Chapter 1: Community, development and popular struggles for environmental justice

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<1>Introduction

'The environment' comprises many aspects of the world: the complex ecosystems and biological and chemical cycles on which all life on the planet depends; the resources exploited by human societies throughout history in structures of production and consumption to meet needs and desires; the spaces in which both production and its waste-stream is located, and in which human non-productive, reproductive, creative and recreational activity occurs; and the physical structures of habitation which shapes our horizons and our personalities. In the conditions of late capitalism, the environment is a site for capital accumulation, a source of raw materials, a place to locate productive industry, a space to be traversed in the distribution of commodities to markets, and a sink for the deposition of the wastes of production and consumption. Increasingly, capital finds new ways to commodify the environment itself, as 'second nature'. Alongside this, environments are gendered and racialised as nature and social structures are shaped and reshaped to favour the interests of powerful social groups. These activities, of powerful classes and groups extending their interests, are often referred to as 'development'.

The social structuring of environments and their dispossession in the interests of capital is made possible in regimes of colonialism. Recent scholarship has emphasised the significance of different modes of colonialism and their impacts on resource dispossession and construction. It is perhaps significant that many of the chapters in this collection are located in settler colonial societies in different stages of 'development' – Canada, Palestine, South Africa – as well as in postcolonial – Ireland, India, Colombia. Significant for our purposes is the different social relations of accumulation in these modes of colonisation – in the former resource dispossession follows a logic of population expulsion, whereas in the latter it is accompanied by proletarianisation and exploitation of labour power.

At the same time, environments are structured through gender regimes. In different contexts, the gendered division of labour has tended to allocate women's (free, unpaid) labour to the means of reproduction, including for community environmental maintenance and responsibility for different environments from those of men – at times bringing women and men into conflict over environmental spaces. Men have often been allocated to extractive and manufacturing labour, leading to gendered constructions of environmental risk. As well as privileging men in a patriarchal gender order, these processes of gendering the environment have also served the purposes of capital accumulation.

This political economy of the environment does not go unchallenged. The activities of such 'movements from above' are met and constantly forced to adapt through the agency of environmental justice movements from below. Such movements and their constituents provide stubborn resistance to their environments being commodified or recreated in the image of the powerful. They mobilise to defend and extend the environments on which subaltern groups survive, thrive, cherish or deem sacred. From environmental NGOs to urban community action groups, indigenous and peasant anticolonial movements to radical scientists, the interests of the environment – and the embedded material interests of the actors – stop, extract concessions from and occasionally overturn the interests of power. Moreover, the classes and social groups engaged in this conflict, both dominant and subaltern, form

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more or less stable alliances on the basis of shared or accommodated interests, and even generalised interests built from the particularities of struggle. The environment, in all its complexity, is therefore a product of social and political struggle over access, definition and evaluation.

It is in this constant dynamic process of clashes between interests, between alliances of movements from above and below, of wars of position and manoeuvre, in which the environment is forged, that activities which may be classed as 'community development' take place. The purpose of this book therefore is to attempt to analyse some of these struggles, by inviting those engaged in these activities and their allies to elucidate the roles of the different actors, their interests and power, and to discern strategies for alternative forms of development. In so doing, the contributors and ourselves draw on shared analytical tools derived from Marxism, social ecology, feminism, anticolonialism and other emancipatory traditions. These analytical approaches have proved to be powerfully robust in emancipatory work around gender, 'race', anticolonialism and political ecology as well as class and capital. They have also provided invaluable insights for the practices of community development, popular education and social movement mobilisation.

Whilst environmental justice struggles and 'environmentalism of the poor' was largely unrecognised by western social theory, the two dominant western traditions of environmentalism – ecocentric and technocentric – emerged from concerns about the environmental impacts of nineteenth and early twentieth century capitalist expansions, and proposed either protectionist or managed solutions (Guha, 2000; Martinez-Alier, 2002). Ultimately, both traditions have found ways of accommodating to capital accumulation.

<1>Hegemony and sustainable development

In 1992, partially as a result of pressure from western environmentalism, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or 'Earth Summit') published *Agenda 21: a global plan of action for sustainable development*. This concept of sustainable development, was presented as a solution to the conflicting demands of industrial development and environmental limitations.

The struggle for hegemony around sustainable development provides an insight into the wider conflicts of the period. The accelerated environmental devastation which accompanied both postwar/postcolonial organised capitalism and centrally planned economies; the exposure by OPEC's price-fixing, of the dependence of western capitalism on oil (hydrocarbon capitalism) and thus vulnerability; the explicit toxicity of capitalist cost shifting made tragically clear by Bhopal (1984), Chernobyl (1986) and Karin B (1988) and exposing at the same time the myriad smaller toxic tragedies occurring daily; and the scientific exposure and increased public awareness of longstanding ecological damage in the forms of biodiversity loss, acid rain, ozone depletion and global warming, all created a series of fronts on which the environment became central to the war of position with capital. By the time the pressure from the increasingly organised and effective environmental movement on governments had led to the UNCED, the mechanisms of state managed capital accumulation with concessions to the more powerful sectors of the working class and formerly colonised peoples was collapsing.

Nonetheless, this is the model adopted in Agenda 21, ostensibly an agreement between states to involve all sectors of society, privileging key disempowered groups (women, youth, indigenous people, workers and so on) as they lead progress towards a social democratic

reading of sustainable development. Meanwhile, the global economy had become neoliberal, driven by the violent experiments of South American military regimes; the Thatcher and Reagan governments of UK and US; the growth of the Pacific tiger economies; the post-communist dash for assets in the former Soviet Union; Structural Adjustments in indebted post-colonial countries, principally in Africa; the emergence of post-import substitutionist new economic policies in South America and Asia; and the soon-to-be-opened-for-post-Apartheid-business South Africa.

In this phase of capital accumulation and class redistribution of assets, the environmental movement provided a challenge, both politically (opening up a new front since the labour movement was in retreat) and materially (environmental damage provided a genuine limit to capitalist growth). The mechanisms for incorporating both the environment and the movement into the interests of capital accumulation had not yet been developed. Lesley Sklair (2001) examines the process through which the sustainable development historical bloc developed at a global level, in which the transnational capitalist class built alliances with the transnational environmental elite in order to capture the environmental movement for global capital. This served to neutralise or marginalise radical environmentalism's threat to the capitalist class's economic interests, causing divisions in the environmental movement (see Doherty and Doyle, 2013) and generating new oppositional strategies (Seel et al, 2000).

A parallel process occurred at local levels through the interface with community development (Scandrett, 2000), although played out in diverse ways in different socio-political contexts. Local Agenda 21 advocated that local authorities enter into a dialogue with citizens, local organisations and private enterprises to adopt 'a local Agenda 21' (UNCED, 1993).

For some community workers working 'in and against' the local state, this provided legitimacy for the radical work of engaging with community struggles and working to build a participatory democracy by placing public services, development planning and local production under the control of locally organised citizens. Eurig worked for Friends of the Earth Scotland at this time to develop community action for environmental justice (Agents for Environmental Justice and Scandrett, 2003). Anne became deeply involved in Earthlife Africa (ELA), an environmental justice organisation which emerged in South Africa in the late 1980s, and co-chaired ELA's 1992 conference, 'What does it mean to be green in South Africa', which drew on Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 provided a Trojan Horse for the promotion of participatory democracy in a range of public services as well as in environmental campaigning.

At the same time, the discourse of participation, consultation and stakeholder involvement was manipulated to obfuscate power relations and give a semblance of participation whilst key decisions were made elsewhere. Business interests also mobilised to incorporate local communities and implement 'dispossession through participation' (Collins, 2006). Participatory methods, which were proliferating, became marketing opportunities for branded techniques and a focus on methods helped to depoliticise environmental community work, hiding questions of politics: participation in what, on whose terms and for whose benefit? As neoliberal reforms privatised services, cut local state budgets and centralised decision making, participatory processes were employed to manage cuts to public services and deliver what many activists referred to as the 'hidden agenda 21'.

By the time of the next Earth Summit, in Johannesburg in 2002, sustainable development had become the preserve of the transnational corporations through initiatives such as 'type 2 agreements' between business and civil society, bypassing any vestiges of a social

interventionist state and excluding any radical environmentalist and social movement actors not acting in the interests of capital.

Environmental justice movements

Meanwhile a parallel process was occurring in populations outwith these debates. In the US, the environmental justice movement emerged from amongst African American, Hispanic, poor white and Native American communities. This alternative strand of environmentalism challenged both the discriminatory practices of federal environmental protection, and the elite understanding of 'environment' of mainstream environmentalism. To some commentators (Faber and McCarthy, 2003), this movement showed the potential emergence of a new hegemonic bloc of subaltern actors challenging racialised capital accumulation in its most advanced country, as, in Cox and Nilsen's (2014) terms, local militant particularist struggles emerged into national and international campaigns and social movements. Others pointed out that 'materialist environmentalism' (Guha and Martinez Alier, 1997) or 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez Alier, 2002) constitutes an ongoing current of social challenge to economic cost-shifting. As the US environmental justice movement achieved some concessions within a dominant neoliberal paradigm, focus shifted to more reformist agendas, initially optimistically through alliances with mainstream NGOs in a frame of 'just sustainability', and latterly as a complete incorporation into neoliberal conditions. Carter (2016) has recently documented how elements of the US environmental justice movement (in the Los Angeles Latino communities) have been transformed through neoliberalism to what he calls EJ 2.0:

> This shift in EJ movement politics is shaped by broader political-economic changes, including the shift from post-Fordist to neoliberal and now green economy models of urban development; the influence of neoliberal multiculturalism in urban politics; and the increasingly prominent role of Latinos in city, state and national politics. (Carter, 2016: 21)

Whilst Agenda 21 has largely gone the way of its *raison d'etre* 'sustainable development' as a historic bloc, incorporating, neutralising and policing any radical components of the environmental movement whilst achieving some concessions, the struggles over environmental community development continue. 'The community' remains a locus for outside intervention for both incorporation into development and mobilisation against development. 'Development' largely operates to destroy community and to dump onto the environment, to engender division, to fragment and marginalise, to seek out the most efficient means of shifting costs and maximising productivity. Communities may be 'part of' the environment from which value may be extracted, or else used as a sink for dumping waste and pollution. Community resources are expropriated and communities expelled, with fractions forming migrant waves or settling, mistrusted, amongst people in neglected urban environments. The entire development process damages communities and their environments, from investment decisions through production and distribution of goods and services, to the eventual decline and neglect as investments are re-orientated more profitably. When forms of development are created that do not correspond with the interests of capital accumulation or geopolitical imperial influence, an attempt is made to crush these.

Nonetheless, 'community' has demonstrated considerable resilience, whether as communities of migrants, of resistance, of struggle, of the 'imagined communities' of national self determination and subaltern ethnicities. Those tasked with community development, whether

professionally or as activists, engage with neighbourhoods, workers, indigenous peoples, those subject to diverse exploitation.

The logic of development by movements from above in neoliberal times has produced diverse structures of exploitation and subsequently fragmented communities whose subjectivities are forged from this. Harvey (2006) has analysed the fragmentation of oppressions and oppositions which neoliberalism generates through different dimensions of 'accumulation by dispossession' alongside the labour process exploitation which dominated earlier phases of capitalist development. Any attempt to practice environmental community development needs to be mindful of this context and seek to address the particular disjunctures that it throws up: residential communities, sink communities, migrant communities, workplace communities, communities of interest whose subjective knowledge of these interests is obfuscated through the practices of labour fragmentation, casualisation and migration controls. The chapters of this book seek to explore these themes.

<1>The state, civil society and popular struggle

Those who engage in community work, as professionals, activists, representatives or educators are caught between incorporation and attempting to resist 'development' and promote alternatives, all with diminishing or zero resources. Whilst academic literature continues to generate critical analysis of neoliberal development and its impact on environments, communities and classes, largely drawn from varieties of Marxism or anarchist theory, the practical and professional guides for community workers remain largely impervious to this theory. Some activists produce their own analysis, often driven by the imperative of the next campaign, or reflecting on the failure of the last one, sometimes laced with burnout. Much of this analysis occurs informally in spaces of critical reflection in homes, communities, workplaces, campaigns. Some of it is published online and forms a literature in parallel to, and interacting with, the material generated by academics (many of whom are also activists), and often read and commented on by other activists within 'echo-chambers' of small self-referencing groups. All these literatures have value – the suggestions for practical action, the academic analysis and the reflexivity from the front line. What this book seeks to do is draw on all these in order to assist those engaged in struggles for environmental justice – as community workers or social activists, environmentalists or community mobilisers – to address the difficult questions about praxis in the face of the neoliberal onslaught.

We are mindful of a significant risk in compiling this volume. The literature is full of examples of academics presuming a superior analysis to those engaged in struggle, seeking to interpret the situation on behalf of the 'ordinary people' who, it is implied, lack the intellectual resources, or because of false consciousness, ideology or not enough (political) education, are unable to develop a sophisticated analysis until the arrival of the 'professional' intellectuals. Vanguardism can be a particular disease of the left, and in the world of NGOs who feel that they are required to 'lead the people' (and often do so back into neoliberal capital). For Anne, the methodology of Jacques Rancière provides an antidote to this tendency, with his 'axiom of equality' (axiom because we have to postulate it, since we can't prove it):

> Basically, there is at the outset an egalitarian maxim that has a certain number of consequences and they are all there at the outset, including in the frustrating form that

means that, when people ask you what needs to be done, you answer that it's up to them to work out what they want to do. (Rancière, 2016: 91)

This fits with our understanding of Gramsci, and his requirement that we accord to ordinary people both agency and thought: 'all men are intellectuals'. Fortunately, as it turns out, the agency and intelligence of the dominated does not require the left intellectual to 'discover' it, since it is ontological. As Cabral (1979) says, 'struggle is a normal condition of all living creatures of the world. All are in struggle, all struggle' (31). We believe, within a Gramscian frame, in the actual struggle of ordinary people to change the world from where they are and work and move.

The environment is a key battleground and potential location for struggle, as economic decision making in the interests of capital accumulation leads to cost shifting onto the environments of those with least economic or political leverage. Whilst the impact of, and resistance to, this environmental-economic dumping is not new, in the current stage of neoliberalism it has become increasingly acute and systematic, and has generated new waves of self-reflective community action and social movement. Analytically this has been explored through the discipline of political ecology. The state is largely playing an important role as midwife of neoliberal implementation, as security for the agents of dispossession, as conduit for incorporating civil society, yet remains a site of struggle in which the war of position is played out. That applies also to the institutions of civil society, including the universities where we and many of the contributors are located.

Resistance emerges from a range of actors in which 'the community' and the complex and contradictory ways in which it understands 'the environment' is at the centre. The book addresses this problematic from a range of angles It also addresses the range of tactics and methods which constitute part of the community development repertoire, which may be used – and incorporated – in diverse ways.

<1>A role for community development?

The 'Rethinking community development' series aims to help practitioners to question what community development means in theory and practice in current times, providing international, cross-generational and cross-disciplinary perspectives, and using contextual specificity as a lens to look at localised consequences of wider, global processes.

But why is it necessary to 'rethink' community development?

Geoghegan and Powell (2008) argue that there are currently three different discernible kinds of community development – *of* neoliberalism, *alongside* neoliberalism and *against* neoliberalism. Much of contemporary community development is a central instrument in consolidating neoliberalism (Popple, 2006; Geoghegan & Powell, 2008). However, there needs also to be a recognition that in our current context the main opposition to neoliberalism includes a protectionist and viciously xenophobic imagined community. There is thus currently a very real struggle for the soul of community development.

However, it is not simply the current context, and its effects on the practice of community development, that require us to pause and 'rethink' – it is also the conceptual difficulties associated with community development per se. To a great extent, this is because the concepts of both community and development are, and have always been, highly contested (Battacharyya, 2004; Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012; Kelly, 2016).

How, then, can a contribution to the series focusing on environmental justice help? Kelly (2016: 24) specifically identifies 'developing appropriate responses to environmental degradation and climate change, the latter becoming increasingly urgent' as a key current challenge for community development practice and theory today. As Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012) argue, resources, including natural resources, are a critical component of community development; and as these resources become increasingly limited or compromised, the question of what community development?, for whom?, becomes increasingly fraught. Hopefully, this book makes a useful contribution. However, we would argue that an environmental justice lens has an even more profound strength in 'rethinking' community development.

Solidarity and agency are key aspects of environmental justice struggles; the contributors to this collection are working in very different contexts, across the globe, but all are seeking to build solidarity and agency. The environmental justice movement has also been perhaps one of the most successful in bridging the macro-micro gap, and the chapters in this book consider these linkages. Looking at local environmental struggles – the contextual specificity this series emphasises – allows us to explore this notion of community development as solidarity and agency, whilst also problematising it. How can we build solidarity in an age of rampant, competitive individualism, in a context of competition over scarce resources? How can we recognise the inherent agency of people to resist, and build this, in an age where the power of neoliberal capital appears so great, as the first book in this series, *Politics, power and community development*, explored? 'How is it possible to strengthen and combine both the small resistances and general challenges to neoliberalism in ways that can lead to transformative change?' (Carpenter, Emejulu and Taylor, 2016: 3).

<1>Structure of the book

To help us understand the micro-macro connection, the remaining chapters are organised crudely from those which focus on very localised struggles to those which consider macro, global links.

Figure 1.1: Location of specific environmental justice struggles discussed in the book TO GO AROUND HERE

In Chapter 2, Hilary and Laurence analyse an iconic environmental justice struggle against the Shell gas pipeline in western Ireland in terms of community led processes and collective self-education in the face of economic might, state corruption, police brutality and postcolonial political division. In Chapter 3, Patrick and Berenice document a remarkable popular uprising in the Columbian port city of Buenaventura from his experience of working closely with human rights activists during the civic strike. Not a typical environmental justice struggle, the strike is rooted in both a human ecology of some of the most excluded populations of Columbia and a massively accelerated level of exploitation centred around the port utilised for export by the neoliberal expansion of extractive industries. In the current context of growing right wing xenophobia, in which tools of 'community development' can be employed to exclude as well as unite, Richard and Daniel's Chapter 4 explores how ethnic divisions between Roma and non-Roma populations in Slovakia undermine class solidarity in struggles for environmental justice

A number of chapters reflect on inter-connections between micro and macro struggles as communities take tentative steps to 'join the dots by joining hands'. In a chapter dealing specifically with waste management in the neoliberal context, Jennifer draws on her experience in the development of community recycling initiatives in Scotland, which were undermined by the interests of capital and state environmental policy. Subsequent waves of incinerator developments mobilised communities in opposition, and again defeated by sustained movements from above. Jon describes a successful campaign against Fracking in Mi'kma'ki / Nova Scotia, Canada, analysing his experience of learning *to*, *through* and *in* struggle (Foley, 1999) through alliances between First Nation and Settler communities. The communities directly affected by coal mining in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa are foregrounded by Mark, who cautions against the tendency for activists and NGOs to 'speak for' those whose analysis is grounded in their experience of resistance.

Simon provides an overview of the environmental history of Palestine and the impact of the Zionist/Israeli settler colonialism. In the context of the current military occupation of the West Bank, he discusses how the Environmental Education Center is able to promote resilience and resistance through a range of environmental community development initiatives. Addressing in particular the dialectic between local struggles and wider movements through educational praxis, Bobby and Jeanne examine an innovative environmental justice school for community and social movement activists from across South Africa, run by the NGO groundWork.

Continuing the theme of settler colonialism, Abeer, Zayneb and Mahmoud, collaborate with Eurig to draw on a range of grassroots struggles in the context of an active and aggressive process of settler colonisation in Palestine. The contributors are engaged in a range of struggles and come together to make the connections between community development, environmental justice and popular struggle as anti-colonial praxis.

Some of the contradictions of working in solidarity with peoples' movements in a context of neoliberalism and ultra-right wing communalism is highlighted in Chapter 10 by Shweta and Dharmesh, co-produced with Eurig, who reflect on the very real dilemmas that community workers and activists are facing in the front line of Narendra Modi's radical deregulation along with state repression and Hindutva violence. In such a context, philanthrocapitalism is providing a vehicle for the neoliberal incorporation of grassroots environmental justice movements, closing down opportunities for resistance to the accumulation by dispossession.

The penultimate macro-level chapter, by Kathy and Sara, addresses the under-researched area of the interface between the community and the workplace in relation to environmental justice, and especially in the forms of struggles for occupational and environmental health, drawing on discussions with a wide range of community-based, trade union, anti-toxics and environmentalist groups across Asia, North America and Europe..

In the concluding chapter, we reflect on the key themes that emerge from the collection, as well as on the process of production of the book.

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