

UNDISCIPLINED ENVIROMENTS

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For 4 days, from the 20th to the 24th of March 2016, about 500 people among scholars, activists, and artists convened in Stockholm for *Undisciplined Environments*, the International Conference of the European Network of Political Ecology (ENTITLE)¹.

Why “undisciplined environments”? Shouldn’t society aim to discipline, control, and contain nature? Historically, this has been the main strategy through which humans have related to nature. Even more, nature has been thought through disciplines, each of them revealing as much as occluding parts of it. According to several scholars, the roots of the current ecological crisis lay precisely in the Judeo-Christian obsession to dominate nature. Although there is a continuous appeal to multi-disciplinary research and training, the ways in which knowledge is created and reproduced is deeply disciplinary/disciplined. This approach is radically inadequate to the ecological challenges our societies are facing. The environments are intrinsically undisciplined, they do not obey to humans’ desires while resisting to narrow disciplinary understandings. Also scholars can be undisciplined when they challenge mainstream paths experimenting

1. Organizing and scientific committee: Marco Armiero (co-chair), KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Stockholm, environmental historian; Stefania Barca (chair), Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, environmental historian; Laura Centemeri, CEMS-IMM, Centre d’Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux, CNRS, France, sociologist; Santiago Gorostiza, Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, historian; Lucie Greyl, NGO ASud, Italy, activist; Emanuele Leonardi, Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, political scientist; Susanna Lidström, KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Stockholm, ecocriticist; Felipe Milanez, Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, film-maker and political ecologist; Irina Velicu, Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, philosopher; Christos Zografos, Institute for Environmental Science and Technology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, ecological economist; Ilenia lengo, KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Stockholm, political ecologist; Amita Baviskar, Institute of Economic Growth, India, sociologist and economist; Maria Kaika, University of Manchester, geographer; Giorgos Kallis, Institute for Environmental Science and Technology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, political ecologist; Joan Martinez Alier, Institute for Environmental Science and Technology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, ecological economist and economic historian; Stephanie Roth, recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize, 2005, activist; Boaventura de Souza Santos, Center for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal, sociologist and political scientist; Erik Swyngedouw, University of Manchester, geographer and urban theorist.

with new practices of research and knowledge production and reproduction. In the last decades we have seen the raising of original fields of studies which go beyond a narrow disciplinary practice. Political ecology and environmental humanities are the perfect examples of post-disciplinary environments. They are not disciplines but rather arenas where scholars from different disciplines have found a common ground for discussion. The conference *Undisciplined Environments* spurred precisely from the confluence between political ecology and environmental humanities. It mobilized scholars, artists, practitioners, and activists around three main themes which are key in addressing the current ecological crisis: indigenous rights, colonialism, and extractivism (Decolonial Political Ecology); social, economic, and ecological alternatives to capitalism (Post-Capitalist Ecologies); and the tension between enclosing and commoning in the making of socio-ecological relationships (Enclosures vs. Commoning). Around each of the three main themes, plenary lectures with two scholars from different geographical and disciplinary backgrounds were organized. Being undisciplined, the conference had the ambition to reach a wider audience than the usual scholarly community interested in this kind of events. For this reason, the conference included a variety of events: scholarly panels, arts exhibitions and interventions, a film festival, and an activists' forum. The conference was also the closing event of an European Union funded training program (www.political ecology.eu), but hopefully the starting point of new research and training projects for which the conference has acted as an incubator (there were workshops specifically dedicated to foster future collaborations).

Scientific purpose of the meeting

Power and conflict are at the core of socio-environmental change, but existing knowledge and higher education structures are ill-equipped to address them. Most socially-relevant environmental research takes place within isolated disciplinary silos and has a disciplinary orientation. Questions are framed in relation to scholarly traditions, not in terms of the problems' structures and the conflicts at hand, which transcend conventional departmentalization. Thereby, the assumption of the conference was that as we live in undisciplined environments, we need undisciplined thinking.

To discuss the possibilities for an undisciplinary political ecology, the European Network 'Entitle' – an FP7 'Marie Curie' action n. 289374 – hosted the International Conference *Undisciplined Environments*, co-organized by the Environmental Human-

ities Laboratory at the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, and the Center for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra.

The conference hosted 90 parallel panel sessions and non-academic interventions. It received almost 700 submissions on any topic of relevance to a broadly defined, undisciplined political ecology. The organizers encouraged contributions in a variety of formats: academic presentations and round-tables, audio/video materials, documentary films, live performances (poetry, music, drama), photo or art exhibits, graffiti, and others.

Plenary Sessions

The three plenary sessions of the conference featured a dialogue between two keynote speakers from different geographical and disciplinary environments on three different thematic streams which permeated the whole conference.

Decolonial Political Ecology

Kim Tallbear (Anthropologist at University of Alberta) and Ailton Krenak (indigenous leader and public intellectual from Brazil).

With colonialism the conference meant not only power relations that still pervade the social, cultural, economic and environmental relations, but also the mental and relational attitudes of domination and exploitation that inform our relationship with ourselves, our fellow human beings, and other living beings. Undisciplined Environments created a space to discuss how political ecology can interact with de-colonial epistemologies (particularly indigenous and feminist/queer), and with emancipatory philosophies, to produce a decolonized socio-ecological thinking.

Kim TallBear teaches at the Faculty of Native Studies of the University of Alberta, in Canada. Born into a Sioux reservation in South Dakota from a family of Native American mixed origins, and with a degree in Community and Environmental Planning at MIT, she then completed a Ph.D. in History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, studying with Donna Haraway – the philosopher most known worldwide in the field of science and technology and feminist studies. Kim Tallbear's book *Native American DNA* discusses the role of techno-science in the colonization of

indigenous peoples (and of what is considered to be, more broadly, “other”) and the arising structures of (self)-government and corporeal/territorial sovereignty.² In addition to academic work, Kim Tallbear is member of the Native American writers’ collective “Oak Lake Writers” and is co-author of *This stretch of the River* volume (2006), a collection of memoirs, essays and poems documenting the relationship of the Oceti Sakowin community with the Missouri River.³

Ailton Krenak is a political representative of Krenaki tribe, native people of Minas Gerais region in the Vale do Rio Doce, Brazil. He is a journalist and writer engaged in the defense of indigenous rights and the environment. In 1985, Ailton Krenak founded the Núcleo de Cultura Indígena NGO and was elected to the Brazilian parliament in 1986, the first elections following the fall of dictatorship. He participated in the Constituent Assembly, where he fought for the legal consecration of indigenous peoples’ rights, and the Alliance of Forest Peoples, created by Chico Mendes for the defense of the Amazon forest and the creation of “extractive reserves” (protected areas entrusted to community premises for sustainable extraction and processing activities of wild fruits, rubber, fisheries etc.). His last publication *Encontros* brings together a number of interviews throughout the span of his lifetime, between 1984 and 2013.⁴

Postcapitalist Ecologies

Catherine Larrère (Université de Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and Alf Hornborg (Lund University).

Post-capitalist Ecologies intended to question the idea of ‘humanity’, as the universal modern male figure, which is at the basis of the *Anthropocene* concept, and invited reflection on emancipatory possibilities of an apocalyptic situation such as that of global climate change. Environmental policies are still guided by notions of ‘conservation’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘green economy’, that support the claim of compatibility between the current global political and economic systems and nature. Conversely, if the Anthropocene is the age of capitalism, then it becomes essential to imagine post-capitalists scenarios of ecological liberation, democracy and a radical post-human democracy based on a transformation of the socio-ecological relationships in egalitarian terms.

2. K. TallBear, *Native American DNA. Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2013.

3. C. Howe and K. TallBear (eds.), *This stretch of the River*, Oak Lake Writers Society, South Dakota, 2006.

4. A. Krenak, *Encontros*, Azougue Editorial, Rio de Janeiro, 2015.

The stream focused on a dialogue between the philosopher Catherine Larrère and geographer Alf Hornborg.

Catherine Larrère is Professor Emerita of Moral and Political Philosophy at Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne. She worked extensively on matters of environmental ethics, techno-science and economy/nature relationships, and she was recently named president of the Fondation de l'Écologie Politique. Her latest book, *Penser et Agir avec la Nature*, wrote in co-authorship with Raphaël Larrère, questions the prevailing ideas on the “protection of nature” and the very distinction between nature and culture that is at the basis of modern Western thought.⁵

Alf Hornborg is Professor of Human Ecology at Lund University – Department of Human Geography – and engages with environmental change from a Marxist political economy perspective. He has published several articles on the ecological implications of the capitalist mode of life and the concept of nature in the social sciences. Amongst his recent publications are *Global Magic: Technologies of Appropriation from Ancient Rome to Wall Street*, and *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange: Fetishism in a Zero-Sum World*.⁶

Enclosures vs. Commoning

Nancy Lee Peluso (University of California at Berkeley) and Ugo Mattei (International University College, Turin).

From Chiapas to Rojava and Gezi Park, from urban farming to climate justice, commons have become a keystone of the ecological-political discourse and among the most innovative social practices in recent years. However, a new phase of privatization is currently at play, evidenced by the upsurge hoarding of land and urban evictions, as well as the commodification of the atmosphere and life itself. The Enclosure vs. Commoning stream invited to reflect on how Political Ecology can help to broaden the debate on commons beyond disciplinary boundaries, and across different spatial and organizational scales, to get to formulate a new Political Ecology of the commons. The stream was introduced by a plenary lecture and dialogue between the Sociologist Nancy Lee Peluso and the Jurist Ugo Mattei.

Nancy Lee Peluso teaches Environmental Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research deals with the different forms of access, use and control of

5. C. Larrère, R. Larrère, *Penser et Agir avec la Nature. Une Enquête Philosophique*, Éditions la Découverte, Paris, 2015.

6. A. Hornborg, *Global Magic: Technologies of Appropriation from Ancient Rome to Wall Street*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016; A. Hornborg, *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange: Fetishism in a Zero-Sum World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011.

agricultural, forest and coastal resources in relation to multiple social identities (ethnic, gender, class, age, nationality) that are intertwined in each individual. In her first book, *Rich Forest, Poor People* (1992), she investigated the social and ecological contradictions of the ethnic cleansing process and appropriation of land in Indonesia during the Suharto era.⁷ Nancy Lee Peluso then published on issues of environmental violence and land grabbing. She is currently working on a new book on the globalization of legal systems, particularly on the matter of property, and the abolition of customary collective rights.

Ugo Mattei is Professor of Civil Law at the University of Turin and International and Comparative International Law at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. He is the author of numerous works translated into several languages, on the theme of property law's cross-disciplinary nature, and was a protagonist of the movement in defense of public water in Italy. His latest book, *The Ecology of Law* written along with the physicist Fritjof Capra, argues that the global ecological crisis makes it necessary to redesign law based on systems theory, freeing it from the old Western mechanistic vision, which sees the world as a whole made of parts individually appropriable, with the consequent devaluation and degradation of commons.⁸

Undisciplined Activism Workshop

On Thursday the 24th of March, the conference concluded with the *Undisciplined Activism* workshop, an additional space for reflection on how to practice environmental activism in institutions, organizations, research and art, featuring as commentator Amita Baviskar, from the Institute of Economic Growth in Delhi. The workshop was co-sponsored by the "Transformations to Sustainability" (T2S) Programme of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), through the support of the Swedish Secretariat for Earth System Sciences (SSESS). The T2S Network hosted a session during the conference.

7. N. L. Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1992.

8. F. Capra, U. Mattei, *The Ecology of Law: Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., Oakland, 2015.

Indigenous Interventions at the Conference

The conference has also been a place for intercultural exchanges on Indigenous ecologies and resistance. In addition to the plenary session on Decolonial Political Ecologies, Indigenous scholars and activists intervened in different panels, and at the roundtable “Decolonial Thoughts: What Can Be Changed”, featuring the keynote speakers Kim TallBear and Ailton Krenak, plus indigenous scholars and activists from Sweden and Brazil. Among them the Kaiowa Guarani leader and scholar Tonico Benites who spoke on behalf of the organization Aty Guasu to report on the violence perpetrated against Guarani people in the past few years (classified as “genocide” by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, of the Organization of American States).

The Undisciplined Activism Workshop also featured a strong participation of scholars, artists and activists from the Sámi Indigenous community of Northern Sweden. Such large participation of Indigenous speakers reflected ongoing scientific collaborations of the ENTITLE network with the research project “Sweden and the origins of global resource colonialism”, led by Per Högselius (funded by the Swedish Research Council), and the Dept. of Human Geography/Human Ecology Division of Lund University.

Artistic Interventions at the Conference

On Sunday the 20th of March, Sámi artist Katarina Pirak Sikku gave the opening speech of the conference, together with Sverker Sörlin from KTH Environmental Humanities Lab. On the same day, the photo exhibitions opened with four different thematic collections, and the mini film festival “Resistance Ecologies” took place in the evening featuring the following documentaries:

- *Mundruku Indians: Weaving Resistance*, Dir. Nayana Fernandez, UK/Brazil;
- *L’Oro Vero*, Dir. Daniele De Stefano, Giuseppe Orlandini and Roberto De Filipis, Italy;
- *Against the current*, Dir. Umut Kocagöz and Özlem Isil, Turkey. A number of short documentary films were also screened at the parallel sessions.

The Entitle Network

ENTITLE has been an EU-funded Initial Training Network under the Marie Curie action of FP7. It was coordinated by the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona with the collaboration of 8 Universities, 2 Non-governmental organizations and 1 Environmental consultancy. ENTITLE trained 18 researchers in the emerging inter-disciplinary field of political ecology.

The overriding research objectives were to:

- document and explain the uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of environmental change, analyze causes and responses to environmental conflicts, and propose new institutional arrangements for social and environmental justice;
- reveal how power relations structure access to environmental goods and bads, and envisage democratic systems that ensure a more equal distribution of power in society and more just and ecologically sustainable economic systems.

For more information, please visit the following websites: <<http://www.ces.uc.pt/undisciplined-environments/>>, <<http://www.politicaecology.eu/>> y <<https://entitleblog.org/>>.