

Report by Zuky Serper on the event

Activists and Academics Forum has been hosted by the Centre for World Environmental History (CWEH) at the University of Sussex since the first meeting in May 2013.

The Centre together with campaign group Foil Vedanta, set up the agenda to questions of environmental justice in the extractive industry, the effects on climatic change and people lives, based on case studies from Asia, Afrika, the Americas and Europe. Linked to these are the urgency of opening academia up for reflexive thinking about production of knowledge, challenging orthodoxies and canons, power relations between researchers and their sources of indigenous activists knowledge, cuts to research funding and students conditions under neo liberal national and institutional policies.

Alex Elliot who studies solidarity movements, identified in the final session of the event with Joan Martinez-Alier words earlier, that this was the most unusual meeting for him to take part in. Alex, (in his words) being a privileged white middle class western academic male whose voice is often heard, reminded the audience of the original notion of the term solidarity: 'to pay debts', in Roman. We are paying a mutual debt by opening up academic space for activists and academics from out of the centre to tell their stories, a forum to link and work together.

CWEH founder is environmental scholar-activist Prof. Richard Grove, whose inspiration is still shaping the way it is operating today under current director Dr. Vinita Damodaran.

This international network meeting - sponsored by the British Academy and the Holly Hill Trust and supported by Foil Vedanta - is offering an opportunity for early career researchers, including young activists and students as well as postdocs and junior faculty, to present their work, link to fellow researchers and get international exposure.

Day 1

The morning session was dedicated to academia's complex relation to communities / the world outside the ivory tower.

In the opening session a space was provided for local campaigns. Activists from Occupy Sussex and Frack Free Sussex to present issues that Sussex communities are facing, and in which they have been involved in the past two years. Later, two speakers told the forum about India, and two more about Ghana. Throughout the day we heard 18 speakers in various sessions talking and answering questions.

In her opening words, Anna Winterbottom briefly introduced the activists and academia forum, that is co-organised by the Centre for World Environmental History and sponsored by the British Academy focusing on early career researchers, and the Holly Hill Trust.

Her talk asked why activism is particularly important to academics at the moment? Why reacting to the selling off of both our intellectual capital and our natural resources is particularly important for early career researchers?

Radical thought flourished in academia for centuries. Here in the UK, popularising scholarship has been led by radicals working in universities, from Wyclif's itinerant preachers of the fourteenth century Lollard movement to the dissenting academies of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. For the struggle to end colonialism and for social movements, universities have provided a base and forum for discussion: examples include Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, which acted as a forum for Julius Nyerere and other African independence leaders to develop their ideas, and the global 1968 protest movement.

At present, the neoliberal assault on higher education in 1970's US has spread worldwide. Young researchers are most affected by the changes to universities: students struggle to fund their fees and later become underpaid and undervalued young researchers and teachers. The cuts in government funding also brought rising number of short-term and temporary teaching staff on insecure contracts, funding research through partnerships with industry (including arms industries). Cuts to educational budgets, especially in the arts, and the privatisation of parts of universities are often part of the restructuring programmes of the IMF and conditions of loans from the World Bank.

Could we, alternatively, rethink the university as a democratic institution? How could this be done?

One important factor is student protests. In Montreal recently protests that began over student fees grew into a wider social movement and succeeded in rolling back the rises in tuition fees. Several of our speakers, including a representative of Occupy Sussex, a group who have adopted the yellow square in solidarity with the red square used by La Classe, will address the issues affecting universities worldwide and the ways in which we can act to take back control of our institutions.

Another important factor is to look around us at our physical environment: Sussex is an area of great natural beauty and abundant resources. These are now under threat from 'fracking' for oil (or hydraulic fracturing), which can lead to depletion of the water table and subsidence. A representative of Frack Free Sussex who have campaigned in Balcombe, Sussex, will be speaking here later. Our MP Caroline Lucas, who has been a central part of this movement, sends her support.

Our wider concerns are those countries that have been the target of unscrupulous extraction of natural resources for decades. Several speakers this afternoon will focus on appropriation of land and violations of human rights as a result of extraction of natural resources.

The university offers a public sphere, and it is up to us to become the new generation of public intellectuals, making links with activists and speaking out for environmental justice. The second day of workshops will be dedicated to forging working links out of the academy to achieve wider change. (based on Anna Winterbottom's paper)

Zuky Serper, convenor of the forum and a visual artist, asked how to work in and out of the institution, academia, which becomes a moral question for artists, academics and activists, who are underfunded, suffer a bias as a result of funding (or lack of it),

dominant ideology, difference in status. In short, how is it possible to operate under neoliberal capitalism while retaining an ethical critical stance and avoiding 'recuperation' of resistance?

The visual arts/fine arts have had a similar discourse going on in the last 100 years around questions of being an avant-garde resistance and aligning to progressive political movements of liberation and revolution. Examples include: DADA, which challenged the boundaries of art (Kurt Schwitters, Marcel Duchamp); the Russian Constructivists who identified with the 1917 revolution (Tatlin Tower). Walter Benjamin's 1936 seminal essay - The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction - linked the new modes of art, photography and film, to industrial capitalist modes of production, and called for the politisation of aesthetics. The Frankfurt School (1930's onwards) influenced the social movements of the 1960's-70's, in particular the writings of Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer, who discussed art under capitalism as part of a Culture Industry, submerged into the status quo.

Strategies to resist this absorption were: Non - material art practices, the rise of Happening and performance art (Fluxus 1950's onwards), collective practices, auto destructive art (Gustav Metzger, 1960's -70's), zero art making or art strikes, political statements in art (Guy Debord and the Situationists, Hans Haacke).

What could be the parallels for the scholar activist in academia?

The wave of resistance to capitalist globalisation at the beginning of the millennium saw the re-emergence of the artist as a political activist. Some examples of interdisciplinary interactions: artists in the G8 in Genoa 2001, Brian Holmes/Beuro des etudes, John Jordan's clown army, Peace not War music project. This experience was integrated into the work of Foil Vedanta solidarity group.

Foil Vedanta developed a methodology of knowledge with direct action and investigative journalism. Vedanta - a UK registered mining giant owned by Indian oligarch Anil Agarwal - threatened to destroy people on their land in the Niyamgiri range, Odisha, India, ignoring their rights to their land and state law. The Niyamgiri Surakhya Samiti (NSS), a peoples movement, led them to victory in the summer of 2013. Anthropologist Felix Padel, activist film maker Samarendra Das, ecological economist Joan Martinez-Alier and many others, who researched the Niyamgiri case, were part of this international mobilisation.

A banner used for 2010 and 2012 Foil Vedanta AGM protest, was then taken to be used in the Niyamgiri by the NSS in the referendum - a symbol for the international support.

The forum gathered under slogans such as: People not Profit, Our World is Not for Sale, A Better World is Possible, Frack-Off Sussex, Occupy, and older notions of the right for the land, commons.

Two terms should become household knowledge:

Externalities - what are the costs of production that are excluded from mainstream accounting?

Material flow - what is the history of our commodities? How can we trace back the raw materials, the impact of mining them on people and land?

Adriano M., a graduate student at Sussex, spoke next. He described deteriorating conditions in academic research and learning, affecting students and staff, as well as non-teaching university workers, as a result of outsourcing service provisions, substituting organised workforce for casual labour on lower pay and conditions, with deteriorating services and conditions to students, precarious employment conditions especially affecting early career academics, and assault on academic freedoms.

Adriano was one of many involved in actions taken collectively under the banner of Occupy Sussex in winter 2013 that were aimed to highlight and reverse those policies. He faced disciplinary procedures for charges which he and others were acquitted of, thank to wide solidarity intervention of fellow students and staff. The discussion highlighted the importance of support from fellow student and staff, the general trend of academia and student life are facing, and links to other struggles.

Moe G.G. from Frack Free Sussex then told the story of the West Sussex village Balcombe sustained campaign to stop Quadrilla from using hydraulic fracturing near the village. We heard about the difficulties in getting hold of academic researchers who can examine and report about the dangers of fracking, corporate media bias with regard to reporting on the scientific evidence against fracking, and police repression against activists, acquitted later by the legal authorities of any wrong doing. A short campaign film from Romania about the effects of fracking gave a glimpse of the costs that the industrialisation of rural land inflict on environment and human lives, the externalities of extracting fossil fuel and gas by fracking. Frack Free Sussex will be taking part in Climate March on Sunday 21 September. It is possible to follow and join the campaign online.

Felix Padel, anthropologist and activist, spoke about relations between activism and academia, which he titled the 'politics of holistic knowledge'.

The history of universities swing between them being centres for dissent and free thinking on the one hand, questioning mainstream knowledge, and repression on the other. Academic research today promotes values of neutrality and objectivity. However, often, unacknowledged bias results in pseudo-objectivity. In the sciences, this involves a frequent predisposition towards technocratic solutions. Examples include: nuclear power among physicists. There are numerous examples of academics blacklisted for questioning the bias in mainstream scientific orthodoxy regarding GMOs, pharmaceuticals, and nuclear energy.

There is a problematic dependence on corporate funding for science departments, rising tuition fees, and promise of lucrative jobs for graduates. In economics and history, the tendency to put the economy first and promote mainstream, nationalist versions of history are clear examples, and many cases of social scientists expressing open opposition to Israeli policies or the War on Terror have frequently suffered draconian punishments.

'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, and wholesale destruction of ecosystems. Indigenous different knowledge systems are considered low by academia, while at the same time appropriated without proper acknowledgement and respect by academia. Closer ties between activism and academia would link thinking with acting on such issues, consciousness with conscience.

Minoti Chakravarty Kaul, a senior economist and professor, told the story of 136 villages named in 1911 and their common land that comprised of what became the imperial capital New Delhi. The Commons were used for nomadic tribes camping, cultivation was based on the Afghan ancient Three Field system, derived back to Babylon and Middle Eastern systems. For Dr Chakravarty Kaul and the academic community in India, their existence was introduced only following a famous land grab case in the 1970's. Research in obscure archives finally led her to years of research and actions. The Canadian case of two tribes in British Columbia is the only one, in which indigenous people challenged the state and gain their rights on ancestral land, using the phrase; 'I have been here since time began'. Academics have to be pro-active and keep their eyes and ears open in order to justify their claim for producing new knowledge.

Obaapanin Oforiwaa Adu, who works for the University of Accra in Ghana, described the opportunities that academia offers to 'organic scholars', researchers, their activism being a service to the community and the creation of academic commons. The Gender Club Adu is involved in, sponsored by academia, offers a participatory space for informal interactions between various social groupings, that are not usually at the centre of academic research and activity, raising awareness and opening up the academic discourse and society to feminist concerns, gender equality and social justice. There are challenges for early career academics to do with work overload and job security, seniority and hierarchy.

Ama Selasie Agbitor, a trained visual artist and a community activist and researcher, works with young woman in the city, many of whom were teenage mothers who were sent away from their local communities into the city to earn a precarious living. Another case tells the story of the Krobo people in the periphery of Accra, whose land became the site of extraction of lime stone, leaving the community struggling to make a living, with low paid short term jobs on offer and deteriorating living conditions: damaged houses as a result of explosives that are used to break the rock and lime dust all over causing health hazards and damage to crops. Self-documentation - rather than NGOs

capitalising on documentation of hardships - for the communities to tell their stories and highlight their needs are focus for the community activist group, working to remedy this community's livelihood.

In the afternoon session, the speakers were telling the stories of five successful local struggles to stop destruction of primal bio-diverse areas and the communities living there. This session was chaired by Samarendra Das from campaign group Foil Vedanta, who commented on those issues based on his first hand involvement with the campaign to stop mining company Vedanta from mining in Odisha, India.

Prof. Bassanta Mallik researches the history of resistance movements in Odisha, India. His work on the 2002 Niyamgiri environmental movement exposed the connivance of state and company against indigenous communities, torture of activists by police in 2003, the mobilization of grass roots and political support for peoples movement (Lingaraj Azad active role in the NSS), acts of direct action such as the 2005 leafleting of the assembly of the Odisha government, the 2006 Forest Rights Act passed with support of minister of Environment and Forest Jairam Ramesh, 2010 Saxsena report and the 2013 referendum of the Gram Sabhas, that resulted with the rejection of extraction of bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills and the reaffirmation of the Right for Happiness. Some 200 years ago Alex Ferguson asked 'What is Development?', a question which is relevant and urgent today.

Gladson Dungdung, a rights activist from Jharkhand, India, himself an adivasi (one of the indigenous people of India), stressed the need for 'glocal' action, meaning international solidarity between local activists on the ground there, and the networked support offered by global communication and activists and academic networks to adivasis, tribal people indigenous on their land, that have been put for many decades under pressure by governments and companies in their pursuit after natural resources. The Saranda Forest, 92,000 square km, with 125,000 people living there, is, on the other hand, under Maoist/ Naxalite rule, which became a site of state repression and torture.

The Saranda forest in Jharkhand, home to the Ho tribe, is one of the last prime forest in India - extremely biodiverse and a prime elephant corridor, adivasis corridor and also mineral corridor - has been protected by the tribes that were living there since immemorial time. The national legislative acts that depend on titled rights do not acknowledge adivasis rights, ignore their role in defending the forest, in effect appropriating the forest from its indigenous owners. Moreover, adivasis, who sacrificed the most for "development", are presented as the strongest opposition to it. The current political climate in India makes the collusion between state and business in pursuit of profit and resources/ commodities easier: to acquirer land and change its use. There are currently 15 mining companies seeking mining leases for iron ore, as well as timber.

The session about Latin America was chaired by Mika Peck from University of Sussex, a researcher of conservation in the cloud forest of Amazonian Ecaudor, who recently spent a month on a boat, raising awareness to threat that mining in the area poses to this world biodiversity hot spot.

Carlos Zorrilla is a passionate activist in the Tropical Andes cloud forest in Ecaudor, where he lives. It is one of 17 biodiverse hot spots recognized internationally by the UN.

The area has copper deposits, sought after by mining companies. In total, 42% of world copper is purchased by China. Since 1995 successful work started in kicking out two mining multinationals: Mitsubishi (1995-97) and a medium Canadian company (2004). There are 41 communities living there, organised to defend their drinking water, in the face of possible expansion of a copper mining lease.

There is state repression and circumstantial collusion between state and mining interests. The Junin community disarmed paramilitaries sent by a Canadian mining company, successfully stopped prospective mining, and lives under strong police intimidation, as state interests are now moving in.

Javier Ramirez, the secretary of Junin community was arrested five months ago (April 2014?) and held without trial ever since.

Carlos Zorrilla's house was raided in the mid-1990's, with the intention to arrest and imprison him. The belief is that mining interests had hand in this affair, which forced Zorrilla into hiding. Further harassment was stopped after Amnesty International intervened. Nine month ago Zorrilla was defamed publicly by Ecaudor's president Rafael Correa, whose progressive public image has not prevented him from joining the harassment of ecological activists.

The Decoin campaign [<http://www.decoin.org>] developed alternative programmes for economic sustainability based on Eco tourism and organic farming, refusing government funding for conservation, while linking with international conservation organisations. A manual 'Protect your Communities' was put online.

Canadian campaigns and lawyers successfully brought the de-listing of mining companies in Canada for their human rights violations.

Carlos Larrea, Professor at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecaudor, participated in the forum via internet link, and presented the case of the Yasuni Park in Amazonian Ecaudor, where crude oil was kept underground for five years between 2008-2013, following a unique process and legislation of protecting biodiverse unique area. President Correa announced the initiative to the United Nations in 2007.

Ecuador's decision to keep oil indefinitely underground was based on the international community contributing at least half of the revenue that the state would earn by extracting the oil. The fund, administered by the UNDP, would be invested exclusively in renewable energy in Ecuador, preserving undisturbed rainforests and original ecosystems, and promoting sustainable social development in the Amazon.

The Yasuni-ITT, an area of 928.000 hectares, is the most biodiverse hot spot in the Southern Hemisphere with an estimated of 850.000 barrels of heavy unexploited oil reserves underground. In 2013 President Correa cancelled the agreement and decided to start oil extraction in the Yasuni Park. There are 14 indigenous nationalities in Ecaudor, that since 1972 have been severely affected by oil extraction: indigenous cultures in the Amazon have been seriously disturbed and oil pollution brought diseases to indigenous peoples. Social movements, grassroots organizations and indigenous

peoples movements played an impressive role to build national and international support for the initiative.

Three possible options for future actions proposed, with concrete ways of collaboration between academia and social movements:

1) The first is to promote the principle of keeping fossil fuels underground in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas in developing countries, as a new mitigation tool to be recognized in future climate change negotiations and international agreements.

2) The second priority is building an international monitoring system for biodiversity protection and the survival of isolated indigenous cultures in the Yasuni National Park. There is the example of research into the impact of a road inside the Yasuni Park by the University of Padova (Geoyasuni, 2014)

3) The third goal is to avoid oil exploitation in the ITT field, which is still a plausible objective, as oil extraction requires the construction of a complex infrastructure, which last several years- and social mobilization continues. (Based on Prof. Larrea paper)

Gwen Burnyeat presented the concept of 'organic intersubjectivity'. As she moved out of voluntary work for the International Peace Brigade into a position of an independent researcher and anthropology student in Bogota, Gwen observed a change in her relationship with the very same people she worked with. Grassroots positive peace activities included cocoa production, which was the site of all interactions and livelihood. Gwen now introduces the organic cocoa growing community and challenges they face to urban civil society in Bogota, outside of academic circles. Interaction with other human subjectivities in the course of anthropological work raises 'political emotions', identification and emotional exchange. In the words of a local member 'we must fall in love more with what we've got', develop alternative engaging narrative for the community to move on from the abuse of human rights to re-conciliation and the rebuilding of lives.

Joan Martinez-Alier's keynote talk – entitled 'Ecological Distribution Conflicts and Global Environmental Justice' - concluded the first day of the gathering. Professor Martinez-Alier highlighted the clash between economic human activity – in his words, social metabolism - and the environment. An environmental economist in training, Joan has been long an activist academic, inspiring generations of researchers and activists around the world. He felt that participating in a relatively small forum, that brought activists and their discourse into academia, was worth doing. Activists' practices produce new ideas, develop original concepts, that than percolate into academia. Good academics are already working with activists' knowledge. The academic is a scavenger of ideas.

Ecological Distribution Conflict mapping is a resource for anyone interested in compilation of data to do with environmental conflicts. It is an open source interactive mapping - which is accessed online through <http://www.ejatlas.org> - updated from time to time.

Keep Oil in the Soil

Coal in the Hole

Gas under the Grass

Already in the 1980's, there were calls to stop American-style development programmes. Oil Watch advocated keeping oil in the ground far earlier than the Ecuadorian Yasuni Park Initiative. Today the concept of De-Growth – or: Post-Growth, Zero-Growth – is being developed as a serious attempt to intervene in the destruction of the environment and climate change. Crucial note here, that even decrease of the industrial output and social consumption will need more newly extracted materials. In Latin America the export-import ratio of commodities is negative, meaning that it exports by far more raw materials than imports goods.

Following are terms and concepts that originated outside academia by activists, and now form part of the vocabulary of the global environmental justice movement:

- 1) The term Environmental Justice (USA 1982)
- 2) Ecological Debt (Chile 1992, 1997)
- 3) Popular Epidemiology (1992, 1997)
- 4) Environmentalism of the Poor (Delhi, India 1989)
- 5) Biopiracy (India 1993)
- 6) Climate Justice
- 7) Water Justice
- 8) Water as Human Right
- 9) Green Deserts
- 10) Land Grabbing (GRAIN 2008) [<http://www.grain.org>]
- 11) To Ogonize (Ogony, Nigeria) / To Xasunize, Yasunization
- 12) Buen Vivir (Good Life) / Sumak Kawsay (Indigenous tribes, such as the Achuar and Kichwa, in Bolivia and Ecuador)
- 13) Sand Mafia (India 2005)
- 14) Timber Mafia
- 15) Cancer Villages - 459 of them estimated across China (China 2013) [accessed: 6.11.2014 - <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/04/china-villages-cancer-deaths>]
- 16) Ecocide (Washington, US 1970?) - Polly Higgins (UCL) proposition to the UN 2010
- 17) Critical Mass (San Francisco 1992)

A list of books and authors mentioned during the talk:

- Economist Herman Daly
- Economist Tim Jackson – Book: Prosperity Without Growth (2009)
- Article: Social Metabolism and Environmental Conflicts in India / Temper L., Demaria F., Martinez-Alier J. (2014) [accessed 6.11.2014 - <http://revistes.uab.cat/indialogs/article/view/v1-martinez-alier-temper-demaria/pdf>]

(notes taken by Zuky Serper)

Day 2 was a workshop day, when participants and speakers from the previous day were able to develop four themed discussions with concrete ideas for action. A few outcomes are already underway.

A response team started working on answering urgent calls from activists on the front line, as a response to requests for more exposure and communication with academia and the outside world, acknowledgement for their work and resolution of difficulties. It is now possible to link directly from the web page to follow campaigns from Ecaudor's cloud forest, the Niyamgiri hills in Odisha and the resourceful Environmental Justice Atlas. A twitter account was set up and as well as a permanent working group for coordination of research and future colloquies.

There were a few hot spots of local struggles that came up in the presentation, focused on localities. These case studies became known to a large number of academic researchers and other environmental justice organisations, who will keep monitoring and researching them, plan field studies, forge links with local activists to help with their work, as some are in areas that are still possible to be saved from destruction, such as:

- The cloud forest and the Yasuni Park in Ecaudor
- The area of the Saranda forest in Jharkhand, India
- Continued effort to keep safe from mining the Niyamgiri Hills in Odisha, India and the Lanjighar smelter
- The Krobo community near Accra in Ghana, struggling to fight off lime stone mining
- Shale gas - or fracking - in Sussex and the UK that threaten a large number of communities, their environmental health and purity of their water supply.

Ecological economist Prof. Joan Martinez-Alier, whose talk and contributions were inspiring and programmatic, advised the forum to focus on those case studies that are present and working, Foil Vedanta being one of many, a solidarity and research group based in the UK, exposing London based mining giant Vedanta, develop ways to communicate the findings to the outside world and the rest of academic institutions, and use tools that are available such as the environmental justice atlas website -

www.ejatlas.org - to compile, analyze and distribute knowledge about conflicts that are the results of environmental justice.

Joan referred to the creativity of activists organisations, which good researchers already rely upon, either acknowledging them or not. There are many concepts that academia and top level of global institutions are using, and that have been popularized such as Ecological Debt, Biopiracy, Land Grabbing, Cancer Villages and many more. This vocabulary, to which we could add Material Flow, Externalities and the concept of De Growth or Zero Growth, should be widely spread.

There were ideas of turning the lens back on the centers of global finance as the Site of Intervention, organise international workshops, summer schools in the effected countries, communicate ideas with art, music and poetry, deepen the knowledge and systematic recording and writing down of the history of local struggles. Few of the new outcomes of the September forum are:

- A project in Ghana with two local high schools, museum and academic educational institution
- The setting up of CWEH artist in-residence position will enable to enrich the discourse of academic research with that of aesthetics in the visual arts. A day in the Sculpture department at the University of Brighton back in November and link with ONCA gallery in Brighton are steps in this direction.
- Being invited by the Centre for Historical Research, Paris, to a conference about aluminium gave us the opportunity to present the negative impacts of bauxite mining, financial

In the coming months, we aim to make the initial exchange into developed international working groups, with the help of the participants to the first gathering of the forum, others that could not attend the event, and the many supporters in other organisations. The Activists and Academia Forum in Sussex University will meet every last Friday of the month. Time and place, with a list of themes and speakers, will be advertised soon.