Collaborative work by Entitle fellows

POLITICAL ECOLOGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

POLITICAL ECOLOGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration (Marie Curie Actions) under grant agreement no 289374 (ENTITLE)

Political Ecology for Civil Society

Project:
ENTITLE - European Network of Political Ecology
http://www.politicalecology.eu/
https://entitleblog.org/

Project's partners:
CDCA - Documentation Centre on Environmental Conflicts
www.cdca.it
ICTA - Universitat Autónoma de Barcelona
http://ictaweb.uab.cat/

Authors:
Diego Andreucci, María J. Beltrán, Rita Calvário, Creighton Connolly, Julie De Los Reyes, Salvatore Paolo De Rosa, Irmak Ertör, Melissa Garcia-Lamarca, Marien González-Hidalgo. Amelie Huber, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Santiago Gorostiza, Felipe Milanez, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu, Jonah Wedekind

Editors:
María J. Beltrán, Panagiota Kotsila, Gustavo García López, Giorgos Velegrakis, Irina Velicu

Coordinators:
Salvatore Altiero, Giacomo Dalisa, Lucie Greyl, Christos Zografos

ISBN: 9788894071467

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Chapter 1. Engaging environmental conflicts in political ecology 19
1.1 Introduction 21
1.2 Co-Producing political responses to 'swiftlet farming' in George Town, Malaysia 24
1.3 Building alliances to influence decision making in the European Parliament and the European Commission 30
1.4 Ecologies of Conflict: between dispossession and resistance amidst tree plantations in Southern Chile 37
1.5 Latent conflicts in mining activities: water appropriation in Cobre las Cruces copper mine 44

Chapter 2. Conceptualising Disaster Capitalism in Political Ecology 49
2.1 Introduction 51
2.2 Who owns the world's largest gold mining companies and why it matters? 54
2.3 Violence and Capitalism: when money drains blood 59
2.4 Waste and money: on the driving forces of illegal waste disposal 67
2.5 Tales of dispossession in times of crisis: Lessons from Greece 75

Chapter 3. Struggles over the commons: Between enclosures and commoning 83
3.1 Introduction 84
3.2 Extractivism, commons' enclosure and dispossession in the Bolivian highlands 94
3.3 A Short History of The Enclosures in Ethiopia: imperialist, socialist and developmentalist land grabs 102
3.4 A political ecology of forest commons in Mexico 111

Chapter 4. Socio-ecological Transformations and Struggles for Real Democracy 121
4.1 Introduction 122
4.2 'Green' Development and its Threats to Democracy - Hydropower and Conflict in the Eastern Himalayas, India 127
4.3 From Mining to Becomings: Rosia Montana's Movement for Democratic Justice 136
4.4 Deconstructing public health, enabling health empowerment. A case from the Mekong Delta, Vietnam 142
4.5 Reclaiming democracy through alternative economies activism: les- 149

sons from agrifood movements in the Basque Country and Greece

Chapter 5. Movements in motion. Sharing Experiences, Building Socio-Ecological Struggles 157
5.1 Introduction 159
5.2 Memory, Historical Research and Activism. The case of Segle XX building and the neighbours of Barceloneta (Barcelona) 163
5.3. Struggles over urban greenspace in San Juan, Puerto Rico: Reconnecting ecology and democracy 169
5.4 Linking fronts, building the alternative, enhancing autonomy: Lessons from 15 years of Campania's social mobilizations 177
5.5 Energy struggles: organising from the bottom up to combat energy poverty in Catalonia 185

Chapter 6. Conclusions 193
Conclusions 194

Bibliography 200

5.2 Memory, Historical Research and Activism. The case of Segle XX building and the neighbours of Barceloneta (Barcelona)

Santiago Gorostiza

When Aymara people in South-America look ahead they are facing the past. Literally. Researchers who investigated Aymara language and gestures have established that, unlike all the studied cultures and languages of the world, they refer to the past by gesturing ahead, while the future is situated in the back of the self. The example of the Aymara indigenous people, when reflecting on how history can be useful for activists participating in socio-environmental conflicts, challenges our preconditioned views (see Chapter 1.). We can put history into the foreground, not just as the background or the context of present events but as a central resource for the present and the future.

"**All history is contemporary history**" – famously asserted Benedetto Croce. But it is not only that we all write and research within the context of our time. It is also that the stories and narrations that we unveil impact on today. They can affect how we look at the past – but especially, when it involves social movements, they can also shape how we look at the present and at the future, at what is conceived as possible and impossible today and tomorrow.

As the Zapatistas claim, it is necessary to "**open a crack**" in history. On January 1st 1994, the very same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force, the Zapatistas launched their revolt in the mountains of Southeast Mexico. From their very First Declaration, they emphasised they were the result of 500 years of resistance to colonialism. One of the expressions of such resistance is precisely their critique to how history has been written. A history that tells the story of the elites just makes the present state of things seem natural, leaves aside the subalterns and silences their past. Against this type of history appropriation, Zapatistas claim the need to "open a crack"– to write the history of the exploited. A crack that disrupts also the idea of unidirectional, non-linear history, opening a loophole that challenges views of what is in front of us and what in our backs. A crack that permits us to look to the past ahead – as the Aymara – as memories of the alternative non-disposable future. Once the past is reclaimed,

the door to reclaim the future swings open (for the importance of place, see also 5.4).

Reclaiming silenced pasts is a task to be done both in the archives and the streets, both in libraries and mountains, listening to stories and reading dusty records. It can be about how a revolution was silenced and obliterated from history, as shown in the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot on the late 18th century in Haiti. And also about how dictatorships try to wipe out the memory and heritage of those who opposed them. When, like in Spain, elites have succeeded to remain in power for decades, the stories of disappeared workers and activists and their emancipatory projects frustrated by a 40-year long dictatorship risk being left aside and silenced forever (on storytelling, see 2.4).

The Case of Segle XX building in Barceloneta

In December 2013, neighbours from La Barceloneta (Barcelona, Spain) announced a demonstration to **reclaim the empty building of *El Segle XX*** ("The Twentieth Century") cooperative for its public use. *El Segle XX* had been founded in 1901, but after years of decadence during the Francoist dictatorship, the cooperative was dissolved in the late 1980s and the building later abandoned.

At least since 2008, La **Òstia neighbourhood association** began collecting information about the history of the neighbourhood and interviewing veteran neighbours. The importance of several cooperatives – *El Segl***e XX** among them – as spaces of socialization, consumption and cultural centres since the late Nineteenth century soon emerged as a central aspect of the neighbours' memories. Later, the Research Group of Cooperative Memory of Barceloneta (Grup de Recerca de la Memòria Cooperativa de la Barceloneta) continued the work of the association focusing on the history of cooperatives by diving into archives, recording interviews, organizing guided tours and other activities. In **Barceloneta**, historically a **working-class neighbourhood** with low salaries and few public and social facilities, now under a **high touristic pressure**, the use of *El Segle XX* building became a symbolic claim to the municipality. The **historical connotations of the building** and of cooperatives' movement were manifest. Since the last decades of the Nineteenth century, the importance of the organisation of cooperatives

in Barcelona grew and was part of a wider international movement. In Catalonia, cooperatives had their heyday during the democratic period of the Second Republic (1931-1939), when thousands of families were members of them. Very often, they had their own theatres, bars, and shops. Through consumption cooperatives, they allowed avoiding intermediaries between consumers and producers and thus also represented a nexus of the urban space to the surrounding agricultural environment that fed it. However, following a military coup that unleashed the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and with the victory of Franco over the Republicans, cooperatives never regained the activity that they had had before. In fact, during the conflict, Barcelona was on the Republican side and Barceloneta was bombed so heavily that it had to be evacuated. *El Segle XX* was hit by Fascist bombings and reduced to ashes. Despite the building was rebuilt after the war, during the dictatorship its activity languished, and most cooperatives were dissolved and buildings sold. *El Segle XX* building passed to private hands at some point during the early 1990s, following an irregular process of dissolution of the cooperative. In recent years, despite the land on which the building is built was categorised by the City Council as a public facility, rumours of private commercial projects for the building circulated along with the growing pressure of gentrification and tourism in the maritime neighbourhood of Barceloneta. This spread uneasiness among the neighbours. During the last days of 2013, two weeks before a scheduled demonstration, an apparently fortuitous fire damaged part of the building. This event fostered a united front of the associations and neighbours of the quarter, and just a few weeks later, more than 30 organisations signed a statement asking the District to either expropriate or buy the *Segle XX* building. They also demanded a transparent investigation about the fire and the legal state of the building property, as well as the commitment of the City Council to keep the category of the building area as a public facility.

Figure 42: Poster "El Segle XX és pel barri" ("The Twentieth Century is for the neighbourhood"). (Source: Grup de Recerca de la Memòria Cooperativa de la Barceloneta)

At the end of the demonstration, in front of *El Segle XX* building, several neighbours intervened emphasising the historical role of the cooperative in Barceloneta. The march ended with the sticking of two posters on the wall of the building. One vindicated the historical memory of cooperativism with a quote from 1899; the other was a blank poster to be filled by participants with their ideas for the future uses of the space, under the title "What do we want for *El Segle XX*?" ("Què volem per al Segle XX?"). In the same fashion, the website of the Research Group of Cooperative Memory of Barceloneta, whose members had an active role in the march, stated clearly their views on the uses of the memory of cooperativism: "More than an exercise of historical memory, it comes to us as a memory of the future: the practices of cooperation give us a powerful tool to face a present of cutbacks in social services and to build a shared future".

Unearthing stories of the past, reconnecting struggles for the future

In a rapidly changing ***barri*** (neighbourhood), with a growing luxurious touristic pressure stimulating higher rents and pushing former neighbours out, associations have resorted to historical research to enhance their struggle. Recording memories, collecting old scanning pictures, and newspapers, finding old records or mapping places disappeared neighbours are also a way to narrate their own story.

As highlighted by activist researcher Emma Alari, participatory mapping has been an essential tool in the neighbourhood struggle. On one hand, maps were used by neighbours in Barceloneta to display the different threats suffered by the neighbourhood. In this regard, the collaboration with mapping activists Iconoclasistas constitutes a good example of the use of collaborative mapping for social movements. But mapping can also be a historical project. By mapping both long and recently disappeared places in "Geografia Esborrada de la Barceloneta" ("Barceloneta Deleted Geography"), neighbours not only narrate their history but configure an emotional geography of the *barri* that binds together the stories of squatted houses already demolished with the story of *El Segle XX* or the *Escola del Mar*, a wood-made school in the seaside that was burnt by the Fascist bombings during the Spanish Civil War.

Such stories are disseminated by walking and talking together with neighbours (organised guided tours) but also leaving the option of doing it alone listening to the audio contents available in the web. Through the map, these stories weave new connections between the past, the present and the imagined futures. Guided tours provide chances for the interaction between those researching the history of the neighbourhood and their inhabitants, confronting and enriching each other's stories. Altogether, this strengthens the claim of spaces such as *El Segle XX* for the common uses in the neighbourhood, by reconnecting the stories of the neighbours' relation to this space with the historical research about its function in the social movements of the past.

After years of actions and campaigns in the neighbourhood, Barcelona City Council has finally committed to start the process **of expropriation of *El Segle XX* building to give it back to the *barri***. The struggle, however, is far from over. As the recuperation of the building is close to become a reality, the **neighbourhood platform designs its own project** for the uses of the building through a grassroots process. In a major open meeting in the square, neighbours wrote their ideas for the future uses of the cooperative building on several large-size copies of the 1939 project drawings to rebuild the cooperative after the war, which they had located in the archives. Not only it was a practical way to collect all the ideas for the different building floors and a reminder of the building past. It was also an inadvertently symbolic gesture: the maps of the project to rebuild *El Segle XX* after the Fascist bombings and occupation of Barcelona in 1939 were recycled 76 years later to discuss an alternative future with the *barri's* neighbours. Past can be a resource for imagining alternative futures – in a very material way.

Figure 43: Planning the future of El Segle XX cooperative on the base of the 1939 maps located in the municipal archive. (Source: Santiago Gorostiza)

While some would see a gloomy and nostalgic flavour in this struggle, activists explicitly state that they don't intend to idealize neither romanticize a return to a static lost past. They want to learn lessons about past experiences tried and failed, understand

past hopes for imagined futures, explore the daily life and problems of the neighbourhood in the past and its connections to today. Following Walter Benjamin, in this way nostalgia can be an emotion connected to transformation and even revolution. Past experiences are opportunities for reinvention, possibilities for alliances across time. Stories like the one told by *El Segle XX* building can be, as Italian authors Wu Ming and Vitaliano Ravagli have asserted, “axes of war to be unearthed”.

Futher readings

Alari, E., 2015. «El barrio no se vende» Los mapeos de la Barceloneta como herramienta de resistencia vecinal frente al extractivismo urbano. Ecología Política, 48, 36-41.

Armiero, M., 2011. A Rugged Nation. Mountains and the Making of Modern Italy. The White Horse Press, Cambridge.

Barca, S., 2014. Telling the Right Story: Environmental Violence and Liberation Narratives. Environment and History. 20, 535-546.

Lowy, M., 2005. Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin’s ‘On the Concept of History’. Verso, New York.

Ming, W., Ravagli, V., 2005, Asce di guerra. Giulio Einaudi Editore.

Núñez, R., Sweetser, E., 2006. With the Future Behind Them: Convergent Evidence From Aymara Language and Gesture in the Crosslinguistic Comparison of Spatial Construals of Time. Cognitive Science, 30(3), 401-450.

Ponce de León, J. (ed.), 2001. Our word is our weapon. Selected writings of subcomandante Marcos. Seven Stories Press, New York.

Pulido L., et. al., 2012. The collection of 115 places & stories of the city of Los Angeles, in: Pulido L., Barraclough, L., Wendy Cheng. A People’s Guide to Los Angeles. University of California Press.

Risler, J., Ares, P., 2013. Manual de mapeo colectivo: recursos cartográficos críticos para procesos territoriales de creación colaborativa. Tinta Limón, Buenos Aires.

Trouillot, M-R., 1995. Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History. Beacon Press, Boston.