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In November 2017, Sydney Environment Institute hosted a major international conference on Environmental Justice, which featured presentations by leading and emerging thinkers in environmental justice scholarship and activism and encouraged thought-provoking and inspiring discussions between panelists and attendees.

The EJ Conference 2017 celebrated the 20-year anniversary of the first major Environmental Justice conference, held by the University of Melbourne, in 1997. That event brought together a scholarly community that focused on the crucial topics of social justice, environmental justice, and ecological justice. As a newly-minted PhD, I found it to be incredibly inspiring. Twenty years on, when organising the 2017 EJ conference, we wanted to bring those same kinds of conversations back to Australia.

The conference was designed to honour outstanding environmental justice scholarship, scholar-activism, and academic influence on the policy process; it was also meant to include and honour both longstanding names in the long history of environmental justice research, such as Professor Robert Bullard, and include and engage a new generation of those interested in the topic.

We also wanted the conference to provide an opportunity for reflecting upon the future of the movement and scholarship, and it became clear throughout the week that there is a vibrant, creative, critical, and engaging community of environmental justice scholars. Many of the articles featured in this special issue come from emerging voices in the field, who are pushing environmental justice and environmental thought in important directions.

I want to thank a number of people that made the conference possible. As always, I thank my co-Director at SEI Iain McCalman for his guidance, mentorship, and partnership. I have to thank our sponsors from the School of Social and Political Sciences, and the Sydney Social Science and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC).

The conference was a success in large part due to the help of my colleagues Linda Connor, Beck Pearse, Dinesh Wadiwel, Sophie Webber, Rosemary Lyster, Manfred Nelson, Phil McManus and Donna Green – who assisted in suggesting invitees and reviewing proposals. Lastly, I have to thank the core of the SEI team – Michelle St Anne, Eloise Fetterplace, and Anastasia Mortimer, and the volunteers who worked tirelessly to make this conference a success.

What follows is a set of selected articles developed in collaboration between our participants and SEI staff, which became our EJ blog post series. The articles touch on the key EJ issues discussed at the conference and bring together the stories and perspectives of a diverse group of activists, students and researchers – much like the conference itself. We hope that this special issue will inspire you all to continue the conversations from the conference and contribute to the ongoing and necessary work in EJ scholarship.

Professor David Schlosberg
Co-Director, Sydney Environment Institute

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Critical Environmental Justice Studies and the Prison Industrial Complex

By Professor David Pellow,
University of California, Santa Barbara

I want to begin with a story about a man named Bryant Arroyo. Bryant Arroyo is a Puerto Rican man who has served time in a prison in the state of Pennsylvania. Bryant Arroyo is also well known in some quarters because he organised more than 900 of his fellow inmates to write letters to the nearby town supervisors, in which this prison is based, protesting the planned construction of an 800-million-dollar coal gasification plant next door. The coal plant project was defeated, earning Bryant Arroyo, a prisoner, the title of jailhouse environmentalist. Now, he is one of just many people in the United States who has fought against environmental injustices under the unimaginable conditions and brutality of the prison industrial complex in my country.

In thinking about 'looking forward' with respect to environmental justice (EJ) research, I want to discuss conditions facing people like Mr Arroyo to consider the utility of what has been called a critical environmental justice studies framework. Critical EJ studies is an idea that people have put forth, going back at least till 2005, intended to address some of the limitations and tensions within the literature.

I recently began a project where I am bringing this perspective to light and trying to apply it to the intersection between the prison system and environmental justice concerns. There are many, many ways in which prisons and environmental issues intersect to produce harms to the bodies of inmates, corrections officers and nearby ecosystems and land bases. For example, there are confirmed reports of water contaminated with lead, arsenic and other pollutants at prisons in more than 20 states in the United States including the now infamous case of Flint Michigan, which is in the heart of Genesee County. Many inmates of the Genesee County jail were forced to drink contaminated water while the corrections officers, the prison guards, looked on while drinking from filtered water out of bottles.

The Northwest detention centre in the Seattle, Washington area is a privately operated immigrant prison, designed to house more than 1500 immigrants (this gives you a sense of the global scale here) and is directly adjacent to a federally designated toxic superfund site.

A classic EJ studies approach to this topic would likely place a primary emphasis on the degree to which there may be geographic concentrations of prisons and jails next to various communities and neighbourhoods and what remedies must be sought through state-based policy mechanisms. I want to build on that with a critical EJ studies approach to just go a bit further. The first pillar of that approach opens up our scope of analysis to consider how multiple social categories of difference are intertwined in the making of, and resistance to, environmental injustice.

The U.S. prison system is comprised of a majority of people of colour who hold a lower socioeconomic status. And today, women constitute the single fastest growing group of prisoners. All of these groups face great risk as a result of a range of environmental threats being generated, both inside and outside of the prisons. So, the point is that all of these categories matter. We must talk about species and ecosystems, and the impacts that prisons place on ecosystems. Such impacts include sewage and other water discharges, a whole host of chemical toxins, fossil fuels, air pollution and hazardous waste, which are all generated from within US prison systems and affect non-human species and communities and waterways, ambient air and nearby land bases.

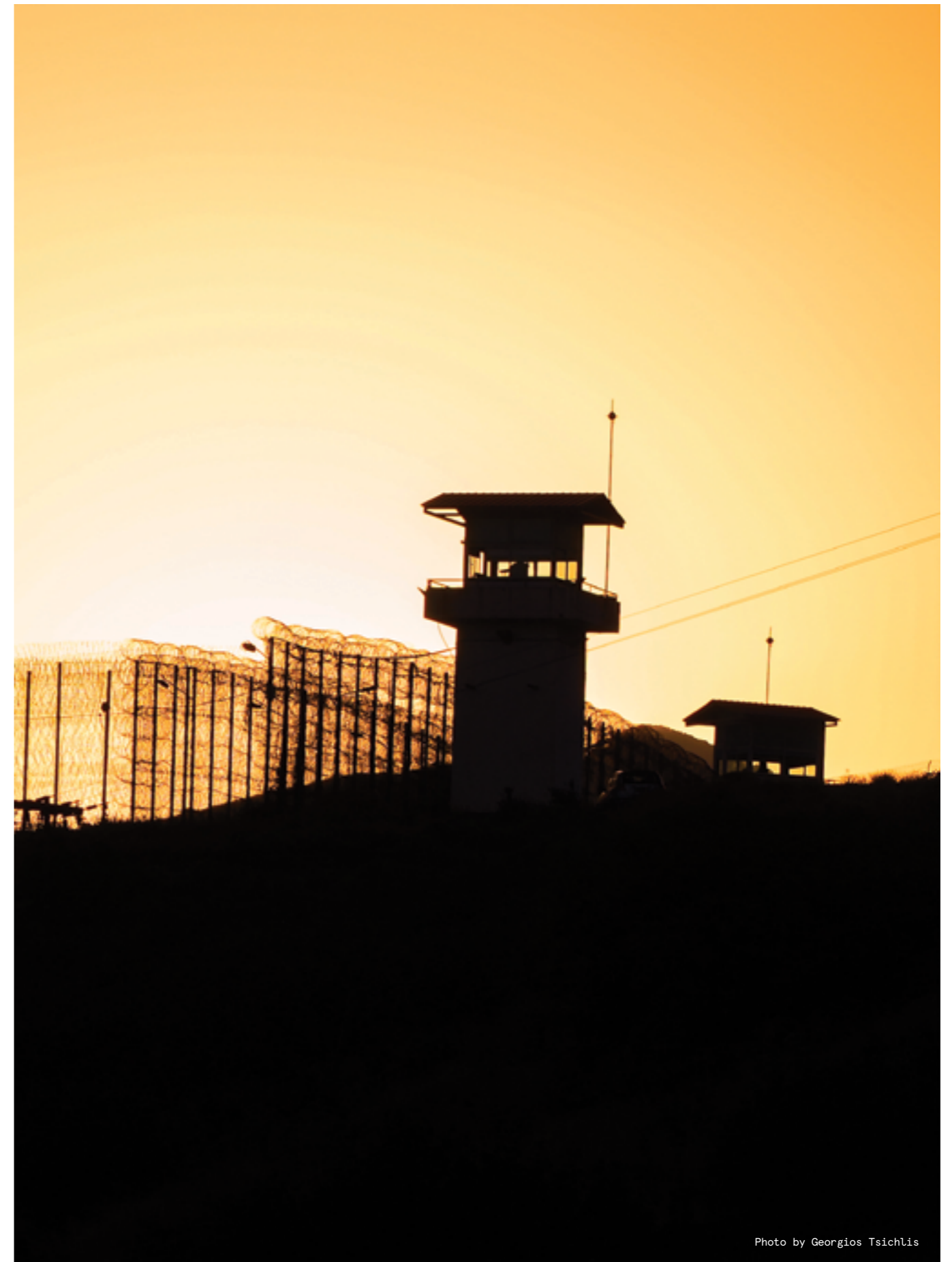


Photo by Georgios Tsihliis

“We can also think about these issues on a microscale, and to do this; we can draw on what the research of Petra Tschakert, which explores the importance of the emphasis on the body. This is an extremely important focus that comes out of feminist scholarship in particular, and feminist environmental justice scholarship as well.”

Professor David N. Pellow

Professor David N. Pellow

is the Dehlsen Chair and Professor of Environmental Studies and Director of the Global Environmental Justice Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara where he teaches courses on environmental and social justice, race/class/gender and environmental conflict, human-animal conflicts, sustainability, and social change movements that confront our socioenvironmental crises and social inequality. He has volunteered for and served on the Boards of Directors of several community-based, national, and international organizations including the Global Action Research Center, the Center Health, Global Response, Greenpeace USA, and International Rivers.

One campaign I am working on is in Letcher County, Kentucky, in the southern United States. Letcher is the site of a proposed prison project that will be placed on land that is now cleared because there once were mountains there. Those mountains are no longer there because coal companies engaged in mountaintop removal, which is a violent, destructive practice of blowing up mountains to extract coal, reducing ecosystems to poisonous rubble and dust. This prison is also to be placed in an area comprised of low-income communities, which raises clear environmental justice concerns about multiple and layered uses over time that will produce harm to ecosystems and human health. The Letcher County Prison site is also home to second growth forests. Second growth forests that serve as habitats for 71 different known species, including the endangered species of the Indiana bat and the grey bat whose lives and fate will be placed in further jeopardy as a result of this proposal.

Temporal scales is the second pillar of the critical environmental justice framework, and this figures quite strongly in any study of prisons in the United States because you’ve got to pay attention to history. There has been a lot of talk about our thirteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution because it has become a key site of discussion for the relationship between imprisonment and oppression. That document, if you read it very closely, makes quite clear that prisons are ‘legally sanctioned sites of enslavement’ as “punishment for a crime.” Thus, many scholars, myself included, would argue that abolishing the prison system, as we know it today, is an important, unfinished bit of business that was begun with the work of slavery abolition centuries ago.

We can also think about these issues on a microscale, and to do this; we can draw on what the research of [Petra Tschakert](#), which explores the importance of the emphasis on the body. This is an extremely important focus that comes out of feminist scholarship in particular, and feminist environmental justice scholarship as well. [Rachel Stein](#), [Cherríe Moraga](#) and others, have argued, as Petra did, that when we redefine our bodies as homes, as lands, as environments, then we can more effectively personalize and therefore politicize the fact that so many of us have our well-being put at risk from a range of threats at the micro-scale. For example, we find that study after study finds that LGBTQ folk and women face extraordinarily high threats of sexual abuse and violence in the prison system. This is not reformable, and it is endemic to prisons. Also, consider the deliberate use of toxins on prisoner’s bodies – I call these chemical attacks at the microscale. In many US jails and prisons, according to a recent study by Human Rights Watch, we find that inmates with mental disabilities are frequently subjected to punishment and pain compliance techniques that include the use of chemical sprays to the eyes and the body. Sexual abuse and chemical attacks, I would argue, are just two clear examples of environmental injustice in prisons.



Photo by Hedi Benyounes

“...surely you and I and everyone else on this side of the prison walls in the so-called ‘free world’ must have far greater power and promise and potential than we ever imagined...”

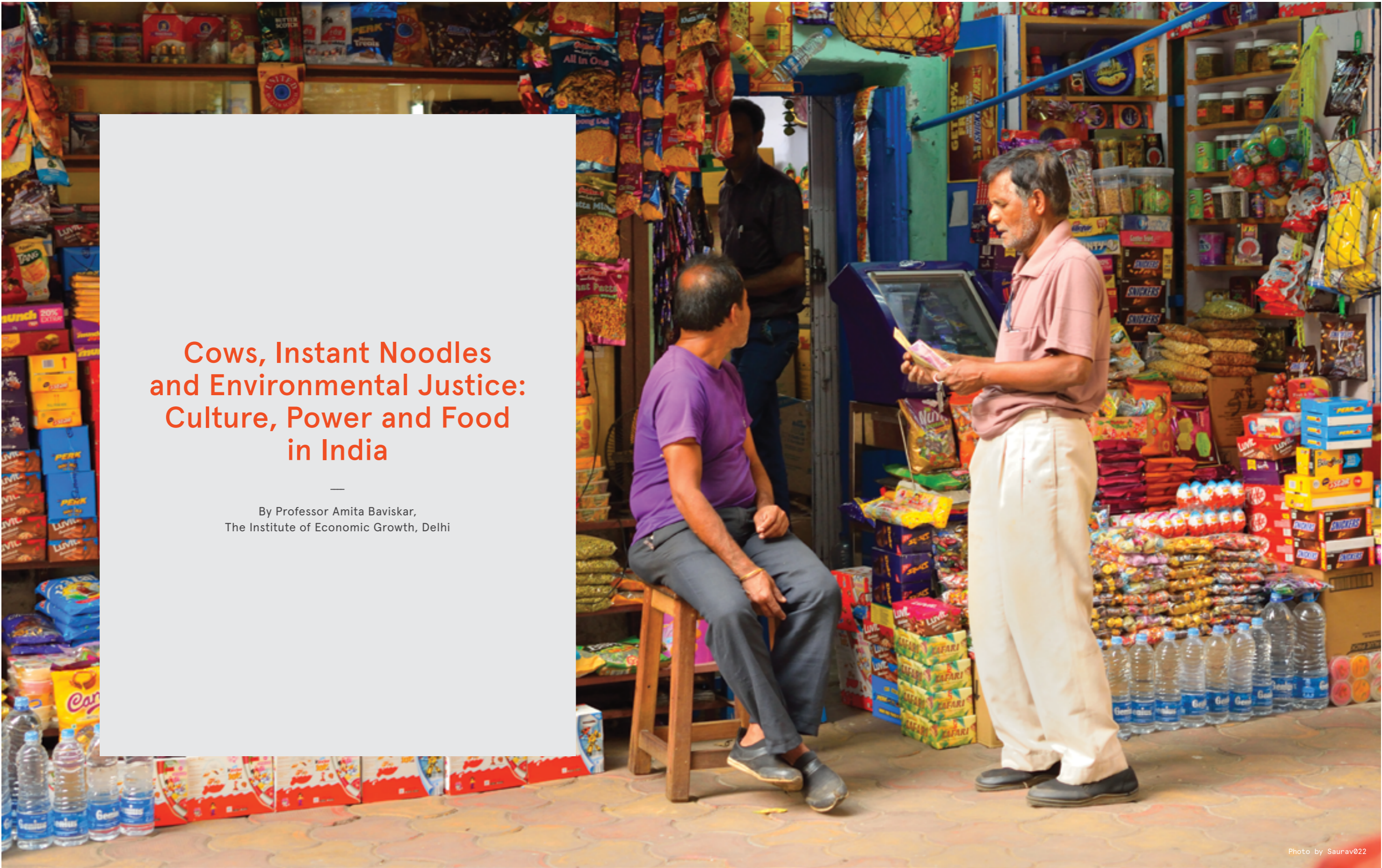
Professor David N. Pellow

We find that many prisons in the US are located on or near former military waste dumps. For example, in my home state of California, we have the Victorville Federal Correctional Complex, which was built on what is known as a former weapons storage area. It is now a military Superfund site, which means it is recognised by the federal government as contaminated land that poses a significant threat to human and environmental health. That prison complex is built on the site of the George Air Force Base where that base was once located and where the Department of Defense once buried and stored radioactive nuclear waste creosote tetraethyl lead and munitions.

When I spoke recently to Eric McDavid—a renowned environmentalist and former political prisoner who did time at that site—he told me, ‘I served time at that facility in Victorville. It’s on a Superfund site. The water is contaminated. It’s what you shower with; it’s what you eat with, it’s what you drink’.

The third pillar of EJ studies signals an opportunity to think and act in ways that question our reliance on state dominance, to imagine and achieve environmental justice. A particularly pronounced way in which prisons and environmental justice come together is through the methods that the state often employs to criminalise, control and incarcerate people who take measures to defend and ‘save the environment and non-humans’. In recent years, this has been called the ‘green scare’, which includes surveillance, infiltration, intimidation, harassment and imprisonment of activists in radical environmental movements. Therefore, this is a particularly tangible and vicious site of state repression. And for me, the fact that activists working to protect and defend vulnerable ecosystems and nonhumans have been targeted by the state as ‘eco-terrorists’ and imprisoned, suggests to radical movements that embracing and reinforcing state power may be counterproductive to efforts to improve and secure environmental justice.

Returning to the story of Bryant Arroyo, if he could shut down a coal gasification plant from within the belly of the carceral beast, that is the U.S. prison industrial complex, uplifting himself and nine hundred of his fellow inmates, changing the power dynamics between free and unfree and securing a rather extraordinary victory for environmental justice, from within the context of such violent captivity...then, surely you and I and everyone else on this side of the prison walls in the so-called ‘free world’ must have far greater power and promise and potential than we ever imagined, and can truly go much further toward creating new knowledge and transformative social change for environmental justice.



Cows, Instant Noodles and Environmental Justice: Culture, Power and Food in India

—
By Professor Amita Baviskar,
The Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

Photo by Saurav022

“These policies have indeed created great wealth for some Indians, and they have also created a growing middle class that aspires to consume on par with the Global North.”

Professor Amita Baviskar

From the perspective of environmental justice, any discussion on culture, food and health in India must begin by noting the persistence of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and the deepening of social and economic inequalities. Within this frame, I am going to focus on two issues: the first is common to India and many other post-colonial countries – and that is the rising consumption of junk food, and the second is probably specific to India – the conflict around eating beef. I’ve chosen these issues not only because they are important in the context that I work in, but also to highlight that our conversations must be global as well as attentive to distinctive local features.

India has witnessed unprecedented economic growth since the 1990s when successive governments have adopted policies of market liberalisation, attracting capitalist investors by giving them great deals: subsidised land, minerals, tax holidays, cheap and compliant labour. These policies have indeed created great wealth for some Indians, and they have also created a growing middle class that aspires to consume on par with the Global North. The top five per cent of Indians drive cars from their air-conditioned homes to their air-conditioned offices, plan holidays abroad, shop for New Zealand apples and Australian oats.

However, most of their fellow-citizens live with chronic hunger, desperately trying to eke out their next meal, feeling helpless anger as their children cry for food. India’s wealthiest 10 per cent holds 370 times the share of wealth that its poorest hold. And this segment has been getting steadily richer, and now holds nearly three-quarters of total wealth. This obscene inequality isn’t happenstance or an unintended side-effect of liberalisation. The roots of economic growth in India lie in ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (and if you’re thinking, but what about Information Technology and business processing, surely that’s not dispossessed, anyone? Please note that IT employs only 4 per cent of India’s working population, and contributes only 7 per cent of GDP). The human and ecological toll that economic liberalisation has taken: displacement and destruction of habitats due to mines, dams, ports, nuclear reactors, special economic zones, and the fierce social movements against them, provide the context for my remarks here on culture, food and health.

The UNDP’s Human Development Index places India at 133 among 188 countries (Australia is second on the list). If we look specifically at hunger and malnutrition, the figures are far worse. UNICEF reports that 47 per cent of all Indian children under five years show clinical signs of chronic under-nutrition. The figure is higher for girls, for children in rural areas, and among the historically oppressed Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While children’s access to nutritious food has improved a bit through state welfare programmes such as day care centres and school mid-day meals, these schemes do not address a fundamental issue: parents can’t provide adequate food at home because they don’t own assets or earn incomes that would enable them to grow or buy food.

Economic growth has brought material prosperity in many ways – mobile phones, television sets, motorcycles seem to be everywhere now – but it’s not always led to an improvement in nutrition. Since the 1960s, when the government invested in the Green Revolution (a package of hybrid seeds, irrigation, synthetic fertilisers, and pesticides), India has been self-sufficient in wheat and rice, and that’s what gets supplied at subsidised prices across the country. Eating polished rice has led to an epidemic of Type-2 diabetes among rural and urban working-class populations. This food regime, backed by the international fossil fuel-agro-chemical complex, has edged out more nutritious and ecologically more sustainable cereals like the numerous varieties of locally-grown millets.

Even more worrying is the steep rise in mass-manufactured, highly processed industrial foods like biscuits and instant noodles, made with that glut of wheat and rice. Shiny plastic packets of these commodities are everywhere, thanks to multinational corporations’ brainwave of selling small, affordable units of their products in low-income areas, a strategy called finding ‘the fortune at the bottom of the pyramid’. My current research is on Nestle’s Maggi noodles, a product wildly popular with children, adolescents and young adults. Why is this? Like other packaged junk foods, Maggi is the brand of modernity, and that means a lot in a sharply unequal country where food practices are divided by class, caste, region and gender. For poor, provincialised, low-caste or tribal youth, whose home-cooked food is stigmatised, sneered at and avoided by upper-caste people, eating Maggi is part of a social aspiration to consume like affluent Indians

(as advertised by film stars on TV), to be a bit more like them. Deprived of so much else, their desire to eat these fun, glamorous food is a mode of seeking consumer citizenship, displaying that one belongs to the dominant food culture of the nation.

The second issue I will briefly touch on is the ongoing controversy in India around the consumption of beef (and, by extension, meat in general). Most Hindus, as you probably know, regard cows as sacred. So the fact that many Indians – Christians and Muslims, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities – eat cows has long been a thorn in the flesh of orthodox Hindus. With a Hindu nationalist government in power since 2014, there have been several incidents where vigilante Hindu cow-protection groups have attacked Muslims, beating and even killing them, on trumped-up charges that they were transporting cows for slaughter or keeping beef in their homes. This brutal cultural policing is part of a campaign to homogenise diets towards vegetarianism, the preferred diet of the upper-caste Hindu. While vegetarianism makes environmental sense in many contexts (including, as a way of fighting global warming), within India’s caste-stratified and religiously plural society, it serves only to deprive poor people of a protein-rich food that they need and enjoy.

Cows have traditionally been crucial to an agrarian economy powered by bullocks and fertilised by cow manure, and to diets in which milk products have been a major source of protein and fat. Today, India is the world’s largest producer of milk. Keeping cows as working animals, of course, also means killing them when they grow old or unproductive, killing male calves that don’t give milk, so a flourishing cattle trade has always accompanied dairying. Yet, because Hindu nationalist fanatics see beef as a stick to beat Muslims into submission, we have government policies that restrict cattle trade, which has already started hurting the agrarian economy. And herds of starving cattle roam the countryside, let loose by farmers who can’t sell them, a sad end to a supposedly sacred animal.

These two examples of the connections between culture, food and health raise complex challenges for our work on environmental justice.

Food is not just about biological nutrition within an ecological context, but about cultural desires, identities that speak to one’s heritage and to imagined futures. It’s about individual choices and collective modes of being and belonging. In a context where these aspects of food are shrewdly assessed and strategically deployed by powerful multinational corporations who not only cater to but in fact *create* what people want, the struggle for food that’s environmentally and culturally just is harder than ever. At the same time, what we’re fighting against is not just global capitalism but national movements that emphasise homogeneity and assimilation to a dominant norm.

Agriarian localism (support for growing and eating millets, as well as other fruit, vegetables and meats looked down upon as ‘peasant’ or ‘wild’ foods) are now emerging as a fashionable alternative, a distinguishing lifestyle statement by Indian elites even as these foods are less and less available to the people who depended on them, and are also less desired by them. Such ironies about the commodification of elements of endangered cultures occur across the world: indigenous peoples’ textiles, art, music and other artifacts circulate as fetishised, precious objects while the conditions of possibility for their production, indeed, the communities that create and nurture them, are erased. For environmental justice, we must support the struggles of those who strive to live and eat with dignity and pride, which means fighting for land, water and forests, and the nutritious traditions that flow from them, as well as demanding government policies that respect cultural diversity and social equity.

“Cows have traditionally been crucial to an agrarian economy powered by bullocks and fertilised by cow manure, and to diets in which milk products have been a major source of protein and fat.”

Professor Amita Baviskar

Professor Amita Baviskar is a professor of sociology at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. Her research focuses on the cultural politics of environment and development. Her latest research examines changing food practices in western India in relation to the transformation of agrarian environments. Amita has taught at the University of Delhi and has been a visiting professor at Stanford, Sciences Po, Yale, and the University of California at Berkeley. She was awarded the 2005 Malcolm Adiseshiah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies and the 2010 Infosys Prize for the social sciences.

Multispecies Justice and the Anthropocene

By Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, University of Sydney



Photo by Oziel Gomez

Paul Crutzen is known for having popularised the concept of the Anthropocene to capture the impact of humans on the earth systems measured in geological time.

Crutzen's diagnosis comprised a sobering list of effects that included anthropogenic climate change, mass human utilisation of fresh water supplies and large-scale forest destruction. Importantly, in Crutzen's formulation, animals are also directly impacted by this planetary scale effect.



Photo by Fredrik Ohlander

Indeed, animals are named explicitly in at least three ways. Firstly, mass species extinction. The sixth great extinction event is closely tied to human activity indeed, insofar as it is anthropogenic in origin, we are dealing with at least an indirect form of planetary scale human violence directed against nonhumans. Secondly, the massive expansion of global livestock populations, and with them deforestation, expanding land use and unprecedented utilisations of energy, resources and food to maintain this commodity supply. Finally, Crutzen specifically notes the rise of industrialised fishing, and with it, the decimation of our oceans – something I will return to.

Crutzen and his colleagues in defining the Anthropocene have created a peculiar challenge for thinking about justice and particularly justice as it applies to animals. This justice project necessarily looks different from many of the justice projects that have emerged from traditional political philosophy, which have been mainly concerned with just institutions and just procedures that produce just outcomes for humans. Instead, the challenge is how we might imagine justice after anthropocentrism; that is, can we imagine justice without simply reinstating human domination in a different form?

And importantly, justice in a multispecies context forces us to ask difficult questions about what is “just” for non-humans. What, for example, do animals want from us when it comes to justice?

In my work, I have been particularly interested in the violence of human domination of human sovereignty as an artefact of our anthropocentrism. In my 2015 book *The War Against Animals*, I was interested in pursuing precisely this systematic set of relationships we have with non-human animals. My argument in the book was that taking a global perspective, our mainstay relations with animals are essentially a relation of continued and unrelenting hostility. If we take food consumption as an example, one conservative estimate is that worldwide over seventy billion land animals are killed annually for food. Estimates of fish killed annually for human consumption range up to 2.7 trillion per year.

Certainly, taking this grim picture into account, it seems reasonable to suggest that if this mass scale injury and death are systematic and directed, then perhaps they conform to an understanding, in political terms, of what might be described as a “war”. This war produces effects that are not preferred or desired by animals themselves. In a political sense, the violence we expose animals to means, to paraphrase Iris Marion Young, that the lives of animals are determined without reciprocation from animals themselves. Put this way, justice in the Anthropocene has to involve some determined effort to reduce human violence towards animals.

“Certainly This war produces effects that are not preferred or desired by animals themselves. In a political sense, the violence we expose animals to means, to paraphrase Iris Marion Young, that the lives of animals are determined without reciprocation from animals themselves. Put this way, justice in the Anthropocene has to involve some determined effort to reduce human violence towards animals.”

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel

The War Against Animals belongs to an emerging field within animal studies that have been identified as belonging to the 'political turn' in animal ethics and rights. This new field of the pro-animal theory is less concerned with questions of individual ethics such as 'what should I personally eat?' or 'what should I personally wear?', and more interested in how we address political structure, institutions, violence, policy and law to generate just outcomes for animals.

Some of this work is directed specifically at democracy and political institutions. For example, thinkers such as Robert Garner, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka have recently been making arguments for the formal inclusion of animal interests in democracies. That is, how might we design democracies in ways that are non-anthropocentric? Mostly these theorists have drawn a leaf from Green Theory in designing these models. Other work within the 'political turn' is interested in strategic problems relating to how we move forward a political agenda for animals and species and how we work with other social movements to make change. One example of this is the work of Claire Jean Kim who explores the intersection of animals, race and environment in different social movement actions. This work is very useful for thinking about the kind of alliances that might be necessary for responding to the huge problems that face us. For example, I am curious if a multi-species justice platform allows us to build better alliances between animal advocates and environmental justice movements.

“It is no secret that during the twentieth century it was the industrialisation of wild fish capture which helped generate the crisis we face in the oceans today.”

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel

Since writing *The War Against Animals*, I have been addressing a different project, exploring the way in which capitalism might interact with the violence of anthropocentrism. Understanding the specific relationship between anthropocentrism and capitalism is vital for comprehending a range of global problems that confront us. In my view, environmental justice, or more specifically, a multi-species environmental justice, has to be part of the solution.

To explore this relation, I would like to return to thinking about industrialised fishing, which as I mentioned is central to the problem of the Anthropocene. The crisis ahead is that the depletion of fish stocks may have reached an irreversible stage where some have predicted the oceans could run out of key fish species by 2050. It is no secret that during the twentieth century it was the industrialisation of wild fish capture which helped generate the crisis we face in the oceans today. From about the 1950s onwards, industrialised fish capture came to dominate all global fish capture, as local small-scale subsistence and artisanal fishing faced challenges from increasingly well-organised businesses, who captured fish on a large scale. Fish are perhaps the most widely traded global food commodities in the world and remain a source of intense interest for global markets. We know too that global seafood industries have been the focus of a lot of advocacy by labour rights organisations, with deep concerns around the use of low wage and forced labour in wild capture and processing operations. Another disturbing aspect of this global business is the large number of fish that are discarded as part of the fishing industry. In May 2016, a team of researchers led by Dr Glenn Simmons at the University of Auckland suggested that fishing vessels in New Zealand waters captured 2.7 times as many fish as they officially declared, and that dumping of unwanted fish was routine in the industry.

All of this is not merely a disaster for humans and the environment, but also a disaster for animals. Almost no wild fish capture involves welfare precautions to prevent fish suffering. Fish are hauled from depths and crushed against other fish and nets. Fish frequently expire painfully from burst swim bladders and those that survive this ordeal are left to suffocate on boats. Growing research on fish sentience and capability highlights that these fish almost certainly feel pain and experience emotions that are comparable to land-based animals. If justice requires us to consider the views of all those who experience injustice – and I would say this is crucial to the environmental justice frame – then what about fish? Are they not delivered a massive injustice in the multifaceted disaster that is industrialised fishing? Would a non-anthropocentric conception of justice acknowledge that fish have the most at stake in any deliberation over the Justice of fishing itself? And what does this just solution look like?



Dr Dinesh Wadiwel

is a senior lecturer in human rights and socio-legal studies, with a background in social and political theory. He has had over 15 years experience working within civil society organisations, including in anti-poverty and disability rights roles. Dinesh's current book project explores the relationship between animals and capitalism. This builds on his monograph, *The War against Animals* (Leiden / Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2015). Dinesh is also involved in a project exploring the application of the United Nations Convention against Torture to the treatment of people with disability.

The example of industrialised fish capture intrigues me because it perfectly illustrates the deep intersections between economic inequality under capitalism and the manifold effects this poses to humans, animals and nature. I find it strange that we have not seen the kind of alliances that might bring these elements together for strategic change. While environment and labour rights groups have been working together admirably in the Asia-Pacific region to address slavery in the industry, it is curious to me that very few of these groups specifically raise the problems this industry poses for fish, beyond questions around the sustainability of fishing for fish populations. On the flip side, I'm curious why animal protection organisations have not worked in solidarity with others to support attempts to end slavery in the industry, as part of the general movement to challenge industrialised wild fish capture itself. From my perspective, the opportunity is there to seek to address injustices that face both humans and non-humans. I certainly think this is an opportunity offered by a conception of multispecies environmental justice.

“Fish are perhaps the most wildly traded global food commodities in the world and remain a source of intense interest for global markets.”

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel

Propagules, Pumps and Briny Relations

—
By Susan Reid, University of Sydney

We humans are in a soak with the ocean. Our global material flows now transition with the ocean's planetary currents and pumps, and our intensifying carbon streams bring transitions of an entirely different register. In the imaginaries of current governance regimes, the ocean is instrumentalised as a quarry, pantry, sink and sump. With such foundations, environmental legal protections can only mitigate against the ongoing and harmful impacts of human activities.

Moving Things that Stir and Pump

Myriad lives emerge daily to squirm, wriggle, pump, and glide from seabed to surface, entraining sediment particles as they rise. It is the largest migration of animals on the planet.¹ Searching for food and avoiding predators, they rise in the shelter of night, to the moonlit surface: krill, plankton, and nekton—threshold-busting creatures ascending from the ocean floor, sea ridges, and through shelf and slope waters. Dawn signals a necessary dive and sinking retreat to the sunless interior.² Vertically migrating zooplankton may input as much energy into the ocean as winds and tides.³

Salt and Flushing Melts

Dependency on a stable climate system makes us vulnerable to the dynamic agency of material exchanges and flows; and their very real susceptibility to change in a direction not yet familiar. Neimanis and Walker's concept of 'thick time' captures the slow, long-range gestationality of water's generative materiality.⁴ It is a concept that lends itself well to the high-pressured old ocean. In the thick time of the thermohaline circulation, materials exchange and transform very slowly; effects generated by present activities may be suspended over time frames well beyond visibility.

The physical and temporal scales of the thermohaline speak little of its vulnerability to changing material intensities, and the exquisite exchange and material transitions at its heart. As ice forms around the polar regions, it spits salt back into the sea. When this dense, cold, saline water sinks, warmer surface waters move in to replace the sinking water and these minute exchanges create planetary scaled overturning. Cold deep water then

creeps horizontally across the seabed until it can rise again to the surface. Thermohaline overturning moves just a few centimeters per second; its ancient water can take a thousand years to complete the cycle,⁵ and as many years to see the sun.

Carbon's lively agency is implicated in the thick time of thermohaline overturning.⁶ Equally planetary in scale, it blankets the atmosphere and precipitates different types of transition. One of these are the warmer surface waters, which melt polar ice, pouring an excess of fresh water into the thermohaline mix. In this transitioning process the exchange becomes increasingly diluted and enfeebled. As we become aware of the real potential for a thermohaline circulation collapse,⁷ how might the lively ocean systems find visibility in governance regimes?

How might governance for transitioning ocean systems be re-prioritised above the commercial development imperatives of resource corporations?

The Transitional in Change

Warming surface waters, storm and rain intensifications, are not suddenly upon us, or separable from us, but are our nature/culture transitions; carrying all the way along the intensifying activity of our industry and increasing emissions, to the warming ocean. François Julien observes that transitions are not easily discerned, often invisible, and unspoken except in the eventual signalling of transformation that they bring about.⁸ The slowing thermohaline circulation and the increasing presence of plastics are just visible outcrops of subtle transitions already underway.



Photo by Elovich

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Transitions are not all imbricated, as if some earlier ocean conditions might return once prevailing conditions are removed. Some transitions signal irrevocable transformation. We talk superficially of changing currents, changing climates, or the changing ocean, as if the currents, climate and ocean possessed some form of prior integrity, rather than a continual transition. Cutting through change to transition enables certain relational connections to be understood. As a processual quality, for example, transition is shared across nature/culture, humans and more than human.

How might we imagine the material conditions for ocean transitions differently, with a view to the manifold liveliness of the world? How might we develop governance approaches that are more sensitive and adaptive to shared material vulnerabilities, over time?

Sarah Ensor identified in Rachel Carson's work an ecocritical approach that sees the present as "the future of any number of pasts—some near, some far, some recent, some long gone".⁹ Repurposing Carson's approach for ocean governance, we might consider the ocean's present condition and our material additions and extractions as already legible futures. If the conditions experienced by today's ocean are already the pasts of any number of futures, all the more reason for intensified precaution and longer-range temporal scales to inform our governance regimes.

Transitions may be either too far away, unfolding over the long range of the thermohaline or the gradual removal of ocean pulses too small to see. Missing the silent material transitions of our material inputs and extractions we are, as Jullien observes, surprised or bewildered when the visible effects appear.¹⁰

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Landscapes of dispossession – Examining adaptation and the persistent exclusion of the urban poor

—
By Karen Paiva Henrique,
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Photo by Luana Azevedo

In the summer of 2009/2010, the city of São Paulo, Brazil experienced unprecedented flooding from the Tietê River. São Paulo's inhabitants are no strangers to flooding, but during this summer the city's aging and insufficient flood management system, combined with extreme precipitation, forced the river to push its boundaries to an extent never seen before.

Infrastructure networks were brought to a halt as people and vehicles became stranded in areas quickly surrounded by floodwaters. No one suffered more than the poor inhabitants of São Paulo's east zone whose life possessions and bodies became submerged by the murky waters of the river for weeks at a time.

The floods of 2009/2010 coincided with plans from the government of São Paulo to build the world's largest linear park – *Parque Várzeas do Tietê (PVT)* – to allegedly protect the city against flooding from the Tietê River.¹ The project consists of a 75 km-long protected area, punctuated by leisure centres and surrounded by a highway designed to protect the floodplain from future unauthorised use. In spite of decades of government mismanagement and neglect, leading to the extensive occupation – both formal and informal – of the basin, the PVT distinctly targets the homes of the poor, singled out as one of the main culprits of flooding.

Even if the project lacked a well-rounded plan for the relocation of thousands of families to be removed (it identifies the homes to be demolished, but not a place for their reconstruction), the floods of 2009/2010 were so extreme that the PVT was able to secure almost 200 million US dollars in funding, enabling the beginning of its immediate construction. In 2017, the PVT is clearly behind schedule. Although the number of families targeted for removal has continuously grown since its inception (from 7,500 to 10,000 families), the state claims it doesn't have sufficient funds or available space in the city to build new homes for them. As an alternative, the

state offers a monthly allowance of 300 Brazilian Reals (approximately 90 US dollars), so each family can rent a home of their choice, close to their social networks and away from flood harm.²

Community leaders, who I interviewed in 2017, claim the allowance is insufficient to rent a safe home in any of the communities affected by the project. They also claim that for most of the families already removed, the monthly allowance eventually stopped being paid, leaving them with no choice but to return to their previous living arrangements. Reoccupation is a serious occurrence, also cited by state officials as one of the PVT's main challenges towards completion.

The PVT's exclusionary basis, rooted in the dispossession of floodplain dwellers, and its apparent inability to improve people's lives raises an important question: why has the state chosen large-scale relocation as a preferred path for flood adaptation in the case of São Paulo?

To start answering this question, we must look into the context, both geographic and institutional, within which the project has emerged. Projects such as the PVT are not created in a planning and development vacuum. They are rather highly contingent on their historical context and more often than not are produced through habit and accretion – 'recycling' and reproducing approaches used in the past and that have since become normalised.³

Such continuities in planning and development give form to what Fazey and others have characterised as a Dominant Adaptation Pathway (DAP): a normative decision-making trajectory built upon institutional legacies that are sustained by uneven relations of power and often serve to reinforce inequalities and inhibit transformational change.⁴

When using a DAP lens to place the PVT in its historical and political context, it comes as no surprise that a project built upon the removal of thousands of homes, without any clear plan for their relocation, would gain such traction. After all, precedents for the disposal of the poor to create room for more 'desirable' urban development can be found throughout the city's history. Yet, a more nuanced understanding of how DAPs emerge on the ground is still missing and could provide valuable insight to future adaptation plans in São Paulo, and elsewhere.

I propose we start by looking beyond relocation projects, where the presence of the state is highly visible, to examine how these projects become intertwined with state neglect towards vulnerable communities. Such neglect is systemic and more pronounced in moments preceding and following relocation when poor populations must fend for their lives in the absence of a liable state.

Looking simultaneously at the state's visible presence and seeming absence will allow us to situate adaptation within broader debates of justice – and systemic injustice – tracing its development within historical patterns built upon the dispossession of the poor. It will also allow us to identify alternative, more just practices for adaptation and the institutional roadblocks they encounter, as barriers persist to satisfy the interests of those in power.

This is not to say that people involved in planning and enacting state-led adaptation projects in São Paulo are inherently evil or exploitative. It is rather to recognise that their sometimes misguided attempts to 'do good' are directed by, and become trapped within, dominant decision-making trajectories historically entwined with the dispossession of the poor.

Floods like those in São Paulo in 2009/2010, and climate change more broadly, constitute an unprecedented challenge and also a unique opportunity to conceive development beyond the dispossession of those arguably most vulnerable, liberating them from poverty through more just and inclusive practices. However, such a feat will be only achieved if we conceive more flexible and transformational pathways that continuously address the most crucial question underlying adaptation efforts: *adaptation for whom and at what cost?*

“I propose we start by looking beyond relocation projects, where the presence of the state is highly visible, to examine how these projects become intertwined with state neglect towards vulnerable communities.”

Karen Paiva Henrique



Photo by ckturistando

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'Just Stories' and the Prism of Mixed Media Storytelling

—
By Dr Sarah Marie Wiebe,
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For over a decade, the Attawapiskat Nation– located along the James Bay in Northern Canada – has experienced environmental conditions that led to several State of Emergency declarations. These ranged from sewer backups, to inadequate housing to an escalation in the rates of youth suicide attempts. Each of these declarations reveals what Rob Nixon refers to as elements of “slow violence”,¹ violences that are slow-moving, systemic and often invisible.

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They are also bound up within an assemblage of settler-colonial policies and practices that reproduce inequities that many Indigenous communities like Attawapiskat experience in their daily lives.² In Canada, these range from exposure to industrial air pollution to constant boil water advisories. A recent report from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario noted that the provincial government continues to turn a blind eye to these systemic injustices, which are often referred to as examples of environmental racism.

The media is a double-edged sword for many communities who seek to raise awareness about these issues of environmental injustice.

On the one hand, the media can be a powerful tool for mobilising political will and shifting consciousness. On the other, it can perpetuate stereotypes about Indigenous communities as constantly in crisis and in need of intervention. Challenging the later, a team of artists, researchers and Cree youth from Attawapiskat co-produced the “Reimagining Attawapiskat” project as a means to shed light on the dark edges of settler-colonialism as well as the beauty of their culture, lands and waters.

As numerous environmental justice scholars have pointed out, there is much we can learn from Indigenous perspectives and peoples about alternatives to the oppressive status quo to expand the sphere of environmental justice discourse.³



Photo by MusicalTAPhotography

Mixed Media Storytelling: A Method to Decolonize Community-Engagement

Through mixed media storytelling, academic-activists and artists can partner together to challenge asymmetrical power relations and counter discourses that frame Indigenous peoples as helpless victims. Instead, as a means to expand the sphere of environmental justice discourse, through the voices of those experiencing injustices firsthand, creative forms of community-engaged research through artistic media such as photography, film and music can co-generate alternatives.

This multidimensional approach to research is prismatic and brings together an ensemble of angles, vantage points, perspectives and narratives to produce a more fulsome depiction of on the ground experiences. The stories generated through this mixed media storytelling approaches are not “just stories” in a simplified sense such that they be cast away as lacking evidence of injustice; instead, they are stories oriented towards justice. Community voices offer compelling counter-narratives to those often told by outsiders.

There are three main contributions that mixed media storytelling can offer the study and practice of environmental justice. First, this method of community-engaged research interrogates monolithic narratives that paint communities with a unified brush and cast aside the diversity of their lived- experiences. In contrast, it is prismatic and seeks to create space for the diverse felt knowledge and experience that emerge from those directly affected by harmful laws and policies. Second, by engaging directly with those affected, mixed media storytelling can cultivate more robust dialogue about multidimensional and multilayered policy problems. Through a combination of community screenings and open source platforms, digitally recorded and produced content can inform a wider audience of first-hand experiences.

The challenge following from this is how to engage policy makers or key decision makers in these conversations and in what format to impact meaningful social change. Finally, through the process of co-creation with artists, academic-activists, researchers and community members, the situated stories produced can intervene on asymmetrical narratives. Such interventions are challenging and require careful curation. They also require caution, and consideration of how to *decolonise community-engagement*.⁴ Any researcher intending to work closely with community partners will need to ask those partners how they envision this intervention, including who the target audience is and what form the intervention should take.

Imagining Decolonial Futures

Initiatives like the Reimagining Attawapiskat project have the potential to challenge the settler-colonial status quo and simultaneously envision decolonial futures. As such this ethic of engagement must simultaneously address systemic issues of environmental justice while also seek to not just hear from but listen to community voices. As the digital stories from Attawapiskat youth articulate so well, their home is not simply a wasteland or a barren land. They are proud of their culture, their traditions and connect their health to the health of their lands and waters. Cultivating connections between human and more-than-human beings are central to their articulations of health and wellness. This resonates with what Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel refers to as “sustainable self-determination”.⁵ Academics and policy-makers must realise that Indigenous communities themselves are in the best position to imagine alternatives to the status quo and generate solutions to the challenges they face. Efforts towards sustainable self- determination, much like the hard work of decolonisation, are ongoing. Never finished or polished, but continuous.

Mixed media storytelling is a dialogical research tool. It brings together people from very different backgrounds with the shared aim of telling marginalised stories and centring these to enhance public awareness and understanding. Further creative methods of community-engaged scholarship will need to not just think about the process but also the policy context. When academics witness situated stories, they become accountable to the storyteller. Bearing witness entails responsibilities that require ethical considerations of how to tell stories, to whom and when. By engaging people at the sensory level, mixed media storytelling can create shared experiences that move people to shift their thoughts and spark action. There is much that the academy can learn from the community in order to go about doing so now and into the future.

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Post-Hegemonic Futures: Decolonising Intergenerational Environmental Justice

By Dr Christine Winter, University of Sydney



Photo by Bronwyn Gudgeon

Dr Christine Winter

Fellow in the Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney. Her PhD research critiqued claims that existing Western justice theories are universal, and sought to decolonise intergenerational environmental justice theory by examining some Aboriginal and Māori philosophies. She has a BA in coastal geomorphology, from Victoria University of Wellington and an MA (Professional & Applied Ethics) with Honours from ANU.

Contemporary Environmental Justice theory carries with it hegemonic, Western-centric ontological assumptions about justice, that are incompatible with Māori, Aboriginal and other Indigenous People’s ontologies, philosophies and ways of life. These assumptions continue the colonial project of domination and invalidation of Indigenous Peoples.

To decolonise Environmental Justice theory (EJ), let’s first understand the environment is always present in Māori and Aboriginal philosophy. So, *all* issues of justice are already issues of *environmental* justice. Therefore, the dilemma is not how to *theorise environmental* justice, but rather how to overcome impediments created by settler hegemony so that we can *continue to implement* practices of environmental protection from respect for ancestors and to ensure future generations inherit a healthy and vibrant entangled *environment and culture*.

As a way to address some weaknesses in EJ theory, I am trying to establish what decolonised intergenerational justice might look like, particularly in my Aotearoa New Zealand Māori context and also for Australian Aboriginal contexts. For this to occur, we need to address some impediments in current EJ theory. We can begin to decolonise theory through ideas grounded in (some) Māori and Aboriginal worldviews, such as notions of time and non-human dignity. The inclusion of these ideas in EJ theory can move us towards a post-hegemonic future.

Decolonising Time

Current impediments to EJ are entwined within the story of time. Time, almost invisibly, underscores the idea of intergenerational justice & EJ, and yet, time itself is left unexamined in justice theory.

Western-centric understandings portray time as an ontologically neutral, irrefutably forward moving measurement of space as represented by science. I want us to examine what happens when we move away from thinking of time as a mechanical, forward moving, and a linear projection.

To understand the Māori conceptualisation of time, I’m going to paint a picture of who I am, one that is different from the individualist conceptions commonly portrayed by the West. Spiral or circular conceptualisations of time making up my whakapapa – the Māori mental construct used to describe genealogies and interconnections between everything – material and spiritual, human, and nonhuman.

This thing ‘Me’, which is here, now, encompasses a basket of ancestry—genetic, intellectual, mythological, biological, mineralogical, ontological, physical and experiential. In whakapapa, we have an ontology that covers relationships with nonhuman (and the spiritual), subjectivity, and community through an ever spiraling past-in-present-in-future-in past.

I am, I embody, at once: ancestors; future generation; living; and ancestor. Rather than a notion of time as forward moving through space it becomes instead spirally bound and emplaced/embodyed. My being and knowledge oscillate between ancient and modern, current and future. ‘I’ cannot be separated from culture or animal or plant or minerals, past or present or future.

Our imaginings of EJ shift quite radically if we think of generations living not in competitive sequences, but as living synchronically, if we move away from thinking of time as a mechanical, forward moving, linear projection. We approach the future facing the past.

“For those peoples for whom the environment is a co-being with the familial and spiritual connection, the idea of dignity is expansive. It ensures ‘human’ is not the only site of justice, and that the obligations and duties of environmental justice are inclusive of the non-human.”

Dr Christine Winter

Including notions of Non-Human Dignity

As a way to ensure EJ reflects indigenous ontologies, we need to explore how ‘the environment’ or ‘non-human’ may be understood to be dignity bearing – as a subject not object.

There is no hierarchy in the Māori and Aboriginal worldview between the human and the non-human. That is, everything has subjectivity. Everything is a site of justice. In the Māori ontology, this is described through the embodiment of fundamental essences – *mauri, tapu and mana* – life force, potentiality to be and respect. These are common to all things, but with species and sort specifically. The ‘environment’ is not ‘out there’ nor ‘other’. As described in my whakapapa earlier, Māori peoples understand an intimate entanglement with everything. And we recognise the non-human as dignity-bearing.

Similarly, for Aboriginal Australians, the distinction between human and non-human is blurred. Everything is part of the family; everything is understood to be entangled in relationships and responsibilities, obligations and duties (for more details on this, see work by Mary Graham).

For those peoples for whom the environment is a co-being with the familial and spiritual connection, the idea of dignity is expansive. It ensures ‘human’ is not the only site of justice, and that the obligations and duties of environmental justice are inclusive of the non-human.

Western understandings of dignity have multiple conceptualisations; meaning it is a flexible concept. This suggests there is room to re-conceptualise standard EJ understandings of dignity and to incorporate a non-Anthropocentric worldview. Where all things have type-specific dignity, the subject/object dichotomies of the West dissolve. Moving from the premise that only the human has dignity ensures everything is regarded with respect and dignity. When dignity is conceived like this, obligations and duties to EJ stem from subjectivity in the environment, the potential dignity of future generations of humans and nonhuman.

How can Environmental Justice Be Decolonised?

Understanding time is an ever spiraling past-in-present-in-future –in past, and by acknowledging the nonhuman as part of the human, some other problems with EJ, like individualism, materialism and liberalism, are transcended. They are incompatible with non-competitive imaginings of time and holistic dignity. By theorising within deep entanglements and embodiment with animal, vegetable and mineral within all-time EJ begin the journey of decolonising. Then theory can stop burying Indigenous Peoples under the ongoing ‘colonial project.’

Your Place or Mine? Environmental (In)justice in Myanmar and Australian Activism

—
By Dr Johanna Garnett,
The University of New England, Armidale

When considering issues of, and responses to, environmental injustice in the Anthropocene, we must consider how the environmental activism of Western industrialised nations could consequentially impact developing nations in the global south.¹

This raises the following questions: Should activism consider ‘others?’ Should we be prepared to compromise? If our activism results in oppression elsewhere, are we responsible? If so, how should we respond? What relationships should we/could we be forming?

In the case study of the multi-national oil and gas company Woodside Petroleum’s attempts to establish a hub at James Price Point, situated about 60km north of Broome on the remote Kimberley coast in northern Western Australia, such considerations are necessary.

In 2008, Woodside Petroleum, backed by the West Australian state government, chose James Price Point in northern Western Australia for a \$35 billion liquefied natural gas project. Woodside’s proposal was to process the huge gas reserves that it had offshore access to in the ‘Browse Basin’.

However, the region is made up of an ancient (and beautiful) landscape, and home to Aboriginal people for over 40,000 years. The area contains valuable artefacts, including dinosaur footprints, which date back millions of years. The land and seas are home to a number of threatened species, and the surrounding seas host the world’s largest humpback whale nursery.²

In early 2010, a small group of Indigenous people, local community members and environmental organisations who objected to this development began a campaign to stop it. They were determined to save this iconic site from desecration, preserve the lifestyles they cherish, and protect local flora and fauna for future generations.

In 2013, Woodside, abandoned the project citing economic reasons. Activists claimed victory, and The Wilderness Society tells us that “the world breathed a collective sigh of relief when Woodside Petroleum pulled the pin on their destructive gas hub project planned for James Price Point in the Kimberley”. But whose world? As a result of Woodside coming into conflict with locals

and environmentalists at James Price Point, the companies focus shifted from the Browse Basin, to an exploration ‘hotspot’ off the west coast of Myanmar, a fragile nation state in South-East Asia.

Myanmar is one of the largest countries in South-east Asia, and one of the world’s least developed countries, with an appalling human rights record due to 60 years of authoritarian, corrupt and inept rule.³ Myanmar is pursuing an industrialised development model as the country transitions to democracy. Its substantial oil and gas wealth is considered critical to its economic and social development.

Local people suffer a range of environmental injustices – in particular, deforestation and pollution, loss of land through land grabbing, and loss of traditional livelihoods – all with little or no compensation. Whilst this is slowly changing in some instances, the government overall is failing to adequately address environmental injustice.⁴

Woodside was one of the earliest investors in this region and is now one of the largest offshore petroleum acreage holders – in possession of nine permits with a number of partners. Potential plans for gas resources are to supply the gas from the “Southern hub” to the local market, or pipe resources to Thailand. Similarly, the option to pipe “Northern hub” gas to China through existing Shwe gas pipeline infrastructure, has also been explored.

There are a number of concerns regarding Woodside’s (and oil and gas activities in general) in Myanmar. Pipelines have caused concern for locals since their inception, and villagers from Mon State in the south and Rakhine and the Chin States in the north expressed to me their concern over the loss of agricultural land and springs for water and deforestation.

The circumstance surrounding Woodside’s plans for Myanmar’s gas resources, and the underlying issues impacting the state, brings us back to the initial question – should our activism consider others?



Whilst Woodside’s presence in Myanmar may not be a direct result of the actions of environmentalists in Australia, there is a distinct correlation between the James Price Point campaign and Woodside’s movements. It has been said that environmentalism per se caters to the wants and needs of wealthy people and harms the poor and I believe that we become part of the broad structural oppression and silencing if we are aware of it and do not act.

We as academics and activists are in privileged positions, and one way to address environmental issues for the worlds’ most disempowered is to use this awareness and our position of privilege. One way we can use our privilege, wealth and resources is to stop firms from simply moving around the globe to locate in places with the weakest regulations we need to make cross-border links.⁵ The question, of course, is how?

We can, and must, explore further the political potential of unofficial realms of collective action. We can create ‘just’ partnerships – mentoring and enabling – building bridges across cultures and situations particularly between those of us who have shared enemies and issues. Partnerships are already forming in Myanmar – they are supported by transnational environmental justice groups such as Earthrights International, International Rivers, and Global Witness and environmental groups are joining communities of interest educating and informing locals. In light of the case study presented I am arguing that we should be expanding the sphere of discourse even further and our activism must consider others for it is not your place or mine but OURS.⁶

Dr Johanna Garnett is an early career researcher and casual Lecturer in Peace Studies. She holds a PhD, Masters of Environmental Advocacy and Bachelor of Social Science all from UNE. She was awarded the Chancellor’s Doctoral Research Medal for Excellence in Research and International Impact for her PhD in 2017, the D R Grey Philosophy Award, 2011, the Bell Prize for Sociology in 2010. She is a member of the Australian Sociological Association, Australian Political Studies Association and the International Political studies Association holds a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

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Lock the Gate, Place and Environmental Justice

By George Woods, New South Wales Coordinator
for the Lock the Gate Alliance

The place I live is Awabakal and Worimi country, that the Awabakal people called Muloobinba, and which my people call Newcastle, named after another coal city in the United Kingdom. The place I live is on the banks of the river that the Awabakal people call Coquon, and my people call the Hunter River.

250 million years ago the Hunter Valley was covered with permian forests and conifer forests, of a tree called glossopteris, and many hundreds of millions of years ago this sea-level rise blocked up the opening of the river into the ocean, and virtually the whole thing became swampland. Eventually, all of those forests became buried, and over the last 200 to 300 million years, they have become fossilised, and now they are coal.

In the Hunter Valley, we mine around 200 million tons of that coal every year from 20 or 30 odd open cut coal mines that are very large and have caused a great deal of disruption of place in the Valley. Most of that 200 million tonnes glide past my window, as it is mostly exported to Asia, and burned for electricity. We export large volumes of former forests to other countries, and Australia's biggest single contribution to climate change is the coal export industry that is primarily concentrated in my hometown and my region.

The place where I live and where I grew up is a fulcrum for a turning world. There is a lot of past there, and there has been a lot of dramatic environmental change, and that change has been cataclysmic for the Awabakal people who lived there before my people invaded.

For the last 15 years or so, I, along with many others, have been a part of efforts that try to prevent the Newcastle coal export and the coal industry from getting larger. Our efforts have abysmally failed. Coal and coal export industries have roughly doubled in the last ten years, and this has made me reflect on the role of people in trying to protect the environment and create positive and just social change.

Now I work for *Lock the Gate*, which is a grassroots network with several tens of thousands of people and hundreds of community groups around the country that brings together different people from extraordinarily different perspectives and experiences which are united by the goal of protecting land, water and people from the impacts of unconventional gas and coal mining.

Lock the Gate is all about people who care a lot about place, and in many ways, *Lock the Gate* is unsophisticated and deeply unfashionable for that reason. We live in a globalised world where quite a lot of people in society, and in my community, have no fidelity to place. When I was growing up in Newcastle, all my peers wanted to do was get out of there and go and see something else. It is deeply unfashionable and seen as quite parochial to commit to place. Nevertheless, *Lock the Gate* is a network that is unafraid to be unsophisticated. Unafraid to express itself soulfully about how people feel about the land where they live. *Lock the Gate* brings people together from across the spectrum who in Australia's recent history has been at loggerheads with each other and have had deeply antagonistic, even violent relationships.

Traditional owners have a strong sense of place, farmers have a strong sense of place, and conservationists have a strong sense of place.



Photo by Lock the Gate Alliance

George Woods

is an activist and environmentalist from Muloobinba, Newcastle, in Awabakal country. She has been an environmental and climate advocate and activist for over fifteen years and has worked variously in paid and unpaid roles ranging from direct action confrontation and community outreach with the grassroots collective Rising Tide to lobbying Ministers and coordinating Australian advocacy at the international climate negotiations for Climate Action Network. She is currently NSW Coordinator for Lock the Gate Alliance.

“Traditional owners have a strong sense of place, farmers have a strong sense of place, and conservationists have a strong sense of place.”

George Woods

All of those different types of people come to the idea of ‘place’ from different perspectives. *Lock the Gate* is a network that transforms all of those people. It has changed me, to be working for it, and to come across people who also love this continent and my region, but from a different perspective. My place has changed a great deal and in the last 10 or 15 years. The coal mining industry, which has been there for a long time, has breached the boundaries of what many people in the region feel is reasonable. The mines are much, much bigger than they used to be. In many instances, mines now occupy about 16 percent of the floor of the valley. They are enormous. They create a great deal of air pollution, and they have disrupted the river by digging up creeks and sending them in other directions.

I think a lot about the future of my place because the sea-level is rising and a lot of the city infrastructure that exports coal is likely to be underwater in a hundred years’ time. It makes me think about the changes that have already gone past in the city where I live and the region where I live. These changes are what have led people who live there now, and who feel greatly connected to it, to feel disrupted in their sense of place.

This sense of disruption of place is what academic Glenn Albrecht, who also comes from Newcastle, has coined *solastalgia*. The term describes the feeling that you get when you miss your home even though you are still there because the landscape has changed so fundamentally. I live in a place called Stockton now on the north banks of the Hunter River, and Stockton is experiencing the terrible problem with coastal erosion caused by climate change and partly caused by engineering. The beach is being eaten away, and every time there is a big storm, a few more metres fall into the sea. At a public meeting held in November 2017, to talk about what to do about coastal erosion, an old man said: “I feel so sad that the beach is gone, it’s like losing a friend.” I also think that if the sea-level rises and the beach that I played at when I was a kid in were swallowed up by the ocean, I would probably feel the same way.

What we try and do at *Lock the Gate*, is to speak to people’s feelings about their place and make it okay to be parochial. Make it okay not to be global and sophisticated. Make it okay to say I love this place and it is worth fighting for. There is a balance to be struck because of everything changes. Climate change is not the only change that has been brought to the region where I live, and change occurs over centuries and millennia even without human interference, but we are accelerating it. We at *Lock the Gate* are trying to come to terms with the change that has already occurred and will continue to occur. But, at the same time, we are re-centring people in feeling connected to the place where they live and connected with other people who feel the same way, with whom they had previously not thought they had anything in common at all.

Keynote Conversations

#1

EJ Looking Back

Chair

David Schlosberg, Sydney Environment Institute

Speakers

Robert Bullard, Texas Southern University
Nick Low, University of Melbourne
Petra Tschakert, University of Western Australia

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#2

EJ Looking Forward

Chair

Gordon Walker, Lancaster University

Speakers

Julian Agyeman, Tufts University
Alice Mah, University of Warwick
David Pellow, University of California, Santa Barbara

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#3

EJ and Climate Governance

Chair

John Dryzek, University of Canberra

Speakers

Robyn Eckersley, University of Melbourne
Maxine Burkett, University of Hawaii

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#4

EJ and Climate Governance

Chair

Rosemary Lyster, University of Sydney

Speakers

Chuks Okereke, University of Reading
Jon Barnett, University of Melbourne

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#5

Multispecies Justice

Chair

David Pellow, University of California, Santa Barbara

Speakers

Michelle Maloney, Australian Earth Laws Alliance
Dinesh Wadiwel, University of Sydney

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#6

EJ Gender and Materiality

Chair

Astrida Neimanis, University of Sydney

Speakers

Sherilyn Macgregor, University of Manchester
Lesley Head, University of Melbourne

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#7

EJ and Indigenous Cultures

Chair

Sarah Wiebe, University of Victoria

Speakers

Kyle Powys Whyte, Michigan State University
Seán Kerins, Australian National University

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#8

Culture, Food and Health

Chair

Alana Mann, University of Sydney

Speakers

Amita Baviskar, University of Delhi
Viliamu Iese, University of the South Pacific

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#9

Just Transition

Chair

Linda Conner, University of Sydney

Speakers

Blair Palese, 350.org
Brendan Sydes, Environmental Justice Australia
Tom Reddington, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

#10

Environmental Justice and Place

Chair

Petra Tschakert, University Western Australia

Speakers

George Woods, Lock the Gate Mike Campbell, OAM,
Community Activist Robert Melchior Figueroa,
Oregon State University

[Video](#)

[Podcast](#)

Events

Conference

Environmental Justice 2017 – Looking Back, Looking Forward

Monday 6 – Wednesday to 8 November 2017

The Environmental Justice 2017 conference celebrated the 20-year anniversary of the original Environment Justice conference and provided a retrospective look at environmental justice scholarship and activism and the prospects and themes for future work in the field.

The conference was hosted in association with Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC) and the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney, and asked what have we learned? What are the key challenges, trends, and directions for environmental justice theories, movements and campaigns, and what impact will this have on institutions and politics?

Lecture

The Future of Environmental Justice

Tuesday 7 November 2017

At this [Sydney Ideas](#) public lecture, longstanding and new leaders in environmental justice scholarship reflected on the meaning, and potential, of environmental justice as an idea, as an organising discourse, and as a political demand.

Speakers

Professor [Robert Bullard](#), Texas Southern University
Dr [Maxine Burkett](#), University of Hawaii
Dr [Kyle Powys Whyte](#), Michigan State University

Chair

Professor [David Schlosberg](#),
Sydney Environment Institute

Launch

Environmental Justice Handbook

Capturing the breadth and diversity of environmental justice research

Monday 6 November 2017

During the EJ conference, we celebrated the launch of *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice*, edited by Ryan Holifield, Jayajit Chakraborty, and Gordon Walker.

The Handbook presents an extensive and cutting-edge introduction to the diverse, rapidly growing body of research on pressing issues of environmental justice and injustice.

“We challenged our authors not only to introduce and critically assess the current state of the art, but also to set an agenda for the future.” Professor Gordon Walker, Lancaster Environment Centre



Speaker Spotlights

Bob Bullard

Professor of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy,
Texas Southern University

Professor Bullard is widely regarded as the ‘father of the environmental justice movement,’ and has been the leading voice in academia and activism about the intersections of environmental degradation, race, class, health and much more.

At the EJ 2017 Conference, Bullard presented in our ‘Looking Back’ Keynote Conversation session, where he explained the importance of Environmental Justice theory in recognising that “climate change will exacerbate existing inequalities and worsen the vulnerabilities of already marginalized populations.”

Maxine Burkett

Professor of Law at the William S. Richardson
School of Law, of Hawai‘i at Manoa

Professor Burkett is an expert in the law and policy of climate change. She has written extensively in diverse areas of climate change law with a particular focus on climate justice – exploring policy responses to climate change’s impacts on vulnerable communities in the United States and globally.

At the EJ 2017 Conference, Burkett presented in our ‘EJ and Climate Governance’ Keynote Conversation session, where she highlighted the need to reevaluate our governance structures.

“We are at a tipping point ... and it seems to me that a similar regime or state shift is needed for the law. This shift does not necessarily require better environmental or international environmental law; it requires a whole new way of thinking about our socio-legal structures.”

Professor Maxine Burkett

SEI Magazine

The SEI Magazine is produced
by the Sydney Environment Institute,
at the University of Sydney.

This Magazine collates cross disciplinary
responses to the critical environmental issues
facing us today.

Contributions come from students,
artists, scholars and activists, working locally
and across the globe, to investigate the
physical, social and cultural dimensions
of climate change impacts.

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