votes by promoting an all-inclusive policy centred on enhancing the



**Figure 36: ACT activists during a protest against dams in Dzongu**  
(Source: [saveteesta.wordpress.com](http://saveteesta.wordpress.com))

political recognition and protection of minority communities. It was also a way of redefining a sense of cultural self-esteem and political emancipation, and

helped mobilize larger numbers of supporters from the Lepcha community, which had been split over the issue of hydropower.

## Mobilizing for inclusive governance

The indigenous **Adi community** in Arunachal Pradesh is staging another on-going **struggle for self-determination**. The main contention here is that dam construction will submerge the wet-rice fields near the bank of the Siang River, an important asset in the Adis' subsistence economy, and a marker of culture, identity and political autonomy. The Adis take collective decisions through traditional democratically organized community councils (one vote per household), and these are binding for all community members. This allowed civil society activists to mobilize a unified, resolute political stand against three large dam projects planned on the Siang River, even if individual opinions may differ, and a resolve not to allow any project activity before public consultations are held. Their adamant refusal to allow the mandatory public hearings has so far discouraged project proponents to further pursue project plans.

## Politicizing new issues

The **most powerful** resistance to hydropower, in terms of numbers, is currently being staged by **peasant and student organisations** in the state Assam. The Assam anti-dam movement took up the issue of lacking impact assessments and rehabilitation processes to account for downstream affected populations. The 2000MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project, built on the Arunachal-Assam border, is expected to have significant impacts on Assam's peasant economy, as flow fluctuations and potential floods resulting from the dam stand to disrupt agriculture, fisheries and transportation in the downstream areas.

The movement has also taken up the issue of dam safety. Commonly perceived as a techno-scientific matter to be assessed by experts and scientists, dam safety concerns are often brushed aside by depoliticizing claims that today's dams are technologically advanced, unbreakable and indisputably safe. A team of local academics demonstrated that this was not the case. They assessed and questioned the project's site selection and technical design, in light of the high risk of earthquakes, associated landslides, and possible disaster should an earthquake or flash flood hit the reservoir. The anti-dam activists quickly

picked up the issue and made it a central point of their campaign, for which they received backing from large sections of Assamese society. The Lower Subansiri project has become such a politicized issue that construction has been brought to a standstill for the past three years (helped by the movement's blockade of the supply of construction materials), and has been unresolved even after multiple rounds of high-level negotiations.

### **Lessons learned**

This contribution outlines how **democratic values** and **practices** are being **threatened** by top-down hydropower planning, disguised as a green, sustainable, and imperative development solution. The dam conflicts presented here illustrate how civil society groups have reacted to such assaults on democracy: by reclaiming their **political identities**; by **mobilizing traditional democratic institutions** to create a more powerful voice; and by broaching and **politicizing contentious issues** that have previously been sidelined. Just as depoliticization can occur through very different means, it is important to keep in mind that there are myriad ways to counter it, depending on local experiences, political configurations, geographic characteristics etc.

To further enhance the democratisation of 'green' development it is important to rethink **grassroots actors as political actors**, and **public action for social and environmental justice as an exercise of political agency**. The political should be understood here not in the narrow sense of electoral politics, but as a way of starting or entering a public debate; of reclaiming voice; and of laying open controversies and antagonisms; even if this implies **civil disobedience**.

## Futher readings

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Meyer, K., et. al., 2014. Green and Clean? Hydropower between Low-carbon and High Social and Environmental Impacts. Briefing Paper 10, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklung.

Vagholikar, N., Das, P., J., 2010. Damming Northeast India. Kalpavriksh, Aaranyak, & Action

Aid India, Pune, Guwahati, New Delhi.

## Civil Society organizations working on hydropower conflicts

Affected Citizens of Teesta

Carbon Market Watch

Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India

International Rivers

Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group

Save Dzongu

South Asia Network of Dams, Rivers and People



### 4.3 From Mining to Becomings: Rosia Montana's Movement for Democratic Justice

*Irina Velicu*

#### **The context of Rosia Montana**

Rosia Montana is a small village in Transylvania, Romania where, for the last fourteen years, a Canadian corporation has been pushing for the development of what would be the largest open cast cyanide-use gold mine in Europe. In the 1990s, Rosia Montana was declared mono-industrial, not allowing for any other form of business than mining to be developed by locals. Under this pressure, the majority of Rosieni were discouraged and disillusioned, ultimately conceding their displacement by selling their lands and properties. People have been told that the 'disease' of communism handicapped them and as a result many Rosieni were ashamed to exercise criticism against privatization. At the same time, politicians and media representatives have overwhelmingly supported the corporate takeover of the region. This tense context has created a situation of urgency in which the choice to develop **a mine became a life-related choice** - or rather, a non-choice. About 100 families were stubborn enough to not give up their land and confront the corporation; their movement mobilized thousands of supporters from all over Romania and the world. How have Rosieni imagined themselves as something else than miners, in the face of these events? How have they articulated their resistance to what seemed an inevitable development path?

#### **Responding to Injustice: Organizing Resistance**

In 2002, 300 families from Rosia Montana and the surrounding villages created Alburnus Maior (AM), a mining resistance organization. AM gradually gained the support of many activists and public figures worldwide (Greenpeace, Mining Watch, the EU parliament and even the World Bank). In more than a decade of struggle, a relation of trust was slowly built (not without tensions and quarrels) between NGOs, ac-

tivists and the Rosieni opposing the mine, resulting to co-mobilizations at local, national, international levels. This coalition also attracted the support of various professionals, including architects, lawyers, economists, engineers and artists, who have voluntarily given specialized support for the campaign. Empowered by this solidarity, Alburnus began the strategy of legally challenging the permits and authorizations obtained by the corporation for the gold-mining project in January 2004. By mid-2007, courts began to rule against the company. Further, these court proceedings demonstrated the illegality of the permit process.



**Figure 37: Figure 1 Anti-mining protest for Rosia Montana (Source: Irina Velicu)**

In addition to legal strategies, a diversity of protests and public events, publications on websites, permanent press releases, articles and documentaries have greatly strengthened the efforts of the movement. The persistent work of more **specific campaigns** such as the “No-Cyanide Romania” or the campaign to include Rosia in the UNESCO patrimony

continued to bring attention to the detrimental impacts of the proposed mine at Rosia Montana. While none of these more specific campaigns were successful, the efforts mobilized **national and international opposition to the mine**. The movement slowly grew from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of sympathizers, while also pushing for more civic engagement.

Rosieni and their supporters appreciate the beauty and richness of the land, mountains and rivers surrounding them. This, along with the comfort, relative stability and predictability of controlling their livelihoods, make them feel ‘rich’ enough to refuse development as simply mining. They started to think about other possibilities of maintaining the commons together while questioning the long-term benefits of mining extraction. Rosieni have created what French philosopher Jacques Rancière has called a dissensus, or “a conflict over the common itself

[...] not a quarrel over which solutions are best to apply to a situation, but a dispute over the situation itself” (Ranci re, 2004). Dissensual politics disrupted habitual conditions of sensible experience, shedding more light on the complications and contradictions of economic development as a goal:

“How is it that the EU is telling me I am poor? I have 15 cows; I can take care of my family...

When I wake up in the morning and I see the mountain, for me that is mental health.

I don’t want any type of development... I don’t want just anyone to come here to change the area. I tell people openly “you have to grow up, you cannot be dependent on gold or whoever comes . . . dependent on others just as drug addicts”.

Transformed attitudes like these have been turned into actions through the creation of the first green festival in Romania, HayFest. Initially a music event that focused on entertainment, HayFest has become a cultural event that represents Rosia as a ‘big stage’ of organizations and thousands of citizens from all over the world showing their solidarity with the cause and socializing/debating issues of common concern. By creating all these different (everyday) practices, Rosieni’s movement gradually made other Romanians think differently about development and about global problems. **Rosia Montana evolved from a local labour conflict into an emblematic socio-environmental movement** defending traditional ways of life, knowledge and the commons.

### **Becoming Something Else: Identity as a Denial and Events of Subjectification**

Resistance to mining might not have been successful if not for the continuing, long-term efforts of a handful of people who were producing different routines and habits in what became the everyday life of ‘Saving Rosia Montana’. Rosieni gradually transformed their mind-set, learning to imagine themselves as something else than just miners or ‘poor people’. Instead of feeling helpless, people began to find strength and imagination to live differently their everyday life. They became ‘entrepreneurs’ of their own destinies, diversifying their economic and social activities both individually and collectively; activists and citizens concerned about their autonomy and independence, informing themselves about other similar cases from other continents, re-discovering their

home-community as a rich sustainable place with mountains, lakes, forests and hospitality for small scale tourism.

These becomings can be theorized as '**events of subjectification**'. In his book *Proletarian Nights*, Rancière (2012) refers to the workers during the Revolution of 1830, who read, wrote and discussed journals, letters, newspapers or poetry after their day in the factory. Rancière reinterpreted those writings as rebelling against the predetermination of their lives and identity under the category of 'workers' and thus a denial of other possibilities of life/identity.

Rosieni are now aware that politicians perceive them as a surplus that could easily be ignored, removing them from the domain of the visible. Therefore, their efforts of imagining something else and their becomings are also processes of visibilization: disturbing the 'natural' order of mining/working class paradigm and creating politics by articulating previously unheard voices. Opposing Rosieni have also become aware that their formal recognition as partners in dialogue is not necessarily followed by a policy of redistribution or decision-making in favour of their alternatives. Therefore, during **protests in 2013**, which were the largest post-communist mobilization in Romania, supporters of Rosia Montana did not ask for their rights of participation just to be recognized. Instead, they more broadly questioned the system that allocates rights and liberties, rather than simply contesting a corrupt local government and one development scheme.

Moreover, even if a certain level of participation may be secured, it does not protect Rosieni from being devalued by elites as some kind of social scum: the last thing the Rosieni need is to be recognised as "ignorant miners", as instituted in the current social imaginary. This kind of demonization as the underdog is a form of injustice that cannot easily be repaired through rights or laws: it pervades everyday life and practices. Therefore, Rosieni's fundamental struggle is to push back against being intrinsically tethered to some fixed identities, like "poor workers", "ignorant miners", "nostalgic communists", or peasants who are waiting for support and easily manipulated. In this struggle, the movement has created space and time for broader **subjective and community imaginaries** to be nurtured from an acceptance of other life-worlds as equally valid. Rosieni ventured into the unknown of what their identities could become. This gave them the courage to act from a position of ambiguity and the strength to accept the consequences of disputing and losing

foundational securities or standards.

## **Non-Foundational Politics and Implications for Democracy**

During the autumn of 2013 people were shouting: “The corporation should not make legislation!” and “This is the revolution of our generation” in the streets of major cities of Romania. Perhaps, they imply their generation needs to produce something else from this new level of consciousness and not be allowed to live comfortably numb in the lies of representative consumer democracy. It was also a way of rethinking democracy by **rethinking the subject of the ‘revolutionary collective’**. Forging solidarities and collectives does not have to mean pushing for essential positions, identities or loyalties, be they workers or environmentalists. When democracy remains only about demanding formal rights, democracy is emptied of its core substance: by the people, for the people.

From a **foundationalist perspective**, democratic politics tends to assume that an identity (or a value-foundation) must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, action to be taken. But any foundational (identity) category is also a product of the very structures it is supposed to criticize in order to emancipate, liberate or represent itself. Power in general could be seen as productive (of subjects) rather than merely repressive (Foucault et al., 2003). Any foundation (identitarian, ideological etc.) is a historical contingent product of **power relations**. Democracy requires imagining new types of relations among beings aware of own embeddedness within power relations and disrupting “all logics that purport to found domination on some entitlement to dominate” (Rancière, 2004).

In other words, rethinking democracy requires politicizing any form of foundational politics in order to avoid romanticization or naturalization even for the purpose of coalition building. A **non-foundational politics** could consider building solidarities and collectives also based on the recognition of fluid and ambiguous identities, and partial or temporary loyalties or interests. What we can do in our continuous construction of open democracies is to always **repeat differently and subvert fixed representations** that may imprison people further.

What was suggested here through describing events of subjectifi-

cation is that, in search for democratic justice, there is need for continuous staging (performing or instituting) of egalitarian subjects and life-worlds, beyond political representation and the compassionate “cause of the other”. Democratic politics is not only a practice of contesting or capturing of power, but also of performing alternative spheres of experience and ways of being. For such subjectification and performing to happen, one has to see the political with a “**constitutive lack of ground**” (Swyngedouw, 2011). This implies replacing the prevailing public reason (such as economic efficiency, human rights etc.) with the absence of a final public reason. The acceptance of such a void liberates us from the various invented prisons of colonial nature. The human poetic will to meaning-making can produce other stories and meanings given the lack of a higher standard (or ‘true’ account of the world) to measure some knowledge against others.

#### 4.4 Deconstructing public health, enabling health empowerment. A case from the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

*Panagiota Kotsila*

##### **Public health as a question of democracy**

Extreme climatic phenomena, environmental crimes and the severing of populations from balanced and functioning ecosystems, have escalated **human health challenges** worldwide. Meanwhile, the ever-expanding sector of biomedicine does not necessarily benefit of vulnerable populations who are put at risk by changing environmental conditions, as the health industry is generally oriented to serve the interests of markets and powerful elites. As the case of Campania in Italy (see 5.4) exemplifies, health risks are unequally distributed and are the product of political processes.

Inequalities in exposure to physical extremes, epidemics, toxic substances and other types of harm-imposing situations often manifest along lines of gender, ethnicity and/or class, as well as between the global North and South. As highlighted in this chapter, when decisions are made based on scientized technocratic dogmas about how “**development**”, “**economic growth**” and “**environmental management**” can or should be achieved, the voices of those whose health and well-being is at stake are rarely taken into account. Moreover, such decisions are often taken in spaces and contexts far removed from where their consequences are experienced. This renders **health** both a question of **environmental justice and democracy**.

Questions of disease emergence, spread and prevention have -in the modern age-been predominantly considered issues for medical “experts” to answer. Research from the humanities, however, has repeatedly shown that relevant and effective answers to health problems can only grow when contextualized, historicized and politicized questions are posed. Such questions and answers must arise from within the communities whose health is at stake.

## A political ecology approach to health

Looking at the interactions and inter-dependencies between health risks or disease and phenomena, such as:

- Polluted ecosystems, extreme climatic phenomena, climate change impacts
- Deforestation, agricultural intensification, use of pesticides, monocultures
- Access to safe water and sanitation, access to sources of livelihood
- Urban landscapes, ecosystem services, gentrification

Examining the socio-political context and interrogating aspects of:

- Dominant modes and discourses of development, commodification of health, privatization of health services, individualization of health responsibilities
- Availability and accessibility of preventive health and healthcare / trust in and use of medical establishments
- Abuse of medical authority and doctor-patient relationships
- The presence and role of traditional/alternative health/disease knowledge
- Health policy and practice in relation to social equity, human rights, minority populations, gender, ethnicity and class
- The interaction of state & society in regional and national scales / micro-politics and power structures within local societies
- Cultural values and social norms associated with bodily practices and disease.

## A framework for understanding and acting in health

**Health injustices** have long been subject of academic research and a reason for vociferous social reaction. The gap that exists between critical social science and depoliticized biomedical explanations often makes it difficult for social movements to find the scientific backup for their efforts to reclaim public health. The **role civil society** can play in strengthening these voices is crucial, not only for improving human health but also for the expanding and **enhancing democratic processes**. Some of the core principles for the democratization of health and its re-positioning in the socio-environmental and public domain, include:

Human health is an emerging attribute of socio-ecological interaction and thus in constant correlation to the changes taking place in people's environment;

Public health is more complex than a sum of medically explained bodies; its explanation needs to involve aspects of everyday life and social interaction, including power relations, cultural beliefs, moral symbols and local knowledge(s);

Trends of capital accumulation, ideological shifts and the ethics behind legal/policy text, affect the spread of disease in ways than bio-



medicine alone cannot explain.

### **Diarrheal disease in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam**

Vietnam is a one-party state in which “the Party is the people and the people are the Party”, as often advocated by dominant state discourse. In the current historical moment of **market socialism**, this representation of people’s desires and needs by the central government and the wider state bureaucracy has been often in question. The case of diarrheal disease presents a good example of how the Vietnamese state maintains its legitimacy through abdicating its responsibilities and perpetuating (health) inequalities.

The Mekong Delta, in Vietnam, is a fertile region whose residents have developed a culture revolving around water. Situated in a wetland rice-cultivating area, with a climate of monsoons and annual floods, the history and culture of the people in the Delta is tightly connected to their hydro-environments. Up until 1990, the practice of using surface water for drinking was maintained by nearly 20% of the population in the whole country, while nearly 40% was exercising open defecation in rivers and canals.

Local residents are vehement about the deterioration of water quality in their surrounding attributing this to dense urbanization, waste accumulation and agricultural intensification. Untreated human waste, pesticides and fertilizers from the surrounding rice-fields, as well as manure and antibiotics from the aquaculture sector have indeed been exacerbating **water contamination** in the Delta for the last 20 years. But the unwillingness of the Vietnamese state to control water pollution and mitigate such degradation of aquatic environments does not figure prominently in the official discourse; and especially not when discussing risk factors for diarrhoea; a disease that is caused mainly by the consumption of contaminated water or food.

#### *Casting blame, legitimizing the state*

Based on statistics that demonstrate a continuing expansion of water supply and sanitation (WSS) infrastructure, state representatives paint a picture of success with regards to diarrhoea prevention. When presented with data showing over **800.000 of diarrhoea cases in 2010**

- and Southern Vietnam being the second most hit of the 4 main regions in Vietnam - state representatives fall into a discourse of renouncing responsibility and casting blame. Those who “don’t want to invest in WSS facilities”, the “stubborn who don’t treat their water,” “the poor”, those



living “in remote rural areas” or “in floating houses by the river”; are all identities constructed on the basis of behaviours that are rendered wrong and accountable for public health problems.

**Figure 38: “Floating houses” constructed at the edge of canals in urban Ninh Kieu district (source: Panagiota Kotsila)**

Through such narrative, diarrhoea is presented as an issue of obstructed modernity and lack of willingness from the side of (some!) local population.

Indeed, many people in the Delta do not follow safe practices of water supply and sanitation, but this owes to the **dispossessions** they are experiencing in material and knowledge terms. The poor -and mostly those in urban areas- are constrained from accessing micro-credit schemes or subsidies for WSS improvements in the region. This is firstly due to their low financial credibility and political power, but also due to the focus of such programs on rural areas - where statistics of WSS access are lower. A chase of numerical targets, based on indicators of WSS, thus becomes the equivalent of disease prevention policy. This, on the one hand ignores those that remain financially restricted to access safe WSS, and on the other, it misreads the existence of infrastructure as a reduction of disease risk (V. Curtis, Cairncross, & Yonli, 2000; Heller, Colosimo, & Antunes, 2003; Jensen et al., 2002; Mintz, Bartram, Lochery, & Wegelin, 2001). Interviews with 131 households revealed that the majority of people have confused, contradictory or unclear perceptions on what makes them sick with diarrhoea and how they can avoid it, in individual or community level. About 20% were not applying the adequate treatment to water before drinking it, and more

than half had toilets that were discharging sewage directly into the river. Local perceptions of “clean” or “dirty” did not always agree with water quality assessments and most people would judge water safety based on its smell, turbidity or taste and not on information about its origin or prior treatment.



**Figure 39: Plant used to cure diarrhoea and the selling of medicinal herbal mixtures. In the garden of the Traditional Medicine Hospital of Can Tho City, there are three more plants that are known to help with the symptoms of diarrhoea. Despite the claims of the hospital's director, growing and preparing such plants in one's own garden was not common in the interviewed households (source: Panagiota Kotsila).**

These types of perceptions were not statistically correlated to people's location or average income; both poor, middle-class and better-off people carried certain misconceptions or contradictive behaviours around water safety and diarrhoea prevention more generally.

Beyond circulating a narrative of blame and stigma for the “backwards” rural and the “dirty” poor, state-backed reports overestimated the access to safe and hygienic WSS as the results of the household survey demonstrated. Triangulation of legal text, in-depth discussions with informants and official state documents, revealed that reporting success in WSS expansion increases the likelihood of a province receiving funding in the future - either from external development aid or the central government. At the same time, a huge fiscal discrepancy was noticed in the public funds assigned for WSS: more than half of the provincial budget was not justified by the evidenced or even the reported constructions. In other words, 15 billion VND (almost 660.000 US dollars) worth of funding appears to be unknowingly spent.

In light of these findings, the “success stories” in WSS development and their proclaimed health benefits can be understood more as a way to ensure inflow of capital to local bureaucracies than a concerted effort to bring down disease. Prioritizing “hardware” WSS infrastructure

while undermining “software” health education measures proves a successful strategy for local governments to capture resources.

#### *Top-down health messages and the moralization of disease*

Apart from the paltry budget that ends up allocated for health education, there is another type of **health dispossession**: traditional knowledge is excluded and replaced with a discourse of (health) behaviours as moral obligations. Based on tenets of biomedicine and epidemiology, health communication comes in the form of bullet-point instructions, excluding the richness of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine that many people practice and consider valuable. Moreover, health messages are attached a strong sense of individual or community obligation towards the collective - represented by facets of the state, through a morally charged language. Public health thus turns from a state responsibility of social welfare to a personal choice representing citizenship morality.

As plethora of research has demonstrated, such approaches create outcomes that effectively bring the opposite of desired impacts. People develop **negative responses to state advice or obligations** when they feel state policy and practice marginalizes and stigmatizes them. This combination of moralizing disease and disassociating the new (biomedical) approaches from old engrained systems of (traditional) understandings contributes to why preventive messages remain distant, not welcomed in practice and not disseminated to the people health promoters wish to reach.

As people are alienated from both the resources and the knowledge that will allow them to understand the problem of disease holistically and thus be able to manage it, the policies and practices that the Vietnamese state uses create a **gap in the democratic space of informed health decisions at the individual and collective level**.

### **Tools for civil society**

#### *Participatory and critical approaches to health*

- Researchers and public health officials engaging local communities around the causes and the expressions, but also the nature of, disease. **Reframing health/disease “from below”**, to reflect the opi-

nions, worldviews and desires of communities.

- Official data should be considered with caution, questioning the methods and the motives behind their generation. Complementary & comparable data can be generated together with local communities. **Popular epidemiology** can create counter-narratives when a health condition related to environmental change is under-reported, bio-medically ambivalent or contradicts scientific wisdom.

*Promoting and building empowering health education*

- Organizing public events to **promote mutual learning between scientists and citizens**. Making these events a platform for citizen-science-activist networks and engaging in discussions with movements reclaiming environmental health and social justice.

- Demystifying complex medical terminology. The use of **narrative tools like visualisations and metaphors** that draw from local tales, historical aspects of life and other elements of local culture can involve the public and facilitate understandings of new information.

- **De-stigmatizing disease and empowering communities** by emphasizing on community strengths, beauty and potential rather than physical or moral “deficits”.

- Placing traditional approaches and methods on eco-bodily interactions side by side with biomedical knowledge. **Enhancing diversity in prevention and healing**, along with peoples’ confidence in avoiding and fighting disease.

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## 4.5 Reclaiming democracy through alternative economies activism: lessons from agrifood movements in the Basque Country and Greece

*Rita Calvário*

So-called alternative agrifood movements such as organic farming, fair trade, slow food, community-supported agriculture, and local food networks have proliferated since the 1990s worldwide. Arising as a critique and an alternative to the corporate control of agrifood systems, the industrial model of agriculture, and neoliberal globalization, they ask the fundamental democratic questions of **what needs, rights and lives people recognize, desire and demand**.

The turn into local scales of action and activism through market choices, however, has undermined the transformative potential of agrifood movements. Whereas some argue that diverse food economies create spaces for progressive discourse to imagine and create alternative food worlds, critics sustain that, without confronting political and economic centres of power, alternatives complement -rather than oppose- conventional agrifood systems, thereby, failing to address social inequalities.

Political economy approaches followed by the international peasants' movement La Via Campesina and embodied in the political framework of food sovereignty, point to the limits of individual choice, alternative lifestyles, and the gradual expansion of alternative food networks. They instead put weight on collective action, structural reforms to markets and property regimes, and social equality, while they focus their action in agroecology, peasant economies, re-localization, land reform, and the human right to food. Food sovereignty is about democracy as it urges to regain **social control over the agrifood systems and policies** away from the power of corporations and capital interests. Therefore, it reclaims the right of (and power to) producers, consumers, and communities to decide on what to produce, how, where, from who and to whom.

Next, we present two different cases, one from the **production** side, other from the **consumption** side, showing how struggles for food sovereignty combine the practice of alternative food economies with

the direct confrontation with the hegemonic powers of capital, including state power.

## Peasant movements in the Basque Country

**EHNE-Bizkaia** is a small-scale producer's trade union, born in 1976 in Bizkaia, a small and densely urbanised province of Euskadi (Basque Country, Spain). In the late 1990s they decided to supplement a more 'classic' trade-union type of protest-action -centred in economic and political demands and collective mobilisations-, with alternative food economies.

This decision was informed by the debates in La Via Campesina movement, where EHNE-Bizkaia actively participates, as well as from the felt effects of agrarian capitalism over small farmers. After years of modernisation oriented to an intensive, competitive and indebted agriculture, neoliberal policies were aggravating the destruction of small-scale farmers' livelihoods, agricultural resources, and local community relationships. Something needed to be done more than complain and centre demands on prices, subsidies and policy-reforms. Approaching critically the models of production and territorial development, followed by the setting-up of alternatives, there was a felt need in order to empower the struggles of small-scale farmers. As a result, they adopted a **food sovereignty political framework** and followed a strategy of 're-peasantization', e.g. cut of external dependencies from capitalist markets through agroecological production, solidarity food economies and re-localisation.

This way, they would not just respond to the survival needs of the producers, they would transform their 'problem' from a "professional" to a social question and broaden alliances in society, while envisioning an economic alternative for the whole of Euskal Herria (the cross-border Basque territory).

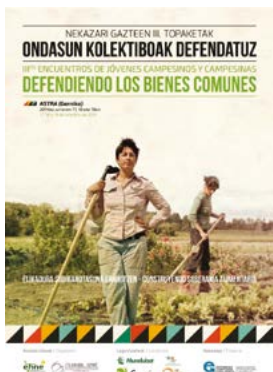


Figure 40 Poster of the 3rd Meeting of Young Peasants in Euskal Herria. Source: <http://www.elikaherria.eus/>

In practical terms, they decided to pro-

mote only agroecology and stopped giving training in capital-intensive modes of farming. They also directed to society their training programs and communication tools and they centred their discourses on food rather than on agriculture. Moreover, they gave primacy to attracting new young 'peasants' to face an ageing sector and developed a network of community-supported agriculture, the Red Nekasarea, based on producers' cooperation and on producer-consumer alliances. Finally, they supported the diversification of rural economies through the development of cooperatives and social businesses.

Their concern, however, was not to offer market alternatives to producers and consumers, neither to simply prove that another agrifood model is possible and better. Re-politicisation of agrifood issues is rather accompanied, on one hand, by ideological work on the emancipatory agenda of food sovereignty, and, on the other, by a project of making producers and alternative networks converge, together with other organisations and social movements, within an enlarged social movement struggling for food sovereignty in Euskal Herria. In 2011, this movement emerged under the name Etxalde.

This work is followed with struggles to change policies and institutions. EHNE-Bizkaia is aware that to advance food sovereignty it needs to confront institutions and demand policy reforms. This is evident on the question of access to land, one of the main problems youngsters face when they want to enter the agrarian sector. Land reform is thus a major stage of confrontation with institutions. But, for EHNE-Bizkaia, land reform is not about redistribute land ownership. Instead, it is about ensure land is used to fulfil its social function of producing food for the population, regardless of the property regime. In this case, the state is called to be the sovereign power in order to plan land-uses according to social needs, and intervene in property to ensure land is used according to its social function. Again, in addressing **social justice** concerns, EHNE-Bizkaia is aware it cannot solve food poverty through prices and without an intervention of institutions. But, for them, this implies to go against the charity and philanthropic logic of food banks, and ensure **social redistribution policies** that address the food sector. In general, when they confront institutions, they demand short-term transitional reforms that are socially relevant within a long-term transformative horizon, and they struggle for changing institutions in order to re-cover its public function in meaningful ways and to re-distribute power in society.



## The ‘no-middlemen’ movement in Greece

Global crisis and austerity policies have hit Greece hard, especially since 2010. Economic meltdown was accompanied with the withdrawal of welfare policies, growing levels of unemployment, poverty and social inequalities. In the midst of social hardship and mass anti-austerity protests, solidarity networks arose to respond to immediate basic needs, expand resistance struggles and offer alternative pathways that re-think the economy and democracy.



**Figure 41: “No-middlemen” distribution in Faliro, Athens (Source: Rita Calvario)**

Food was no exception in these changing conditions. For the first time in decades, food consumption declined. Signs of hunger and **nutritional poverty** were evident around Greece, while relative prices of food kept increasing. Moreover, in a context where ‘food’ and ‘solidarity’ have become heavily politicised - the government, religious actors, and the media were promoting charity, philanthropy and the entrepreneur spirit, while neo-nazi groups were organising food banks for ‘genuine’ Greeks - there was a felt need to build alternative narratives and social relationships based on equity.

After the emergence of a number of grassroots solidarity food banks, soup kitchens, and social groceries, in 2012 the ‘no-middlemen’ initiatives were created. Such initiatives bypass traders in the exchange between producers and consumers allowing fair prices and direct payment to the former and quality food at low cost to the latter. The first initiative appeared in the town of Katerini, in Central Greece, and rapidly spread across the country, especially in the bigger cities where deprivation is higher. Many of the existing 50 local groups, are also involved in other solidarity actions in health and education.

In general, no-middlemen actions consist of **open-air distribu-**

**tions where producers and consumers meet**, after activists from the local groups have selected producers, products and negotiated prices - the criteria are social, quality-based and in some cases environmental. Producers are also asked to give for free a percentage of their sales in food products for poor households.

'No-middlemen' distributions arose to face the paradox of producers who could not sell their products due to low prices paid by traders on the one side, and of consumers who could not buy food due to food inflation and austerity-squeezed incomes, on the other. This paradox highlighted the failure of conventional agrifood systems and neoliberal policies to ensure social needs.

In face of the sovereign debt and austerity policies, agriculture and food re-emerged as a strategic sector without which no political uprising is possible. Apart from responding to the basic needs of urban consumers, a central aim of these initiatives is to participate in the **reconstruction of the economy**, with the recognition that this is not only a top-down task of the state. One of the prospects in the food movement is to reorganise production and exchange towards the solidarity and cooperative economy

The original aim of these initiatives was, thereby, not to supplement a neoliberal austerity state or show that the economy can be diverse. These initiatives are an integral part of the broader political movement directly confronting austerity governments and policies, while they are also struggling for an economic alternative for the agrifood system and the overall economy, in which the state is called to participate but also to transform itself. After the change of government in January 2015 to the left-wing party Syriza, these initiatives remain active.

In practice, solidarity food actions work to provide hope against despair and self-empowerment, while they promote mutual-aid, reciprocity, self-organisation, cooperation, and direct democracy. These actions try to politicise and empower citizens for challenging austerity policies and change society in the long run. Food distributions are festive and politicised with banners and multiple debates, and many groups organise convivial and political activities in their neighbourhoods and get involved in local struggles such as against electricity cuts and public services privatization. Moreover, each group takes **decisions by consensus in open assemblies** where all participate on an equal basis.

The groups gather together in regional networks and national me-

etings to share experiences, discuss challenges and take decisions for moving forward. This reinforces their capacity to act, envision possibilities, and discuss collectively political proposals to restructure the food sector, while strengthens the movement's politicisation. Their relation with the state is one of confrontation, as they are independent structures. They demand policy reforms that, on one side, can allow the initiatives to grow (as the law does not allows or puts barriers to this type of food initiatives) and, on the other, push for the reconstruction of the agrifood system through the solidarity economy. They do not dismiss or aim to replace the state, but envision to transform the state and redistribute power in society, claiming for a real democracy.

### **Lessons for political ecology and democracy**

This entry highlights that tackling agrifood injustices and reclaiming real democracy involves challenging the political and economic powers that are structuring agrifood systems. For this to take place, it is not possible to separate the practice of alternative economies from the struggles to change the rules of the game as determined by institutions, policies and corporations. Whereas the practice of alternative food economies contributes in opening imaginaries and politicize food issues, they can easily complement the neoliberal (austerity) state if they do not engage in a more confrontational politics that, on one side, does not refuses to engage with the state, but, on the other, aims to go further than policy reforms to change the state itself.

Both cases show also the importance of enacting alternative food economies to strengthen struggles and confrontational politics, moving from mere reactive positions to rising issues in the political agenda and forcing the state and capital powers to react.

In sum, it is from intertwined interventions in the economic, social and political realms that people's power to govern and be sovereign of their collective and individual lives can be reclaimed.

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### Civil Society organizations working on agrifood issues

[La Via Campesina](#)

[International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty](#)

[Elikaherria](#) (Basque Country)

[Solidarity for All](#) (Greece)

[Landless Workers Movement](#) (Brazil)

[Food First](#) (USA)

[Confédération Paysanne](#) (France)

Chapter 5.  
Movements in motion. Sharing  
Experiences, Building  
Socio-Ecological Struggles

*Santiago Gorostiza  
Gustavo García López  
Salvatore Paolo De Rosa  
Melissa Garcia-Lamarca*

*Editor: Panagiota Kotsila*



## 5.1 Introduction

People often decide to mobilize, organize and represent themselves politically and collectively in counter-reaction to changes in environmental conditions and livelihoods (Scott, 1976, Martinez-Alier 2002, Robbins, 2012): for example, where and how dams are built, oil or gold is extracted, waste is dumped. In many of these and other cases, there is a sense of a loss of control over the conditions and effects of “development” plans, usually described as injustice. In Political Ecology, these forms of injustices have generally been described as the disproportional exposure of poorer and/or minority communities to intensive resource extraction, hazardous waste or more generally, poor environmental conditions (Bullard 1990; Pellow 2000; Pulido 2006; Schlosberg 2007).

In this chapter we refer to cases of **injustices** both in **urban and rural areas** that have driven people in various communities to **initiate movements** for greater autonomy and control over the terms of development, reproduction of lives and dignity. We are particularly interested in those social movements or actors of struggles for justice and egalitarian socio-ecological futures which are re-politicising aspects of social and ecological life advocating and practicing direct forms of democracy and self-governance in various forms. We do not intent to offer a theoretical perspective on the complex and highly heterogeneous movement-building process: rather we are **drawing lessons** from the specific cases and introduce different strategies, tools and practices that have helped movements to advance their goals in the different, although still similar, political contexts of Italy, Spain and Puerto Rico. Through this, we seek to provide transferable knowledge that could be useful to movements and activists in other contexts.

The chapter shares some ways in which Political Ecology can bring new understandings on movements across the world: what seem to be local problems reverberate into global structural issues which concern all of us. Movements play a fundamental **role in the defence of the environment, common resources and people's livelihoods**, in preventing processes of dispossession and in creating spaces for society outside or beyond capitalist relations. Most importantly, they make visible the interconnections between political and ecological issues.

At the same time, Political Ecology warns us of the tendency to



romanticize such movements. We thus start from an awareness of such risks, and in addition to offering an insightful account of the successful stories of these collective struggles, we will speak about their tensions and complexities. Therefore, we do not intend to give a simple definition of movements, as they are **phenomena in constant motion** (Walker 1994). The prevailing discourse that in order to be effective movements must seek particular institutionalized effects is problematic because the target of dissent (capital, states, Mafia etc.) also moves and transforms its practices (Deleuze 1992, Rupert and Solomon 2006, Velicu 2014). As Benjamin Arditi<sup>14</sup>, Professor of Politics at the National University of Mexico (UNAM) notes, the protest, or emergence of a movement, may be “something unplanned and difficult to capture within a system of rules because rules are precisely what are being put into question.” In other words, faced with their own displacement, people may choose to displace the exact cognitive maps that allow their territorial maps to be re-written. That is because the dominant discourse of development, in its desire for profit making no matter the costs, claims to be an omnipresent, atemporal truth (Escobar 1998). Therefore, to seriously consider the political possibilities of movements, it may be necessary to be more aware of the limits of our own thinking about these possibilities (Walker 1994).

We suggest that one way to think of these political possibilities is to travel through time towards the collective histories that have been silenced in the processes of modernization/industrialization, urbanization or generally, capitalist development. Community self-narration of its past could be an insightful alter-story to the history told by the state. Whether reframing campaigns in Barcelona or inspiring action in Puerto Rico, such alternative (hi)stories, resonating with practices of people under colonialism, remind us of knowledge, languages, identities and actions which have been erased in the process of internalizing and taking for granted capitalist development.

People are *doing* Political Ecology in movements; therefore, as an academic field, it has grown in the context of activism. In this sense,

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14 Benjamin Arditi. Insurgencies don't have a plan – they are the plan: Political performatives and vanishing mediators in 2011. JOMEC Journal: Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. [http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/jomecjournal/1-june2012/arditi\\_insurgencies.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/jomecjournal/1-june2012/arditi_insurgencies.pdf)

movements are sources of knowledge in and of themselves. Perhaps, sometimes, an **engaged-activist scholar** could push some boundaries through his or her knowledge and connections. For instance, from the first contribution of this chapter we find out that **research and dissemination about historical movements** carried out by activists can be insightful for present day's social movements to imagine and configure alternative futures. In the first section of this chapter, he shows us how through historical narration, activists in Barcelona re-articulate the struggle connecting the present with the past in shaping desired futures.

Moreover, telling us a personal story of childhood neighbourhood, the second contribution shows the interconnections between a **historical process of suburban expansion into green spaces** which can be traced to the colonial context and contemporary widespread urbanization of Puerto Rico. By contrast to government involvement in environmental issues, individuals come together to restore and protect their urban green spaces and forests and in the process, they become involved in struggles over democratic decision-making over land use. The case of Cupey thus offers an example of movement development for reclaiming not only the ecological but also the civic commons, not only the forest but also democracy.

The third contribution narrates the controversial problem of waste in Naples through a historical perspective of a population that has long suffered the consequences of a Biocide: in response to such violence, people in Campania have **transformed their grievances into a long-term struggle for imagining alternatives**, and have created alliances beyond identities and divisions in order to perform their equal right to life and democratic decision-making. He shows how movements tackle the connections between local manifestations of structural processes, turning this framing into a political device for enlarging the scope of activism towards other issues and movements. The 'permanent revolution' that people are living in their everyday lives is both a means to find new ways to represent themselves politically as well as a revival of their living in common, through joyful actions with unexpected outcomes.

Similarly, the last contribution is focused on the problem of **energy poverty** in Spain, and highlights how an **alliance of social-ecological movements** tackles the issue on the streets and through legal and institutional mechanisms. This contribution shows how pedagogy plays

a critical role in collective organising, bottom-up action against energy poverty and in raising awareness on that our equal right to consume energy has to be connected to energy as a commodity that produces social and environmental costs for people elsewhere on the planet.

Movements are means for the rediscovering and recovering of crucial commons, from forests to housing, energy, cities or social relations themselves within a community. This shows us that in the moving of movements, one can read the constant struggle for democracy, as an open never-ending process shaped by history and geography, desires and discourses, ideas and sensibilities.

## 5.2 Memory, Historical Research and Activism. The case of Segle XX building and the neighbours of Barceloneta (Barcelona)

*Santiago Gorostiza*

When Aymara people in South-America look ahead they are facing the past. Literally. Researchers who investigated Aymara language and gestures have established that, unlike all the studied cultures and languages of the world, they refer to the past by gesturing ahead, while the future is situated in the back of the self. The example of the Aymara indigenous people, when reflecting on how history can be useful for activists participating in socio-environmental conflicts, challenges our preconditioned views (see Chapter 1.). We can put history into the foreground, not just as the background or the context of present events but as a central resource for the present and the future.

**“All history is contemporary history”** – famously asserted Benedetto Croce. But it is not only that we all write and research within the context of our time. It is also that the stories and narrations that we unveil impact on today. They can affect how we look at the past – but especially, when it involves social movements, they can also shape how we look at the present and at the future, at what is conceived as possible and impossible today and tomorrow.

As the Zapatistas claim, it is necessary to **“open a crack”** in history. On January 1st 1994, the very same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force, the Zapatistas launched their revolt in the mountains of Southeast Mexico. From their very First Declaration, they emphasised they were the result of 500 years of resistance to colonialism. One of the expressions of such resistance is precisely their critique to how history has been written. A history that tells the story of the elites just makes the present state of things seem natural, leaves aside the subalterns and silences their past. Against this type of history appropriation, Zapatistas claim the need to **“open a crack”**– to write the history of the exploited. A crack that disrupts also the idea of unidirectional, non-linear history, opening a loophole that challenges views of what is in front of us and what in our backs. A crack that permits us to look to the past ahead – as the Aymara – as memories of the alternative non-disposable future. Once the past is reclaimed,

the door to reclaim the future swings open (for the importance of place, see also 5.4).

Reclaiming silenced pasts is a task to be done both in the archives and the streets, both in libraries and mountains, listening to stories and reading dusty records. It can be about how a revolution was silenced and obliterated from history, as shown in the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot on the late 18th century in Haiti. And also about how dictatorships try to wipe out the memory and heritage of those who opposed them. When, like in Spain, elites have succeeded to remain in power for decades, the stories of disappeared workers and activists and their emancipatory projects frustrated by a 40-year long dictatorship risk being left aside and silenced forever (on storytelling, see 2.4).

### **The Case of Segle XX building in Barceloneta**

In December 2013, neighbours from La Barceloneta (Barcelona, Spain) announced a demonstration to **reclaim the empty building of *El Segle XX*** (“The Twentieth Century”) cooperative for its public use. *El Segle XX* had been founded in 1901, but after years of decadence during the Francoist dictatorship, the cooperative was dissolved in the late 1980s and the building later abandoned.

At least since 2008, La **Òstia neighbourhood association** began collecting information about the history of the neighbourhood and interviewing veteran neighbours. The importance of several cooperatives – *El Segle XX* among them – as spaces of socialization, consumption and cultural centres since the late Nineteenth century soon emerged as a central aspect of the neighbours’ memories. Later, the Research Group of Cooperative Memory of Barceloneta (Grup de Recerca de la Memòria Cooperativa de la Barceloneta) continued the work of the association focusing on the history of cooperatives by diving into archives, recording interviews, organizing [guided tours](#) and other activities. In **Barceloneta**, historically a **working-class neighbourhood** with low salaries and few public and social facilities, now under a **high touristic pressure**, the use of *El Segle XX* building became a symbolic claim to the municipality. The **historical connotations of the building** and of cooperatives’ movement were manifest. Since the last decades of the Nineteenth century, the importance of the organisation of cooperatives

in Barcelona grew and was part of a wider international movement. In Catalonia, cooperatives had their heyday during the democratic period of the Second Republic (1931-1939), when thousands of families were members of them. Very often, they had their own theatres, bars, and shops. Through consumption cooperatives, they allowed avoiding intermediaries between consumers and producers and thus also represented a nexus of the urban space to the surrounding agricultural environment that fed it. However, following a military coup that unleashed the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and with the victory of Franco over the Republicans, cooperatives never regained the activity that they had had before. In fact, during the conflict, Barcelona was on the Republican side and Barceloneta was bombed so heavily that it had to be evacuated. *El Segle XX* was hit by Fascist bombings and reduced to ashes. Despite the building was rebuilt after the war, during the dictatorship its activity languished, and most cooperatives were dissolved and buildings sold. *El Segle XX* building passed to private hands at some point during the early 1990s, following an irregular process of dissolution of the cooperative. In recent years, despite the land on which the building is built was categorised by the City Council as a public facility, rumours of private commercial projects for the building circulated along with the growing pressure of gentrification and tourism in the maritime neighbourhood of Barceloneta. This spread uneasiness among the neighbours. During the last days of 2013, two weeks before a scheduled demonstration, an apparently fortuitous fire damaged part of the building. This event fostered a united front of the associations and neighbours of the quarter, and just a few weeks later, more than 30

organisations signed a statement asking the District to either expropriate or buy the *Segle XX* building. They also demanded a transparent investigation about the fire and the legal state of the building property, as well as the commitment of the City Council to keep the category of the building area as a public facility.



**Figure 42: Poster “El Segle XX és pel barri” (“The Twentieth Century is for the neighbourhood”). (Source: Grup de Recerca de la Memòria Cooperativa de la Barceloneta)**

At the end of the demonstration, in front of *El Segle XX* building, several neighbours intervened emphasising the historical role of the cooperative in Barceloneta. The march ended with the sticking of two posters on the wall of the building. One vindicated the historical memory of cooperativism with a quote from 1899; the other was a blank poster to be filled by participants with their ideas for the future uses of the space, under the title “What do we want for *El Segle XX*?” (“Què volem per al Segle XX?”). In the same fashion, the website of the Research Group of Cooperative Memory of Barceloneta, whose members had an active role in the march, stated clearly their views on the uses of the memory of cooperativism: “More than an exercise of historical memory, it comes to us as a memory of the future: the practices of cooperation give us a powerful tool to face a present of cutbacks in social services and to build a shared future”.

### **Unearthing stories of the past, reconnecting struggles for the future**

In a rapidly changing *barri* (neighbourhood), with a growing luxurious touristic pressure stimulating higher rents and pushing former neighbours out, associations have resorted to historical research to enhance their struggle. Recording memories, collecting old scanning pictures, and newspapers, finding old records or mapping places disappeared neighbours are also a way to narrate their own story.

As highlighted by activist researcher Emma Alari, participatory mapping has been an essential tool in the neighbourhood struggle. On one hand, maps were used by neighbours in Barceloneta to display the different threats suffered by the neighbourhood. In this regard, the collaboration with mapping activists Iconoclasistas constitutes a good example of the use of collaborative mapping for social movements. But mapping can also be a historical project. By mapping both long and recently disappeared places in “[Geografia Esborrada de la Barceloneta](#)” (“Barceloneta Deleted Geography”), neighbours not only narrate their history but configure an emotional geography of the *barri* that binds together the stories of squatted houses already demolished with the story of *El Segle XX* or the *Escola del Mar*, a wood-made school in the seaside that was burnt by the Fascist bombings during the Spanish Civil War.

Such stories are disseminated by walking and talking together with neighbours (organised guided tours) but also leaving the option of doing it alone listening to the audio contents available in the web. Through the map, these stories weave new connections between the past, the present and the imagined futures. Guided tours provide chances for the interaction between those researching the history of the neighbourhood and their inhabitants, confronting and enriching each other's stories. Altogether, this strengthens the claim of spaces such as *El Segle XX* for the common uses in the neighbourhood, by reconnecting the stories of the neighbours' relation to this space with the historical research about its function in the social movements of the past.

After years of actions and campaigns in the neighbourhood, Barcelona City Council has finally committed to start the process of **expropriation of *El Segle XX* building to give it back to the *barri***. The struggle, however, is far from over. As the recuperation of the building is close to become a reality, the **neighbourhood platform designs its own project** for the uses of the building through a grassroots process. In a major open meeting in the square, neighbours wrote their ideas for the future uses of the cooperative building on several large-size copies of the 1939 project drawings to rebuild the cooperative after the war, which they had located in the archives. Not only it was a practical way to collect all the ideas for the different building floors and a reminder of the building past. It was also an inadvertently symbolic gesture: the maps of the project to rebuild *El Segle XX* after the Fascist bombings and occupation of Barcelona in 1939 were recycled 76 years later to discuss an alternative future with the *barri's* neighbours. Past can be a resource for imagining alternative futures – in a very material way.



**Figure 43: Planning the future of *El Segle XX* cooperative on the base of the 1939 maps located in the municipal archive. (Source: Santiago Gorostiza)**

While some would see a gloomy and nostalgic flavour in this struggle, activists explicitly state that they don't intend to idealize neither romanticize a return to a static lost past. They want to learn lessons about past experiences tried and failed, understand



past hopes for imagined futures, explore the daily life and problems of the neighbourhood in the past and its connections to today. Following Walter Benjamin, in this way nostalgia can be an emotion connected to transformation and even revolution. Past experiences are opportunities for reinvention, possibilities for alliances across time. Stories like the one told by *El Siglo XX* building can be, as Italian authors Wu Ming and Vitaliano Ravagli have asserted, “axes of war to be unearthed”.

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### 5.3. Struggles over urban greenspace in San Juan, Puerto Rico: Reconnecting ecology and democracy

*Gustavo García López*

Urban areas have increasingly become sites of social-ecological struggles as communities seek to defend and re-make their neighbourhoods and challenge processes of community displacement and social and environmental degradation. This is the story of the Cupey Arboretum, a small group of middle-class suburbanites who (sometimes) came together with a simple idea –to beautify their neighbourhood and restore a small remnant of forest by planting trees; and of how in the process of their struggle, they become ‘politicized’ and integrated into a larger movement challenging the political economy of urban planning. The analysis emphasizes the importance of individual actions, even if small, and of explicitly ‘connecting the dots’ between local processes and the supra-local **political economy** driving urban transformations. It also invites reflection on the role of lived experiences as a basis for engagement.

#### **The political economy of the urban growth machine**

Puerto Rico, a small archipelago in the Caribbean, is a colony of the United States since 1898. Until the 1940s, its economy was mostly agricultural. A large ‘development’ project called Operation Bootstrap implemented by the local government with strong backing from the US, gradually transformed the country’s economy into an industrial and urban one. US colonialism also meant the implementation of the US model of urbanization, known as **(sub)urban sprawl**: low-density, car-dependent urbanization spread away from city centres. Today, most of Puerto Rico’s population lives in low-density gated suburban communities –abandoning both rural (agricultural) areas and urban centres; almost everyone (about 90%) uses private cars as their main transportation; and we have one of the densest networks of roads in the world (Gautier and Santana, 2001). A clear ecological consequence of this has been the **enclosure** and destruction of large swaths of green and

blue spaces (forests, mangroves, agricultural lands, water bodies, etc.) in and around the expanding city. Developers cut mountains, paved over creeks and prime agricultural lands labelled as ‘idle’ or ‘wasted spaces’. Local activists have a word for this type of ‘development’: *desastrollo*<sup>15</sup>, which we could roughly translate as disasterment (see also Chapter 2.).

The typical apolitical explanations of urbanization state that it is spontaneous and inevitable (Otero et al., 2013); the state (through its planning system) and market (through the construction sector) simply respond to consumer demand for housing through a rational, ‘expert-based’ decision-making process. Political ecology questions this perspective because it ignores the deliberate, power-laden political choices that make urbanization possible, as well as the resistances that challenge it and underscore its unequal and undemocratic nature. It shows that there is a structural process of an “urban growth machine” (Molotch, 1976)

Sprawl would not survive without what political ecologists’ call **facilitation** (Collins, 2009). In Puerto Rico, sprawl has been facilitated by the drastic expansion of the road network, entirely built and maintained by the government, the significant financial and regulatory benefits to the construction industry, the approval of most construction projects through exceptions to planning rules, and the soft hand and complicity in environmental violations. This is strengthened by corrupt and revolving door relations between the political and construction elites and severely undemocratic decision-making processes in a context of an “emergency” regime which limits public participation and criminalizes protest. Finally, suburban sprawl is also supported by an **ideology** which has historically linked construction to *progress* and *development* which makes any proposal for urbanization appear inherently good and almost inevitable.

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15 Instead of the spanish translation of “development”, *desarrollo*.

## Guerrilla gardening against sprawl in the Cupey Arboretum

The neighbourhood of Cupey was one of the first **suburban expansions of the city of San Juan to the rural/agricultural lands** south of the city, in the 1960s. In the 1980s, the neighbourhood was a growing but still quasi-rural, located in the frontier of forested hills. Today, it is San Juan's third most populated neighbourhood. In 1992, the main road to Cupey was expanded, cutting through forested hills and facilitating further suburban growth of the neighbourhood. A group of neighbours had unsuccessfully tried to block the project and to achieve conservation of the area's remaining forest.

In the mid-1990s, Don Esteban González, a retired resident of the neighbourhood, had an idea: a reforestation project to beautify and restore the area impacted by the road, which the government had left completely devoid of vegetation, and to serve as a green buffer for the creeks that flowed next to the road and connected downstream with the city's only river, the Piedras River.

Don Esteban's idea was both ecological and aesthetic: he was especially keen on yellow flower trees, for being a bright and highly visible colour, and perhaps also because it is a colour associated with joy. The name **Arboretum**, which in a narrow sense means a collection of trees but is used as reference of urban and botanical gardens, came from a previous movement which in the early 1980s had promoted the creation of an Arboretum for San Juan.

Esteban started recruiting some neighbours for his idea, including his doctor, Basilio. Basilio suggested to a local school's Boy Scouts troop, and held several meetings to organize a first reforestation event. The activity was held in 1999 with the troop, with the collaboration of the state and local government and a national environmental organization.

Over the next few years they would organize other large reforestation events in collaboration with government agencies and non-government organizations, until they completely reforested most of the area's green spaces. By 2014 the Arboretum had planted more than 3,000 had been planted, all in an area less than 5 kilometres long. We are not talking about the 'photo-op' with a pre-planted tree frequently used by politicians and corporate CEOs.

Esteban preferred action to meetings and planning, and he was adamantly independent: he was a 'man on a mission'. He created a

makeshift tree nursery in his front yard and in a small patch of the Arboretum. He would collect tree saplings from different parts of the city and would obtain some from the government’s greenhouse staff, with whom he developed a close relationship. Locally raising the trees made them more adapted to local conditions, hence more resilient over their lifetime, but also gave the Arboretum independence from the government for its reforestation initiative; in fact on occasions the Arboretum supplied saplings of various species to the government’s nurseries.



**Figure 44: Arboretum logo (Source: Arboretum)**  
and turn them into urban commons are sometimes called “**guerrilla gardening**”.

In the afternoons, Esteban would plant trees in any open greenspaces he could find. Sometimes he did this with the collaboration of other small groups of nearby residents, university students and schoolchildren, but most of the times by himself or with one or two friends. Over the weekends, they would take care of the area –for instance, by removing trash and weeds from recently planted trees. These self-organized activities to recover abandoned urban spaces

### Reconnecting ecology and people

For the Arboretum, in the words of Basilio, the objective was to create a *harmony* between nature and the communities’. Through the reforestations and interpretive guided walks through the Arboretum, as well as its promotion of local school projects in the forest, the Arboretum fostered emotional/spiritual connections with ecology. The importance of these encounters of suburbanites (especially kids) –increasingly isolated inside private homes with TVs, smartphones and videogames– when they come out, play and discover in a forest, plant a tree and connect their hands to the soil, touch leaves of different shapes and textures, or encounter for the first time a bird or the creek

and their sounds, should not be underestimated. Perhaps what Esteban was talking about, was that the “only road to freedom is through beauty”<sup>16</sup> reminding us that our freedom, when practiced, blossoms us like the yellow flowers he was planting.

Through these activities, the Arboretum also broke the ecological-geographical illiteracy of many of the suburb’s residents, who did not have the **local ecological knowledge** or the connection to the territory that comes with sustained long-term interactions with our surrounding. They learned that inside the forest lied a great deal of life. Moreover, the Arboretum linked the forest’s permanence to our well-being – for instance, to the protection from the noise and pollution from the area’s traffic, and from the flooding suffered by sectors of the neighbourhood.



**Figure 45:** Left side picture: School and government volunteers in the Arboretum with Don Esteban, second from right. Right side picture: Don Esteban with a friend in a reforestation activity. (Source: Gustavo García López)

### **Challenging growth, recovering commons and democracy**

Contrary to the common perception as a suburban ‘leisure’ activity and as material for television programs, gardening is historically tightly interwoven with struggles over land use planning and greenspace (McCay, 2013). Ecology becomes political in these struggles; moreover it becomes a *collective* concern. The Arboretum’s apparently apolitical and aesthetic ‘reforestation’ actions were actually the contrary. As they connected people to each other and to the local ecology, they politicized nature as an autonomous sphere of experience outside profit or

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16 Quoting the philosopher Friedrich Schiller in *The Aesthetic Education of Man*

state mandates, transforming the vision of the value of an urban forest and of whose domain of action it is: from an exclusively 'public' (i.e. government) and 'private' (i.e. market) space into a **commons**, a collective endeavour by and for the communities. In doing so, it was challenging the **privatization** of the public sphere of the contemporary city.

The Arboretum also politicized as it inevitably clashed with the **political economy** of the suburban sprawl machine. Protecting the last stretches of greenspace in Cupey confronted the construction sector's plans and the Arboretum's leaders realized that the problem was much broader than the local. As Basilio explained, the Arboretum 'emerges from the neighbouring communities' reaction to the accelerated deforestation and the insatiable, poorly planned urbanism that the region suffers, as in all of Puerto Rico.' The greenspace became, as McKay (2011) suggests, a "special zone for the common articulation of social change...the critical rejection of some aspects of society, and...the confrontation with authority." (p. 12)

This recognition of the **scale** of the problem fostered a connection with a larger network of neighbourhood associations and community-environmental groups which had been struggling since the 1990s to protect its dwindling greenspace and interconnected water bodies of San Juan from urban sprawl machine and the related **enclosures** taking place in San Juan. It had slowly coalesced into an alliance promoting the creation of the "San Juan Ecological Corridor" (SJEC) in the 'ain contiguous forest of San Juan, through which the Piedras River flowed. In 2003 the SJEC became legally protected. This network in turn led the Arboretum activists' to emphasize the broader ecological flows of forests and water which connected their local greenspace to the SJEC. In 2004, with the support of the SJEC movement and other civil society organizations, the Arboretum became legally protected.

The victory, however, was short-lived, and showed the limits of legal strategies. Even after the legal protection and recognition of the local 'civic' ecological responsibility, the government continued to approve construction projects in the area. The 'expert' planning process and the 'participation' of public hearings proved once again a farce. The group's fight, therefore, became increasingly one about democracy, denouncing the government's cronyist relations with developers and the farce of the planning process. In numerous letters, Esteban called out the 'leonine' contracts that gave away greenspace for more shopping

centres and housing, and pointed to the government as the biggest predator of ecology and community. The group became increasingly involved in draining court battles that demobilized the collective.

In recent years some of the Arboretum activists sought to revive the networks of collaboration to break this impasse and integrate into the broader ecological landscape of the Piedras River watershed. In 2011, they organized the first ever Piedras River cleanup and reforestation day. The activity, which has been repeated every year since, mobilized hundreds of volunteers from the community's schools and neighbours, as well as from various civil society organizations, giving visibility to the Arboretum as part of the efforts by other larger and powerful organizations to protect the Piedras River watershed and the associated San Juan Bay Estuary. In other words, broadening the ecological scope was a way for increasing the community's power.

### **Naming the agents of destruction**

*To plant trees was to metaphorically cultivate democratic change... breathe new life into the dead metaphor of grassroots democracy... At the heart of this symbolic nexus was a contest over definitions of growth: each tree planted by the Green Belt Movement stood as a tangible, biological image of steady, sustainable growth, a dramatic counter-image to the ruling elite's kleptocratic image of growth, a euphemism for their high-speed piratical plunder of the nation's coffers and finite natural resources...[it] inverted the syntax of violence by naming the agents of destruction. (Nixon, 2011 p. 135-36)*

The conflicts around loss of greenspace as a result of urban expansion has become increasingly common across Puerto Rico. In many instances these are localized fights against particular construction projects. Some have criticized these movements as NIMBYists ("not in my backyard", see 1.3). However, the experience of the Arboretum, as many others around the world, demonstrates that through their everyday engagements, people can open to broader understandings of core issues relating the environment with politics and the economy through a grounded experience in the local, but which at the same time surpasses a localist understanding. **Political ecology** contributes to this task by connecting issues of democracy, economy, and ecology.



In doing so, it makes visible the need for broader alliances with other struggles.

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Guerrilla Gardening

## 5.4 Linking fronts, building the alternative, enhancing autonomy: Lessons from 15 years of Campania's social mobilizations

*Salvatore Paolo De Rosa*

The 15 years-long grassroots mobilizations emerged in reaction to environmental contamination in the Campania region of Southern Italy, represent a useful entry point to distil important lessons for **bottom-up activism**. In this contribution, it will be provided an overview of their path from a constellation of unrelated citizens' committees resisting localized threats, to a regional coalition acting at several scales for implementing new models of democracy, economy and community well-being. In particular, three organizational tools will be highlighted that, beyond strengthening collective action, are addressing structural and ecological dimensions. After introducing the processes leading to livelihoods degradation in Campania, the following features of the social movements will be analysed: the linking of different fronts of struggle at regional and national scales; the widening of the scope of the movement; and the work on community's autonomy through practices of **re-appropriation**, that is, the reclaiming of space and knowledge.

### **Trashing bodies and ecosystems**

Over the course of the last twenty years, the provinces of Naples and Caserta, an area of Campania region stretching on 3.800 sq. km and inhabited by approximately four million people, have been turned into a huge trashcan. The joint actions of government-sponsored urban waste management project and of a complex network of mafia groups, industrial managers, corrupted white collars and public officials, created a system for the extraction of profits from the disposal of waste at the expenses of local livelihoods.

On the one hand, the authoritarian governance of the urban waste management for the entire region, framed by the government as an "emergency", became a succulent business for private investors that could enjoy law derogations and optimal contractual conditions for the implementation of facilities according to a project centred on incine-

rators, landfills and storage sites. On the other, the infamous mafia-led trafficking, wild dumping, open-air burning and illegal disposal of hazardous materials, mostly from industrial production, turned every available hole in the region into a sink of toxic scraps.

Both processes shifted onto communities and ecologies the environmental costs of industrial production and waste disposal. This translated into a toxic environment for the local population, affected today by threats to health, reduction of cultivable land and stigmatization. More than 2000 potentially contaminated sites have been recorded in 2008 by the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection, and the complex links between those contaminants and the increasing cancer diseases among the locals have been investigated by several scientific studies.

Moreover, the stigmatization of Campania's land as hopelessly contaminated had a generalized impact on agricultural sales from the region: even when products are certified as safe, buyers avoid them, forcing many active farmlands (the traditional landmark and most valuable sector in Campania) to close down, providing further land for speculation. The hazards to public health have been recognized by the central government through the insertion of three wide areas within Campania in the national record of polluted sites in need of remediation, together with other 50 places all around Italy. Nevertheless, cleaning-up works are still minimal and the authoritarian governance of environmental management and land-use planning still dominates the Italian landscape.

### **Framing local threats as structural inequalities**

When the "emergency regime" declared by the Italian government for the management of urban waste in Campania begun in 1994, people in the municipalities of the plain targeted by the imposed facilities reacted on a local basis. During the battle against the incinerator of Acerra in 2000, for example, the local committee made of ordinary people, farmers and students, did not receive substantial support from other municipalities or organized groups. The self-formation of the activists focused on a critique to the technology of incineration and on the contamination already present in the rural areas of the town. The battle of Acerra was lost in 2004 under the batons of hundreds police sent by

the government, but the state-sponsored attack to territories moved around in other spots where landfills and storage sites were planned.

The linking of the Acerra's committee with the citizens' groups emerging in Chiaiano, Pianura, Serre and Giugliano was pursued by activists through the **identification of recurring patterns**: the techno-managerial approach to urban trash management, the authoritarian governance model, the State facilitation of illegal toxic waste disposal, the lack of people involvement in decision-making processes, the dismissal of alternatives, and the risks posited to humans and environments by outdated facilities and contaminated sites. In few years, relying on extensive and transversal **information campaigns**, regional alliances were formed, and delegations were travelling from one place to another following the eruption of new frontlines. At the collective assemblies, through knowledge exchanges and the elaboration of a shared vision of the problem, the committees came to the conclusion that incinerators, landfills and illegal disposal were part of a wider project for the top-down implementation of an economy revolving around waste.

The work of cooperation between local committees united into alliances produced between 2010 and 2013 a broader conceptualization of the enemy they were facing: **Biocide**. In the conception developed by activists, *Biocide* articulates the relationships between political-economic processes and their complex interaction with ecosystems and



**Figure 46: First demonstration of Campania's Grassroots Movements as a regional coalition, under the banner of #fiumeinpiena (raging river) and Stop Biocidio (End the Biocide), Napoli, 16 November 2013 (Source: Salvatore Paolo De Rosa)**

bodies: it connects the “killing of life” to strategies of profit making. The notion illustrates the interdependent features of **cost shifting** and life-killing as a deliberate project to which a territory is sacrificed: for every contaminant released into the environment, powerful economic actors are able to displace the

burden of their compliance costs onto people and ecologies. Such concept helped to frame the issue of contamination beyond the specificity of the contested process (waste) and turned out to be fundamental in order to build alliances between similar struggles and with other social movements engaged against the same, underlying, structural processes. Since then, the **coalition *Stop Biocide*** has been growing nationally, embraced by movements fighting against oil extraction, mega-infrastructure projects, polluting industries and land speculations.

### **Elaborating alternatives within a wider project**

The contradiction faced by activists, caught between the need to focus on the specific threat suffered by their community and the need to address the wider, structural causes of the localized problem lies at the core of the difficult path from resisting locally to joining forces and pro-actively fight to change the world. Struggles focused only on local litigations have short life, either they win or lose, unless the social movement is able to frame the causes of the specific problem into wider political-economic arrangements, and unless it formulates alternatives within a broad project of people's led change.

For the *Stop Biocide* coalition, it was a long path, reaching a turning point during the preparations of the first demonstration in Naples as a regional force in 2013. Before, during and after the assemblies, through mail exchanges and working groups, the coalition drafted a **shared platform** aimed at gathering knowledge from all the localized mobilizations to insert proposals and visions within a **project of wider political scope**, serving as a set of general and common objectives for rethinking participation, economy, ecology and society.

Beyond technical indications on how to reduce and to manage urban waste, how to deal with hazardous materials' disposal and how to address the health concerns of the population, the platform laid out the connections between the capitalist mode of production and **the creation of environmental injustices in the form of sacrificed zones**. The broader scope of the critique was tied to the prefiguration of the desired world. The shared platform reclaims "**true democracy**" by tackling the procedures through which land-use planning and territorial development unfold and by proposing a model of socio-ecological

transition for the regional economy. As Lucio narrates *“We have to be able as a community to demand, at the administrative level, mechanisms of participatory democracy: participatory budgeting, assemblies, city councils, an urban plan that must be studied and approved in a public meeting and public consultation processes for deciding how to use local resources”*.

### **Building autonomy and self-organization through re-appropriation**

Throughout its history of struggle against *Biocide*, the social coalition of Campania had to overcome the attempts by the media to criminalize its actions and the efforts of politicians to co-opt its leaders. The objective of the elites was to perpetuate the exclusion from the political arena of the radical claims embodied by the requests of alternative democratic procedures. The social coalition therefore has focused on **producing and spreading autonomous narrations** of the crisis, grounded in the merging of scientific expertise and first-hand experience of activists, that could resist negation and mystification attempts. To impose the framing of the problems by local communities in the realm of media and politics meant to **conquer fundamental spaces into the collective imaginary** of the nation so to trigger responses and inclusion by the government. On the one side, this strategy implied addressing the nearest representatives of the government, as Vincenzo explains: *“We aim to the accountability and empowerment of local administrators for the safeguard of territory. So far, the environmental sphere was the last of their preoccupation. We managed to make it a priority”*.

On the other hand, the target of changing national political parties' priorities remained fundamental: *“We must have a ‘contaminating’ effect, influencing the palaces where decisions are taken and the world of political parties. This doesn’t mean that we have to become a political party ourselves. However, we must be able to strongly influence their agenda. We have to condition the wider political landscape. We know that, today at least, the traditional political parties are hostages of the lobbies, as are the institutions. Everything is rooted there. In re-appropriating the value of the policy at the service of citizens and not of the industrial lobbies”*.

The work on media campaigns has also been pursued through the involvement of citizens in grassroots mapping projects. To answer to the minimization by political representatives of the claims that countryside was being turned into open-air trash cans, the movement organized the *D-Day*: a denunciation day in which hundreds of people walked the rural areas to document with GPS and cameras the places where waste was illegally dumped or burned. In the words of Sara: *“We go to photograph the condition of places and we show that, despite the announcements of the government, nothing is changed. In this way we have been able to arrive in the news, in the newspapers, we broke the wall of silence, because those media were the most under control by lobbies”*.

Beyond changing the representation of the problem through autonomous framing aimed to re-appropriate media and political spaces, the strongest enactment of the alternative that the coalition brings has been achieved through **the application “here and now” of the model**



**Figure 47: “G.A.S. (Solidarity Purchase Group), an answer to the Biocide. Short supply chain Km. 0” from an event organized in the social cooperative of Chiaiano, 2014 (Source: Salvatore Paolo De Rosa)**

**of the desired future society.**

This project has entailed a growing cooperation with farmers, the most hit by the widespread pollution.

According to the coalition, the

agricultural sector could become the productive base for the re-appropriation by the people of a regional social economy grounded in the preservation of territory and the care of the commons. In the beginning, the denunciation of committees had antagonized the farmers: the stigmatization of the land threatened the selling of agricultural products. But then, activists and farmers discovered to be on the same path:

*“Farmers were against us. We had to work hard to make them understand that we are on their side. Today we cooperate from the bottom up, through a community-check: with the self-certifications, farmers give the guarantee of a safe product and we in turn help them to create a circuit of Km-0 economy through solidarity purchase groups”.*

The work with farmers is aimed at building alliances in the actual places where the illegal dumping is happening. The interest in enhancing agriculture wants to prevent further land speculation after active farmlands are forced to close down. Territory in this way becomes embedded in the political strategies of the coalition (Escobar, 2008), also through recovering the beauty that has been tainted by pollution, because to **“recover the beauty** means to re-appropriate space, territory, liveability for all”. The autonomy of the community is built also through the linking with other activists’ projects that resonate with the coalition’s goals. This has been the case of the cooperation with the anti-mafia movement. Again Lucio explains: *“Our path is interlinking with the anti-mafia movement and with the social cooperatives that cultivate lands confiscated to the mafia. Social economy is the future. To reclaim assets confiscated to mafia, making them productive for social aims, giving job opportunities to disadvantaged people, this is the model of the alternative. To trigger cooperation that becomes social economy”.*

It is precisely the building of the **alternative model “here and now”** that makes stronger the campaigns waged by the coalition of social movements in Campania. To self-organize a social economy based on communal structures, on sustainable use of local resources, on democratic confrontation and popular initiative contributes to the re-orientation of the common sense while providing the material goods that are lacking. It engages ordinary citizens, brings them near to the universe of meaning constructed by the activists, involves producers, administrators and other associations, and reshapes geographies and imaginaries. It is through these seeds of the future society that the old socio-economic model will be made obsolete and will fall. Because people decided that it is not viable anymore and they already self-organized the alternative.



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## 5.5 Energy struggles: organising from the bottom up to combat energy poverty in Catalonia

*Melissa Garcia-Lamarca*

Household access to energy and water remains an urgent issue for well over a billion people around the world, largely in the global South. Yet it is increasingly difficult for many households in the global North to pay their energy and water bills due to sustained unemployment and rising energy prices. Increasingly unequal distributional effects are becoming more and more apparent as energy and water companies generate exorbitant profits due to deregulation, government subsidies and increasing prices. This model is based in the logic of the capitalist appropriation of nature that results in **energy poverty** for the many and mammoth profits for a handful of companies, their CEOs and shareholders.

Spain is one country where energy poverty – understood here as limited or no access to basic services such as water, electricity and gas due to a person's inability to pay – has increased dramatically with the crisis, as 17% of the population has difficulties paying their electricity, gas or water bills. Within the context of growing rates of energy poverty specifically in **Catalonia**, this contribution seeks to explore the **energy struggles** of the **Alliance Against Energy Poverty**, focusing on their strategies, ways of organising and lessons learned. Their success is based on uniting historic and current street-based movements with technical entities to bridge social, ecological and political issues, creating social clamour and building solutions at grassroots as well as institutional levels.

The Alliance, formed in 2013 by neighbourhood associations, workers' assemblies, and water and housing rights platforms, aims to guarantee universal access to basic services (water, electricity and gas), to avoid indiscriminate service cuts and to defend human rights. A brief overview of energy inequalities in Catalonia is first outlined to contextualise the Alliance's struggle. Based on an interview with two Alliance activists, attending a collective advising assembly in Barcelona, as well as the Alliance's published materials and [website](#), focus is then placed on the Alliance and how they act on various fronts.

## **Why act? Energy inequalities in Spain, Catalonia and beyond**

The Spanish electricity system is captured by a handful of powerful companies that are impoverishing Spanish people, a situation that has become more extreme after eight years of crisis alongside increasing levels of unemployment and precariousness. The **electricity oligopoly** that operates in Spain – including Endesa, Gas Natural-Fenosa, Iberdrola, EON Espanya and EDP – registered €7.6 billion in profit during the first three trimesters of 2013, double that of other European electricity companies. The University of Barcelona researcher Aurèlia Mañé Estrada highlights the depth of their power in stating that Iberdrola and Endesa control outright the legislative branch of the Ministry of Industry and Energy (Mañé Estrada, 2013). Endesa alone, the main distributor of electricity in Catalonia, declared over €1.8 billion in profit in 2013. Such exorbitant profits are also fruit of a 60% increase in electricity prices since 2008 and Endesa and Iberdrola in particular having their tentacles spread throughout Latin America (Endesa) and investments in the UK, USA and Brazil (Iberdrola). Yet despite colossal profits, in 2013 Endesa and Iberdrola cut the electricity access to 931,263 homes across Spain.

As unemployment affects 22% of the population in Catalonia, and all members of over 200,000 households are unemployed, being able to pay water bills is also a concern for many households. The price of water has increased 65% since 2008 and the Spanish Association of Environmental Sciences notes that in the Barcelona metropolitan area alone, the number water supply cuts rose from 27,359 in 2011 to 72,039 in 2012.

### **The Alliance: uniting street-based social movements and technical entities**

To combat and find solutions to these injustices, the Alliance Against Energy Poverty was founded in November 2013 to unite a range of entities to fight for the right of all to basic energy, gas and water supplies.

## Members of Alliance Against Energy Poverty

- The Coordinator of the Unemployed Workers Assembly Movement (Coordinadora d'aturats/des de Catalunya), connecting 14 unemployed workers' assemblies across Catalonia
- Water is Life (Aigua és Vida), a platform of social, neighbourhood, union and ecological associations towards a non-commercial management of water in Catalonia
- The Platform for Mortgage Affected People (PAH: La Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), a movement with over 70 branches in Catalonia and 210 across Spain that fights for mortgage debt forgiveness and the right to decent and affordable housing for all
- The Confederation of Neighbourhood Associations of Catalonia (Confavc: Confederació d'Associacions Veïnals de Catalunya), a non-profit organisation founded in 1988 coordinating 541 neighbourhood associations and 22 federations in Catalonia
- The Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona (Favb: Federació d'Associacions de Veïns i Veïnes de Barcelona), a civic entity founded in 1972 that brings together over 100 neighbourhood associations in Barcelona to improve the quality of life in the city
- Civic Front (Front Cívic), a call to all citizens to debate and write a programme with concrete proposals that provide an alternative to the current situation
- Energy Sovereignty Network (Xarxa per la sobirania energètica), associations and groups made up of over sixty citizens from across Catalonia
- Ecologists in Action (Ecologistes en acció), a confederation of more than 300 environmental groups distributed across Spain
- Iaioflautas, grandparents who "fight and achieve a better future for our sons and daughters"
- Pensioners Tide (Marea Pensionista), a platform that aims to promote the defence of pensions

The Alliance brings together **various entities, diverse in their ideological positions and in their ways of organising**, like street-based social movements, both recent and historic, and more technical entities that have worked on electricity, gas or water issues for years. While such a strategy has its challenges, as each movement has many actions and some participants don't have the energy to engage in everything, overall the Alliance is made stronger through the **complementarity** of its groups. *"The technical entities lack a movement vision, while the street-based movements lack a lot of information to really understand what is happening", as one activist explained. In this way, "each component teaches each other and learns from one another. We are not two fronts; we work together".*

A process of **mutual learning** also emerges between movements

in the Alliance that are more ecologically focused and those with a more social emphasis, illustrating the vital importance of an integrated approach. The two Alliance activists interviewed come from the **PAH**, a housing rights movement, and found that other groups held many misconceptions about what the PAH fights for. Similarly, one stated that *“when I came into the Alliance I had no idea about environmental issues... But now seeing all work [the environmental groups in the Alliance] do and it has completely changed my view... I think the opposite has happened too. People who have had no contact directly with people unable to pay their energy or water bills were blown away when they came to their first collective advising session”*.

### Visibilising a scam

The groups that founded the Alliance were pushed to come together as energy and water companies *“are scamming everyone, with the help of the government: here in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain”*. It was critical to give **visibility** to the movement in order for the administration to see people organising to fight for solutions to the situation. Creating this visibility is fundamental as energy poverty is very much a hidden problem, and the strategy of companies is absolute silence: *“the aid provided by Social Services avoids electricity and water cuts. But if they permanently avoid cuts in Barcelona, it seems like there are none....The city government pays and there are no cuts. The companies...you call them and they avoid the cut”*. In other words it is easiest for the authorities and companies to quietly respond, resulting in an image that the problem does not exist.

How does the Alliance give visibility to the problem? The core way is by interacting with and mobilising the people who are living the problem through collective advising assemblies. For example, one of the founding groups *Aigua és Vida* has been denouncing Agbar, Barcelona’s private water company, for many years, *“but if there are not people whose water has been cut, who are living the problem, it seems that the media doesn’t pay any attention and that politicians are not interested in solving the problem. Because there is no social clamour.”* So creating this *“social clamour”* is an important objective of the Alliance.

## **The Alliance's strategies: "we are working for a future, for a present and for a future"**

The Alliance operates at both grassroots and institutional levels, and like most movements develops its strategy through trial and error. Certain movements that form part of it participate in local government organised third sector tables, specifically one on energy poverty, and with the ombudsman. The Alliance also collaborated with the PAH to submit a **Popular Legislative Initiative** (ILP) to the Catalan Parliament with housing rights and energy poverty demands. The latter include stipulations for people in a situation of vulnerability to have guaranteed access to electricity, gas and water for 3 years, paying according to their capacity, with associated costs and debt assumed by the companies. Three times the required 50,000 signatures were gathered for the ILP, and it was unanimously approved in the final parliamentary session in July 2015. How and if it is implemented remains to be seen, depending on upcoming regional elections and future rulings from the Spanish Constitutional Court regarding competencies for the execution of the ILP, a reality that points to the need for continued struggle.

The core grassroots element of the Alliance's approach is holding bi-monthly **assemblies** where people having trouble paying their bills or who have had their energy or water cut explain their problem to the group, and **solutions** are found among all. Such solutions can include accompanying people to the company's offices, or suggesting they go to government social services; there is also direct contact with the main electricity and water companies in Barcelona and phone calls can be made in extreme situations. The idea is to exhaust all paths so that later a company or the local government cannot say all formal paths weren't used.

Assemblies are places where affected people come together with solidarity activists to fight for their rights and to **collectivise problem solving**, where it is underlined that this is a problem that goes beyond our own bills. The fact that this fight is against multinational companies is emphasised in the assembly, where it is underlined that it is not just about a person coming to solve their individual problem: *"We have to know that these companies export themselves and extract natural resources, and leave massive amounts of devastated forests.... At least when people solve their problem, they have a little knot in their stomach*



**Figure 48: Occupying the energy supplier Endesa's Barcelona office in March 2014. (Source: Robert Bonet)**

*that says, man, this goes much further. I have solved my problem, but this company keeps doing what it is doing". At the same time, the Alliance's work is moving slowly, step by step. An activist reflected that perhaps it is not easy to mobilise people who are unable to pay half of a €100*

energy bill, and scrape together money from wherever possible to avoid electricity cuts; others manage to pay but are however motivated to complain and mobilise.

When the Alliance was first founded it had an **action-based strategy**, feeling that they needed to go and organise a macro protest; to this end – to chants of “Endesa steals and the government collaborates!” – Barcelona’s Endesa office was occupied by 300 people for over half a day in March 2014 (Figure 44). This action achieved a meeting with Endesa’s Director of Endesa’s Catalan Office and Customer Services, and resulted in five specialised attention points for people who cannot pay their energy bills set up across Catalonia. However activists left the meeting with the feeling that “we were speaking to a wall”, as they had very concrete maximum demands that the company, evidently, was not going to meet. Perhaps *“now if someone goes to Endesa in the name of the Alliance Against Energy Poverty, they are treated differently”*, but overall there is a feeling that there is a long road ahead in terms of collective action, as the experience from other movements has shown that many actions are needed before concrete results are obtained. The scale of mobilisation is also critical: one of the activists noted that until they have a critical mass, the Alliance can’t spend their energy doing something just to show the “enemy” that they have difficulty mobilising people. Overall, organisers are very optimistic, but move one step at a time; as one activist underlined, *“we are working for*

*a future, for a present and for a future”.*

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# Chapter 6. Conclusions

*Panagiota Kotsila*

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*Panagiota Kotsila*

The field of political ecology has evolved well beyond its origins concerning critical studies on environmental facets of development in the “third world” (Bryant and Bailey, 1997). Political ecology now encompasses discussions of justice, gender, identity and knowledge in relation to questions of ecology and in settings that span the globe. The broadening of the field has happened, in part, because of the increasingly attention paid by political ecologists to social movements around the world. Research has been conducted into the practices and discourses of groups, communities and collectives that were articulating and performing a political ecology from below (see for example: Escobar, 1998; Peet and Watts, 2004; Scott, 2008), driven by “a practical political engagement with new social movements, organizations, and institutions of civil society challenging conventional notions of development, politics, democracy and sustainability” (Peet and Watts, 2004).

As in activism or civil society organizing, there is not just one way of doing in political ecology. The contributions in this manual show that through the methods and tools in the field (combination of hard data with qualitative and participatory research, transcending disciplines, performing cross-scale analysis, linking historical to contemporary phenomena), what is often presented as “neutral” scientific fact can be (re)politicized and thereupon, the distribution of socio-ecological risks, harms and benefits arises as a question of power relations. Political ecology recognises winners and losers in environmental conflicts with scientific rigorousness, at the same time acknowledging that neutrality and positivism may not be the best way to conduct analysis that challenges such power relations and the status quo of inequality and injustice.

Political ecology sheds light on issues of **environmental justice**, on the **commons**, on socio-ecological **disasters** and on questions of **democracy**, as well as on the **conflicts** and the social **movements** created around or inherent to such issues. A field that not only studies but also enters into such movements and everyday struggles is what we, ENTITLE fellows, aspire to see political ecology become. Civil so-

ciety and social movements have been actively using scientific findings, resources and tools, as well as forming those coalitions that help them achieve their goals and develop their visions, both within and beyond academia. We want to invite an academia-activist collaboration that goes beyond apolitical and state-dependent policy recommendations, in order to unleash trans-disciplinary action, collaboration and learning, with the explicit goal of challenging the established power structures.

Despite the presentation of cases under thematic chapters, many of the cases involve overlapping and interrelated issues that connect each chapter to the other. When discussing the management or re-making of **commons**, for example, one cannot avoid asking questions of rules, decision-making and state institutions, touching on issues that go beyond classical cases of enclosures and extractivism. The potentialities, dynamics and variety of challenges for socio-ecological change “from below”, are as central for the chapter on **democracy** as for the examined cases of environmental **conflicts**. They are as crucial for understanding **disaster capitalism**, as in the analysis of **social movements**. Likewise, the five chapter themes are not closed categories, but rather different entry points for discussing the nexus of socio-political and biophysical interactions across and between scales. Although such divisions are in a sense artificial, they serve the purpose of highlighting the diversity of angles from which issues such as those discussed can be approached.

By speaking of **disaster capitalism**, we want to problematize not only how the aftermath of catastrophic socio-environmental events is used to broaden and deepen neoliberal reforms for the benefit of elites, but also interrogate how those events are themselves the result of systemic inequality and capitalist expansion. By zooming in, out and across scales (local, national, global) and scrutinizing different fields of economic activity, we underline the multifaceted nature of “accumulation by dispossession” - inherent in neoliberal capitalism - which inevitably encompasses socio-ecological dimensions. This inter-connectedness of sectors and scales comes out as a crucial lesson if we are to understand the “causes behind the causes” of so-called natural disasters, economic crises or humanitarian failures.

Important insights come from contributions in this book that describe the struggles of citizens and social movements against hegemonic forces of exploitation and capital accumulation, such as states, corpo-

rations or powerful social groups. Although those are spread in all five chapters, such lessons come out particularly strong from the chapter on **social movements**, in which we highlight how people are *doing* what political ecology is talking about: fighting for justice, for equal access to resources and services and for a dignified and meaningful life. Social movements make visible the dense connections between political and ecological issues, take control over the terms of development and create spaces for society outside or beyond capitalist relations.

In these struggles, members of social movements often need to discuss and debate the management of the **commons**, the organization of economic activities, the use of public space and the exposure to conditions harmful for human health - all aspects that are discussed under different themes in this book. Seeing the contributions on gold mining, for example, we see how “uneven geographies” are formed within a global web of capitalist financial relationships (see 2.2), creating local dilemmas, conflicts and resistance related to its impacts (see 4.3), as well as violence and loss of human lives as the mining operations expand against the will of local communities (see 3.3). At the same time, social movements should not be romanticized as necessarily egalitarian or democratic. The case studies from Mexico, Ethiopia and Bolivia (chapter 3.) show that there can be inter-community enclosure of common property and exploitations along lines of gender, generation or ethnicity/indigeneity. Political ecologists need to be as attuned to micro-politics and power relations within communities as they are to state hegemony or corporate rule.

Social movements are not necessarily inspired by counter-hegemonic, egalitarian or emancipatory principles. They too need to consistently confront their internal politics and visions of society while simultaneously pursuing their broader goals. **Democracy** arises both as a projected objective and an internal issue within movements. Whose voices will be heard and which type of knowledge will be given validity are central questions in the struggles for democracy, often taking the form of latent or violent **conflicts**. The environment (whether natural or constructed, rural or urban, in the form of material resources or in the values that are attached to them) occupies a central place in such conflicts. Human health and well-being stand in the heart of many such conflicts, as in Campania’s 15-year long mobilisation against toxic waste (see 4.4), but also the latent tensions and controversies in Malaysia

(see 1.2), with the threat of disease being a central argument against the spread of bird nests. In similar ways, the case of diarrhoea in Vietnam demonstrates how health becomes a central question of justice and democracy when discourse about disease prevention evades the space of public debate and local knowledge (see 4.4).

Some of the methods and tools presented in this book have been widely deployed by political ecologists to re-politicize issues, mobilize critical consciousness and strengthen democratic resistance.

#### Some of the methods and tools

- The use of historical records and artefacts, to connect past stories to present struggles.
- Discourse analysis (of media, governmental/legal material, cultural products and other sources), to discover underlying argumentation, values and ideologies and to understand the multiple sides of a conflict.
- Close observation and involvement in the activities of (other) civil society organizations, social movements and groups, to gain insights on the inner dynamics and potentials of building resistance.
- The use of pedagogy in collective organising and bottom-up action.
- The building of connections with other movements in multiple scales for (re-) discovering common goals and lines of action.

These methodological tools, exemplified in the case studies presented, can prove useful when civil society organizations perform their own investigations, generate new knowledge and provide proof for phenomena that local communities observe to advocate for more just socio-natures. We hope that the case studies discussed in this book will be used as examples for building stronger arguments, framing and contextualizing problems, or formulating educational output materials that will help civil society actors to **strengthen their collective struggles**.

In the exploration of historical co-existences, co-formations and co-dependences of social and biophysical systems, political ecology is characterized by certain theoretical, methodological and political commitments (Perreault et al., 2015). For these commitments to materialize, the actions, resources and experiences of civil society movements and organizations are vitally important. The role of civil society organizations is paramount in order to bring forth issues that concern vulnerable communities affected by various types of socio-ecological and economic changes. At the same time, the rich empirical research and ground-up theorization that develops through the work of political

ecologists has been strengthening this dialogue and thus the relevance of academic insights for social action. Political ecology has been exemplary in showing the fictitious division of social and environmental spheres, showing interactions of capital and power in global and local scales that are often concealed in mainstream (environmental) discourse. We - as in all political ecologists - now need to make findings more “readable” and shape research alongside civil society, building an even more substantial dialogue.

Connecting the efforts of grassroots, bottom-up initiatives and organizations that voice the concerns of local populations with those of academics who study the significance and interrelatedness of such phenomena with wider tendencies of global politics and environmental governance, is pivotal for **building a movement of socio-ecological transformation**. It becomes increasingly clear that the on-going processes of socio-ecological doing and learning need both militant and academic aspects. How can we achieve a political ecology that is not only inspired by, but also part of, civil society? How can our research be informed not only by the practices but also by the desires of social movements? Both those aspects could be embodied by individuals, coordinated within organisations and/or attempted among collaborative collectives. We need to build more alliances, learn from and through each other’s work, make people’s concerns central research questions, learn to co-produce knowledge with non-academics, learn to keep movements open and evolving, and attempt to involve them in research projects.

**This manual is an attempt to make our research relevant to civil society and to share the experiences we have had with social movements.** Through the wider ENTITLE project, the challenge of contributing to and continuing dialogues between academia and civil society is taking a more concrete form. We, as ENTITLE fellows and authors of this manual, are committed to discuss and explore what **new fields of research** and **new forms of action** can be created through this conversation.

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The book “Political Ecology for Civil Society” is a collective effort to translate research findings into valuable examples for civil society organizations and active citizens. Brought together under five main themes (Environmental conflicts, Disaster capitalism, Social movements, Commons, and Democracy), the book explains what can be the contribution of a political ecology approach to better understand, communicate and address socio-environmental issues.

But what is political ecology? It is an interdisciplinary approach that studies human-environment interactions with a critical lens. In general, it is focused on how power inequalities relate to environmental changes and to the distribution of costs and benefits that result from such changes. Political ecology emphasizes the need to re-historicize and re-contextualize problems in the socio-ecological sphere, so that the roots and ramifications of such problems can be made visible. This publication follows political ecology’s vision that there are more just and ecologically sustainable ways of organizing our society (i.e. our political and economic system) and that the relationship between the academic field and social movements needs to become more dialogical and synergistic than simply observational. The authors thus reflect on how to enhance such collaborations for the purpose of transforming current unjust and unsustainable social-ecological arrangements.

In this book, one will find definitions of key concepts in the field, theories illustrated through concrete examples, and methodological and practical tools from which academics, activists and active citizens can draw and use in their own investigations, practices and struggles. Offering readers with accessible and transferable knowledge, through case studies from a wide variety of contexts, this publication offers an accessible insight into political ecology issues drawn from the experiences of a new generation of political ecologists trained within the project.

**Authors:** Diego Andreucci, María J. Beltrán, Rita Calvário, Creighton Connolly, Julie De Los Reyes, Salvatore Paolo De Rosa, Irmak Ertör, Melissa Garcia-Lamarca, Marien González-Hidalgo, Amelie Huber, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Santiago Gorostiza, Felipe Milanez, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu, Jonah Wedekind

**Editors:** María J. Beltrán, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu

**Coordinators:** Salvatore Altiero, Giacomo Dalisa, Lucie Grey, Christos Zografos

