

Academia and Activism, 12-13 September 2014

Abstracts

Ms. Obaapanin Oforiwaa Adu, Acting Head, Gender Mainstreaming Directorate, University of Education Winneba (UEW), Winneba, Central Region, Ghana. Also Co-Deputy Coordinator of the ASASEYAAMMA Pan-Afrikan Green Campaign for Global Justice.

Title: *STRADDLING ACTIVISM AND ACADEMIA WITH PAN-AFRICAN ORGANIC SCHOLAR-ACTIVISM IN GHANA*

Reflections upon my own experience so far of striving to build upon lessons from Pan-Afrikan Student Activism (with for example the All-African Students Union - AASU and its partners) to guide my steps of professional work in Academia since joining the staff of the University of Education Winneba (UEW) in the Central Region of Ghana. This includes challenges of seeking to maintain, develop and resource link-networking between those of us mainly based in academia and community-based activists of the grassroots formations of students, youth and women in particular. My interest in doing so stems from my keenness in pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation between academia in its broadest meaning and the grassroots of activism in tackling issues of common interest such as gender empowerment, community engagement and sustainable development education from the Intersectionality perspectives of Postcolonial Theory as relevant to Pan-African insights into global citizenship education.

Ms. Ama Selasie Agbitor

Gender Empowerment; Arts and Crafts in Education ("Edutainment"); Community Regeneration for Sustainable Development; Environmental History Documentation (through Photography and Video Recording); Pan-Afrikan Reparations for Global Justice.

Ideal "Provocation Paper"

Title: "*WOMEN IN PAN-AFRIKAN COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AGAINST ECOCIDE FOR 'GLOCAL' JUSTICE: Action Learning from the Grassroots Defence of Mother Earth Rights in Ghana*".

Description (Abstract/Synopsis): This presentation will highlight some key lessons about women's role in Community Empowerment that are being drawn from my own experience of working as a "Grassroots Scholar-Activist" on issues of Community Regeneration for Sustainable Development with communities in Accra, Greater Accra Region, and Krobo, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It will be illuminated with examples from the work of our ADZEWAGBETO Pan-Afrikan Women's Liberation Union (ADZEWAGBETO-PAWLU) and its affinity groups of Activists and partner organisations within network-formations such as the Accra

Community Regeneration for Sustainable Development Action Forum (ACORSDAF) and the Krobo Community Regeneration for Sustainable Development Action Forum (KORSDAF), as well as the Climate Alliance of Ghana for Sustainable World Development (CAGSWOD), the ASASEYAAMMA Pan-Afrikan Green Campaign for Global Justice and the VAZOBA Afrika and Friends Networking Open Forum (VAZOBA-AFNOF). It will show the vital importance of the indivisible 'glocal' links between the local and the global in authentic grassroots Activism for people-centred Sustainable Development as conducive to true Pan-Afrikan Community Regeneration in furtherance of holistic Justice, including Cognitive Justice.

Gwen Burnyeat

The Creation of Organic Intersubjectivity through the Circulation of Narrative, Affect and Shared Political Action: An Ethnography of my Research Relationship with the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

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Affiliations and academic profile: Candidate for Research Masters Degree in Social Anthropology at the Universidad Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia, and holder of Leverhulme Trust Study-Abroad Studentship.

Student Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Abstract:

'Collaborative production of knowledge' is a problematic term, charged with tensions around inequalities of ethnographer-subject relationships. It is, however, an ethical and academic goal to work towards, aiming to capitalise on the dialogue of knowledges between anthropologist and informants. My relationship with the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a rural peasant community which has declared itself neutral to the armed conflict in Colombia, approximates this goal. My research on their proposal of society in terms of their political, social and economic strategies, and how these interlink holistically in their commercialisation of organic cacao, is based on what I would call *organic intersubjectivity* in which we formulated the research problem through the circulation of narratives, affect, and shared political action. In this paper, I provide an ethnography of this relationship and my organically-evolving methodology, and challenges for what implications this case study poses for ethnographic positioning in the globalised world.

Desired outcomes/actions: Building links between other academics and activists for further research collaboration and activist actions, receiving feedback on my work from both academic and activist sectors in order to strengthen my research, exploring crossovers between academia and activism

Carlos Larrea

The Yasuni National Park: A Symbol in the Struggle for National and Global Sustainability

The Yasuni National Park, the most biodiverse hotspot in the Western Hemisphere, holds a large oil reserve underground. Recently the government cancelled the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, aimed to keep the oil reserve unexploited to preserve biodiversity and mitigate climate change. The decision not only originated a strong social movement, but also highlighted the global significance of the Initiative beyond the national case. The presentation analyses the national and global environmental contribution of the struggle for the Yasuni Park.

Carlos Zorrilla

**Fear, Loathing and Hope in Ecuador's Cloud Forests
On the Hardships of Trying to Save Something so Little Known**

Abstract:

Working to conserve biological jewels in developing countries is, to say the least, challenging. It is much more difficult, and dangerous, when what one is trying to conserve is not known outside a few circles and, when governments team up with multinational corporations to implement large-scale extractive projects in these sites.

Such is the case of Intag's cloud forests in northwest Ecuador. For nearly two decades Intag's communities and organizations have been fighting off large scale mining development, and trying to conserve some of the last remaining cloud forests in all of Western Ecuador; considered some of the most biodiverse, and threatened, on the planet.

Bio

Carlos Zorrilla

Born in Cuban in 1951, emigrated to the US when 11 years old. Permanent resident of Intag's cloud forest region since 1978. Small-scale farmer, founding member of several conservation organizations, author of several papers on mining and its impacts on communities. Full time activist for a Intag-based NGO.

Environmental Movements in the Contemporary Odisha:

A Study on

Niyamgiri Movement

(ABSTRACT)

Basanta Kumar Mallik

This paper represents the socio-economic, physical and cultural condition of the hill Niyamgiri, located between the border of Lanjigarh and Raryagada District of Odisha, India. Niyamgiri movement aimed at preservation and protection of the physical environment from the clutches of the multi-national company namely, Sterlite Company. Because this environment has provided life and livelihood, health and hygiene and peace and happiness to the primitive Dangaria Kandh and Kandh inhabitants In Nigarmgiti there exists, thirty-six perennial streams and the cradles of two important rivers, namely, Nagavali and Bansadhara. It is full of floras and faunas of numerous varieties. Since very early time of the civilization more than 15,000

people have been peacefully living on this hill, now their life and livelihood are seriously disturbed. The indigenous people have raised their voice against the advent of the company with the co-operation of the Govt. of Odisha. The innocent people have encountered the wrath of the Government in many ways; eg. of police torture, Jail, confinement, false cases etc. and there shall be a detailed delineation of the issues and its implications in the full paper.

Brief Bio

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Special Interest: History of Social Movements, Ambedkar Studies,

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Activism and Academia: the Politics of Holistic Knowledge

Felix Padel for Sussex Conference 11-12 September

The academic enterprise promotes neutrality and objectivity, and it is clear that balance is needed to arrive at real knowledge, rising above emotions and bias. Often though, whether in sciences or arts, unacknowledged bias results in pseudo-objectivity. In the sciences, this involves a frequent predisposition towards technocratic solutions, from nuclear power among physicists to a bias in what is taught about mining or GMOs in engineering or bio-technology, especially when issues of corporate funding for science departments is considered. In economics and history, the tendency to put the economy first and promote mainstream, nationalist versions of history are clear examples.

The history of universities can be seen as a swing between centres of dissent and free thinking on the one hand, questioning mainstream knowledge, and repression on the other, often bolstered by funding from corporations, rising fees, and promise of lucrative jobs for graduates. Among scientists there are numerous examples of academics blacklisted for questioning the bias in mainstream scientific orthodoxy regarding GMOs, pharmaceuticals, nuclear energy; while social scientists expressing open opposition to Israeli policies or the War on Terror have frequently suffered draconian punishment.

‘*Cogito ergo sum*’ – Descartes’ definition of thinking as the basis for existence – promotes the cutting off from feeling that formal education inculcates. By contrast, Goethe’s definition of knowledge assumes that no ‘objective’ knowledge of any object or ‘other’ is possible without subjective knowledge – self-knowledge and knowledge of how one relates with others.

Arguing for a more holistic conception of knowledge, including self-knowledge, would encourage more participation of activists in academic discourse. To give what the wider society has a right to expect from them, academics should free themselves from unnecessary jargon and open up to the evidence collected by activists, and to a wider consciousness of the fault-lines in civilization that have become painfully clear to every thinking, feeling individual – the proliferation of wars, displacement of communities rooted on the land (who often have knowledge systems completely different from those promoted by academia), and wholesale destruction of ecosystems. Closer ties between activism and academia would link thinking with acting on such issues, consciousness with conscience.

Academics and Activism

CONNECT or DISCONNECT?

Prof Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul

Founder Rahat for Shamilat-deh

Formerly Deptt of Economics Lady Shri Ram College

Suddenly in October 2012, village common lands in northern India have been swept into the eye of a storm of protest against land scams and corruption in India. The story was more than that of an upright district officer exposing mis-use of land records by the very custodians who were entrusted with public policy and laying bare the bureaucrat-politician nexus in the partition and privatisation of common lands of villages near Delhi.

Yet corruption in general, and that in land records and usurpation of community property resources was not the issue by which parties won or lost in the elections of 2014 in India.

Why?

This is an attempt to find an answer through inspirational stories in academia like that of Sidney and Beatrice Webb and their 10 volume work on self-governance of communities, the cleansing of the Thames and designing of worker's houses in London and the most important founding of the LSE.

Further, illuminating acts of historic activism in the UK is evident in Lord Eversley's monumental work on "the Battle during the last Forty-five years for Public Rights over the Commons, Forests and the Footpaths of England and Wales," published in 1910. This culminated into movements like that of the Open Spaces Society and Octavia Hill's National Trust which ultimately inspired the setting up of Garden cities in the UK. In contemporary times we have the Foundation for Common Lands in UK conceived and set up by Dr. Andrew Humphries (who has taught in Agricultural Colleges) which has taken up the case of pastoral resources in the UK and has gained support from the Prince's Trust for young people in rural areas.

My story is based on my own findings about academic blind spots which were exposed when a cluster of villages in Northern Delhi protested outside Parliament House in New Delhi in 1978 against the acquisition of their common lands and distribution of the same to landless people who promptly sold them to property dealers, thus depriving the village cattle and their own of any village grazing pasture!!! This is not an isolated example of erosion of natural resources but has serious environmental consequences.

It is also a story of my subsequent inability to activate my own organisation to join and influence NGOs in order to feed information into public policy which in case of the Government of India sees little beyond the short run quick fix gains in GDP through preferably FDI as cases like Vedanta illustrate. Lifting oneself with one's own bootstraps as Lord J.M. Keynes had prescribed is cast aside as neo-classicism.

My findings also indicate the centrality of institutions (laws) - tampering with land records has far reaching consequences for the ecological relationships of those who share natural resources for livelihood with serious consequences on human and natural environment .

In the first part of the paper we will map out the the evidence from historical records of ecological patterns of land-use in which common property rights were central. This will reveal how land records minimised uncertainty in the Indian country-side and supported rules which took care of not only cheating and shirking rules of use, but also to avoid a "tragedy of the commons". However it depended on the Government of the day honouring customs both in administration and in courts. Today things have gone awry as can be illustrated in the second part from a sample region (northern India); in an eco-system (Sutlej-Yamuna inter-riverine area) within it; and in a cluster of villages within the eco-system.

Since common lands are more vulnerable to change by fiat and executive order and provide space for corruption, can academia redeem its connect with activism by guarding records of rights against tampering and so enhance ecological certainty and provide for greater reliance on contractual commitments of the Government? Two examples illustrate.

First land reforms of 1947 were intended to bring social justice by removing intermediary interests between the tiller of the soil and the landlord. At once it intended to reform the tenure conditions from insecurity in the long run and to secure conditions under which land was held, rented, cultivated and transferred and common resources shared. Can academics provide research to provide information of any infringement in these rules?

Second, land reforms in India were to re-instate the village community and this is possible to prevent "opening common property to open access" and therefore possible over-use. Again, can academia help by engaging in institutional building in collective action?

ECOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION CONFLICTS AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Joan Martinez-Alier (ICTA-UAB)

There are an increasing number of ecological distribution conflicts around the world ultimately caused from the increase in the metabolism of the economy in terms of flows of energy and materials. There are resource extraction conflicts, transport conflicts and also waste disposal conflicts. Therefore, there are many local complaints. Since the 1980s and 1990s there has been a globalizing environmental justice movement that in its strategy meetings and practices has developed a set of concepts and slogans to describe and intervene in such conflicts. They include "environmental racism", "popular epidemiology", "the environmentalism of the poor and the indigenous", "biopiracy", "tree plantations are not forests", "the ecological debt", "climate justice", "food sovereignty", "water justice"... These notions have been born from socio-environmental activism but sometimes they have been taken up also by academic political ecologists and used in their analyses.

Keywords: social metabolism, political ecology, ecological distribution conflicts, commodity frontiers, environmental justice, environmentalism of the poor, environmental racism, ecological debt