# **Interpreting Industry's Impacts: Micropolitical Ecologies Of Divergent Community Responses**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Where governments have failed to protect their citizens from the environmental and social impacts of industrial development, social movements have often arisen in response. However, other community members may defend – sometimes violently – the same corporations targeted by their peers. The contributions to this cluster explore ways that communities disagree about how to respond to the ecological impacts of industry, their reactions inflected by differential concerns about economics, landscapes, indigenous rights and human health. The three studies illustrate the heterogeneity that communities display in their interpretations of, and responses to, industrial development, and demonstrate how this diversity informs, in crucial ways, grassroots activism against the development, or acceptance of it. In particular, this cluster examines how community-scale actions, and the interpretations of industry's impacts upon which these actions are based, are contested through multiple discourses centred around community identities and boundaries.

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### ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY: GRASSROOTS RESPONSES TO INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Industrial Revolution brought with it a myriad of improvements in health, longevity, education and career options; simultaneously, it resulted in unprecedented levels of pollution and deforestation, and gruelling working conditions for the poor. Since that time, legislation and technological improvements have remedied some of industrialization's worst environmental and social ills, yet the scale and pace of industrial development have made many of its excesses nearly impossible to control. Where governments have failed to protect their citizens, civil society has sometimes taken action against both government and the agents of industry, through forms of opposition that include armed rebellion but also a range of less violent varieties of 'socio-environmental struggles' (Bebbington, Hinojosa et al., 2008: 892).

Two elements of civil society involved in resistance to the impacts of industrial development are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations (GROs). NGOs are 'officially established, run by employed staff (often urban professionals or expatriates), well-supported (by domestic or, as is more often the case, international funding), and... often relatively large and well-resourced' (Mercer, 2002: 6). GROs, in contrast, are locally-based, 'smaller, often membership-based organizations, operating without a paid staff but often reliant upon donor or NGO support, which tend to be (but are not always) issue-based and therefore ephemeral' (ibid.). NGOs have far more resources and connections at their disposal, and therefore are capable of actions that are difficult for GROs, such as mounting large-scale campaigns or lobbying governments. GROs, however, may have other types of resources that NGOs lack, including special legal rights, public sympathy for the 'underdog', or the political and moral legitimacy associated with indigeneity (see Horowitz, in press).

Some resistance centres around economic concerns. As capitalism's reach penetrates ever farther into remote locations, corporations accumulate wealth by both 'dispossession' (privatization and exportation of resources and profits, often by multinationals) and 'exploitation' (undercompensation of labour and unwillingness to share profits) (Harvey, 2003). Therefore, local populations may demand 'distributive justice, ... more equitable distribution of the benefits deriving from the exploitation of natural resources' (Perreault, 2006: 154). They may also object to the control, often by national governments or foreign corporations, of resources that the community has long considered its own (see Banks, 2002; Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008), sparking demands for 'procedural justice' defined as 'greater participation and transparency in decisions over the management of natural resources' (Perreault, 2006: 154). Protest based in labour relations and resource governance but spreading to encompass demands for a more participatory political process has, on some occasions, resulted in political change at the national level (Bebbington, Hinojosa et al., 2008).

Other protests focus on another type of impact that results from industrialization: ecological degradation. Since rural economies in developing nations are often tightly linked to natural resources such as forests and fisheries, a threat to the ecosystem is simultaneously a threat to local residents' subsistence and income. The removal or incidental damage of natural resources, then, may spur concerns about 'the security and integrity of livelihoods' (Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008: 2890). This leads to an 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier, 1991, 2002; see also Guha, 1997), a defence of natural resources driven by a need to preserve long-term access to these (e.g. Horowitz, 2010). Industrial activity threatens another type of natural resource as well:

clean air and water. Poor and minority groups are especially likely to have hazardous or polluting industries and facilities in their neighbourhoods, as they have the least political and financial resources to challenge such siting decisions (Pellow and Brulle, 2005; Saha and Mohai, 2005). In the global North, the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement has arisen to oppose this injustice. In recent years, EJ scholarship has begun to pay greater attention to the 'global dimensions' of environmental injustice, exploring issues such as the dumping of toxic waste and relocation of polluting industries in the global South, as well as the activism that has arisen in response (e.g. Schroeder et al., 2008). All these various forms of environmental protest differ from the economic concerns described above in that they do not simply seek a more equitable distribution of the financial and political benefits from industrial development; they often struggle against this vision of development entirely, envisioning instead 'a process that fosters more inclusive (albeit smaller) economies, respects citizenship rights, demonstrates environmental integrity, and allows for the co-existence of cultures and localized forms of territorial governance' (Bebbington, Hinojosa et al., 2008: 901).

Social movements grounded in opposition to the impacts of industry can make major changes at the national level, particularly when activists' popularity has propelled them into office, and local protests can even occasionally influence companies' behaviour directly (Bebbington, Hinojosa et al., 2008). However, resistance does not always arise. In the face of polluting industries that threaten their family's health and well-being yet provide the community with a meagre income, people may see no option but to acquiesce, in a 'silent habituation to contamination' (Auyero and Swistun, 2009: 4). In fact, the opposite of resistance occurs when village elites 'violently defend capital', chasing away opposition to the corporation that represents, to them, the promise of development (Welker, 2009: 143). Such support for the company, despite the environmental and social risks it creates, may be encouraged by a 'corporate security strategy' that, through preferential employment practices or other forms of privilege, 'consciously enlists local elites as the first line of corporate defence' (ibid.).

The literature on grassroots responses to the impacts of industrial development has provided important insights into the multiple ways in which resistance is both enabled and constrained at a multitude of scales, as discussed in the next section. However, so far one scale has not been adequately examined: the micropolitics of intracommunity disagreements about whether to embrace or reject this development and its agents. The papers in this cluster address this gap by exploring the ways that communities disagree about how to respond to the ecological impacts of industry, as their reactions are inflected by differential concerns about economics, landscapes, indigenous rights and human health. These analyses stress that communities are far from homogeneous in their interpretations of, and responses to, industrial development, and that this diversity informs grassroots activism against industry, or acceptance of it, in crucial ways.

## COMPLEXITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF GLOBALIZATION: HOW GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE IS ENABLED AND CONSTRAINED

Environmental social movements opposing the negative impacts of industrial development, whether in the Third World or the First, whether motivated by concerns about livelihoods or health, face both opportunities and constraints at multiple scales. In an era of 'time-space compression', intrinsic to globalization (Harvey, 1989), the international scale is increasingly relevant to local struggles. On one hand, capitalism's

global reach works against grassroots efforts. Transnational corporations find it easier to evade regulations, while neoliberal trade policies set by international institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and international treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, make it harder for governments to refuse goods and services produced through environmentally or socially irresponsible practices. The reduced power of national governments makes it more difficult for angry citizens to obtain a voice. Meanwhile, capital's mobility has allowed corporations to shift their operations to places without a strong labour movement, thereby effectuating 'the roll-back of trade union power' (Harvey, 1989: 150). Much of the power of multinationals thus stems from their ability to 'stretch' (Giddens, 1990) — to tap into, and indeed themselves become, international networks in what is increasingly a 'network society' (Castells, 1996).

On the other hand, globalization has 'complex and contradictory effects' and must be viewed as 'opening new spaces for oppositional politics' (Haarstad and Fløysand, 2007: 290, 304). For instance, grassroots groups around the world now also frequently connect and collaborate with each other (Edelman, 2005) through what have been termed 'transnational advocacy networks' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). They also garner support from other actors, sometimes even the researchers working among them (Kirsch, 2002). Some of these allies are powerful international institutions themselves, which can provide 'human, informational, social, and other resources' (Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008: 2892), publicize the issue to a global audience, and offer funding. The flip side of this relationship, however, is that most donors are unwilling to question national governments, forcing activists' agendas to become 'depoliticized' in spite of their constituents' political concerns (Hodgson, 2002: 1093). Meanwhile, energies are channelled more into 'accommodating donor ideas and meeting reporting requirements than in empowering local people' (Igoe, 2003: 881; see also Arellano-López and Petras, 1994).

Other international allies include the United Nations with its multiple agencies and advisory bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Such intergovernmental institutions, along with many NGOs, devote particular attention to indigenous peoples (e.g. the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989). An ability to frame concerns in terms of indigenous rights — the 'tribal slot' (Li, 2000) — instantly provides activists with globally-recognized political and moral legitimacy as well as 'enormous resources' accessible through international networks (Hodgson, 2002: 1095; see also Karlsson, 2001; Saugestad, 2001; Warren, 1998). This special status and the relationships it engenders constitute a double-edged sword, however, as discourses that idealize indigenous people's ecological wisdom often stand in sharp contrast to lived realities and immediate needs (see Brosius, 1997; Redford, 1990), creating 'unease' within NGO-community relationships (Baviskar, 1995: 244; see also Keck and Sikkink, 1998). When indigenous people do not attain 'the impossible standards of ecological nobility' set for them, they are judged as inauthentic and their concerns may be ignored (see Conklin and Graham, 1995; Hvalkof, 2000; Nadasdy, 2005: 293; Ramos, 1994). Such discourses privilege Western environmentalist values, which can easily be turned into justifications for restrictions on local people's behaviour (Cantzler, 2007; Sturgeon, 1997: 123). While important, however, transnational relationships do not necessarily determine outcomes of protest movements, which may be more deeply influenced by 'national and local factors, the unique political economies in which each case has unfolded, and the dynamics internal to local movements' (Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008: 2901).

At the national scale, grassroots organizations (GROs) face a range of factors that both enable and constrain their activities. Relationships with NGOs or other GROs operating at a national or local level may be somewhat more equitable. However, while urban-based activists may have less power over local communities, and may sincerely desire to empower them, micropolitical tensions may still arise from differences in socio-economic status and ideologies and resultant mutual suspicion (e.g. Baviskar, 1995, 2003), or from the impossibility of achieving 'translation alignment' — of harmonizing goals and agreeing upon roles (Horowitz, in press). Alliances involving different ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable. Despite shared interests in conserving resources, the different groups may ultimately find themselves quarrelling over differing visions of 'wilderness' and 'livelihoods', infused with racial tensions and memories of colonization and conquest (Kosek, 2006). However, some groups overcome differences to forge a 'coherent identity and strategy' (Larsen, 2003: 75) that emphasizes 'a common agenda against outsiders' (Larsen, 2008: 178; see also Gedicks, 2001).

Of course, one of the most important actors at the national scale is the state itself. Its 'political opportunity structure' — largely, its degree of openness to the expression and mobilization of opposition — strongly informs the possibilities and outcomes of activism (Meyer, 2004). Meanwhile, nation-states possess certain powers that multinationals do not, such as a 'monopoly of control of the means of violence' (Giddens, 1990: 71). Nonetheless, many governments rely heavily on industry for tax revenue (not to mention bribes, or their sometimes-legal cousins, 'facilitating payments'), allowing them to be less accountable to citizens (Karl, 1997). Therefore, they may place their power at the service of corporations, even foreign ones, protecting them by repressing — sometimes violently — any opposition to their activities and thus providing companies with 'a powerful political and economic insurance policy' (Leith, 2003: 3). Neoliberalism, encouraged in part by institutions such as the IMF, results in states' readiness 'to realize radical economic and political reforms by repressing, or at least disregarding, the demands of social groups hurt by the reforms' (Özen and Özen, 2009: 563). Industries' economic power over nations can also operate in more subtle ways. Their importance to national and local economies — and the ever-present danger of a decision to relocate elsewhere — can silence governments, the media and even academia (Tu, 2007). Meanwhile, exogenous circumstances are not the only factors influencing protest movements; internal characteristics such as groups' 'entrepreneurial skills, political experience, financial assets, relationships with allies, and their tactical resourcefulness' (Pralle, 2006: 19; see also Ganz, 2000), as well as their vulnerability to corruption and cooptation (Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008), are all important. However, these intra-group dynamics, which inform grassroots protestors' engagements with other actors and in particular the micropolitics of disagreements among community members about how to respond to industrial development, are far less well understood.

### MICROPOLITICAL ECOLOGY

Political ecology arose in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of combining 'the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy' (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987: 17), thus providing insights into the national and international political, economic and social factors behind local environmental issues. In denouncing the apolitical myopia of both cultural ecology (which viewed societies as closed homeostatic systems) and ecoscarcity (which posited purely biophysical 'limits to growth'), political ecology went

perhaps a step too far away from consideration of the local. Thus, it did not always account adequately for cultural specificities or community-scale politics that may influence communities' engagements with environment and development issues. Responding to criticism that political ecology suffered from a 'macrostructural bias' (Moore, 1993: 380), scholars from the early 1990s onward began to focus more on 'the 'micro-politics' that informs environmental conflict and cooperation at the local level' (Bryant and Bailey, 1997: 24), applying an 'actor-oriented' (see Bury, 2008; Giddens, 1976, 1979; Long, 1992; Murdoch and Marsden, 1995) ethnographic methodology while recognizing broader politico-historical, economic and social forces. This hybrid approach has been termed 'micropolitical ecology' (Horowitz, 2008b).

One of micropolitical ecology's contributions is to highlight the complexities of social groups, and ways that contemporary political and economic stakes increase this complexity. 'Communities', for instance, have often been portrayed as simple, monolithic entities, whether the distinct, homeostatic societies described by structural-functionalists (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown, 1952) or ecological anthropologists (e.g. Rappaport, 1984 [1968]), or the conveniently homogeneous units imagined by colonial administrators (see Breman, 1982; van Helden, 2001; Robertson, 1984; Warren, 1993). However, they are in fact composed of 'multiple and contradictory constituencies and alliances' (Watts, 2000: 268), including nested sets of sub-groups and individuals with various, contingent identities (Robertson, 1984: 146). Because of this diversity, communities need to be 'imagined' into existence by forging common identities (Anderson, 1983).

Industrial development may inadvertently encourage formation of community identities through 'discourses of rights claimed (to land, to membership, to compensation, etc.) or rights abused (human rights, land rights, environmental rights, exclusion from membership, etc.)' (Ballard and Banks, 2003: 298). However, communities may also be 'unimagined' through tensions generated by the development of an extremely lucrative commodity such as oil (Watts, 2004). Unequal distributions of benefits — or even expectations thereof — often exacerbate economic and social disparities and/or tensions (e.g. Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008; Hirsch, 1996; Horowitz, 2002, 2008a; Welker, 2009), sometimes sparking violence within the community or against the state, such as the Bougainville rebellion in Papua New Guinea (see Connell, 1991, 1992; Filer, 1990; May and Spriggs, 1990). Even in the absence of violence, different expectations lead to 'distinct critiques' of the development project and 'different proposals' as to how (or whether) to address it (Bebbington, Bebbington et al., 2008: 2891). In part, these divisions may relate to anticipations of long-term outcomes. Those who see an industrial development project as providing continuous benefits for themselves and their descendants may be willing to allow natural resources to be sacrificed through over-harvesting or pollution; in contrast, those who view the project, and jobs, as short term may insist upon preserving their natural resources for long-term livelihood security (e.g. Horowitz, 2010).

Activists, while aware of internal divisions within the community, may deploy 'strategic simplifications' for political expediency in their advocacy work with governments and donors (Li, 1996, 2002; Walker, 2001), making the community appear more uniform and united than it is. In contrast, scholars' 'analytical interventions' — which may tear apart notions of 'naturally bounded' communities, unified in their demands — risk undercutting the claims of the movements they study (Brosius, 1999: 288). However, simplistic portrayals can play into the hands of corporations who are able to co-opt self-styled community representatives and completely overlook less powerful sub-groups, such as women and young people, thereby 'ignor[ing] political

realities in the communities they are dealing with while at the same time appearing to be protecting them' (Weiner, 1991: 72).

### THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions to this cluster use a micropolitical ecology approach to describe instances of tensions and divisions among stakeholders who disagree about ways to engage with local manifestations of industrial development. In a case study from Turkey, Patrick Hurley and Yılmaz Arı analyse conflicts between 'competing capitalisms': mining vs. amenity migration. Wealthy urbanites who migrated to idyllic rural areas to escape the city found themselves confronted with the prospect of destruction of the very landscapes that had attracted them, as mining companies discovered gold within surrounding mountains. Presenting themselves as possessing superior knowledge, these migrants cast themselves in the role of trying to convince the 'ignorant peasants' (who could not be trusted not to be seduced by miners' promises of employment) to embrace their current agricultural — and, incidentally, aesthetically pleasing — livelihoods. Grassroots organizers attempted to connect urban and rural citizens through reference to shared symbols, here in the form of nationalistic images of Atatürk urging all to respect the 'sacred' homeland. In this way, the GROs, staffed exclusively by migrants, aimed to reinforce notions of united 'insiders' (local residents, recent or long-standing) threatened by greedy and destructive 'outsiders' (mining companies). This construction of the insider/outsider divide, however, along with the migrants' knowledge claims and emotional appeals, were all challenged by sceptical long-time residents who resented the interference of migrant GRO leaders, whom they viewed as 'outsiders', spreading not knowledge but ideology.

Noah Theriault also examines conceptualizations of the insider/outsider divide in his study of intra-community tensions surrounding a movement that sought to redress the dispossession and relocation of indigenous people in the Philippines. This expropriation had occurred to make room for a palm plantation, and later a pearl farm. When people with ancestral claims to those areas of land and sea began to agitate for the restoration of their rights, the pearl farm — recognizing the power of this identity engineered and funded a parallel 'indigenous' group with counter-claims to the same areas. Theriault examines ways that members of the movement ascribed different meanings to their own indigeneity and sought to use the legal and moral stakes this concept represented toward divergent ends: socio-economic parity with settler communities, or an exceptional, identity-based status. Intra-community differences, then, centred as much on understandings of the significance of their distinctive indigenous identity as on the power to set goals for their shared struggle. Over time, the character of the movement evolved to allow greater involvement of non-indigenous fisherfolk seeking resource access. However, understandings of indigenous rights still proved an important stake both in residents' own interpretations of the situation and in their attempts to garner sympathy from outsiders, such as large transnational NGOs.

In the cluster's final paper, Alexa Dietrich examines a community grassroots group facing environmental pollution and its relationship to an outside NGO. Like the other contributors, she explores the politics of 'knowledge', here in the form of differing interpretations of the environmental health impacts of an industry that, ironically, is ostensibly committed to combating and preventing disease: pharmaceutical production. In this case study from Puerto Rico, a grassroots group competed with a regional NGO for the right to claim representation of a 'community' that had been fighting for twenty

years to redress pollution of their water by drug company operations. Both the NGO leader and the pharmaceutical companies claimed possession of knowledge superior to that of putatively ignorant and uneducated local people. Dietrich's research reveals, however, that because of 'deep capture' — the profound co-optation of governments, residents, and even academics, mainly due to economic dependencies — 'expertise' was largely an 'ascribed status' attributed to 'politically correct' groups or individuals. The tendency toward 'seeing like a corporation' ran so deep that the NGO leader was able to turn the insider/outsider divide inside out, glossing industry and government as 'insiders' and the community as 'outsiders' who had to 'integrate'! While, despite official rhetoric, both GRO and NGO ultimately aspired to social 'harmony', the NGO was far more successful in promoting its causes than the GRO. Primarily, this was due to differences in strategy, with the unfunded GRO narrowly and uncompromisingly focused on a single concern and the NGO, happy to accept drug company money, diverting media and regulatory attention toward less controversial environmental issues.

Thus, all three studies explore a set of heretofore largely unexamined influences on grassroots activism: differential interpretations of industrial development among different sub-groups within the impacted communities themselves. These papers describe communities that are divided in their responses to industrialization and in their understandings of its effects on local economies, ecosystems and human health. Each side in these debates supports its position through arguments based in conceptualizations of identity and an insider/outsider dichotomy, claiming a just cause by virtue of a putative 'insider' status, with access to privileged knowledge and understanding, while framing its opponents as 'outsiders'. These categorizations, however, are in all cases contested by others who propose alternative boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In most of these cases, the industries themselves have attempted to manipulate the discourses around the special knowledge and status associated with the position of 'insider'. In conclusion, then, this collection explores and highlights ways in which grassroots actions, and the interpretations of industry's impacts upon which they are based, are contested through multiple discourses centred around community identities and boundaries.

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