

Public sociology and the struggle against corporate environmental abuse in Africa

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Introduction

Corporate globalisation involves the increasing commodification and pollution of natural resources. As Hardt and Negri write, the frightening reality is “not that humans are changing nature but that nature is ceasing to be common,. That it is becoming private property and exclusively controlled by its new owners”. (Hardt and Negri, 2004:72) Increasingly the ‘new owners’ are powerful, multinational corporations, concerned largely with profit. Resistance to the environmental injustices this involves is increasing throughout Africa as evident in struggles against the commodification of water in Ghana, against the air and water pollution in the Vaal triangle of South Africa, against genetically modified food in Zambia, against large dams that threaten mass displacement in Namibia, Lesotho, Mozambique and Uganda, against deforestation to Kenya and against oil extraction practices in the Niger Delta, to cite a few examples. The paper argues the need for sociologists to join these struggles, to engage with the localised but globally connected social movements that are challenging the increasing social injustice and environmental degradation brought about by corporate globalisation.

Public Sociology

The corporations which are driving neo-liberal globalisation are doing so increasingly through the commodification of natural resources, turning basic needs such as water into commodities to be bought and sold on the market what Harvey(2002) has termed ‘accumulation by dispossession’. A crucial task for sociologists is to analyse this process. The task may involve any of the four types of sociology Michael Burawoy (2004) has distinguished - public, professional, critical and policy sociology - on the basis of the type of knowledge involved (instrumental or reflexive) and the intended audience (academic or non-academic). He emphasises the interdependence and necessity of collaboration between professional, critical, policy and public sociology. During his presidency the theme of the 2004 meeting of the powerful 13,000 member strong American Sociological Association(ASA) was ‘public sociologies’ which was intended to capture this variety. Public sociology is a form of both intellectual and political engagement. It is defined by a critical scholarly engagement with contemporary public issues. From the standpoint of environmental sociologists the crucial public issue is the pollution and destruction of the natural resource base on which development depends. This is part of what Joe Kovel has termed the ‘-suicidal regime’ of capitalism. His book, *The Enemy of Nature* is subtitled, *The end of capitalism or The end of the world. (2002) Capital acts through the giant corporations that he terms ‘ecological destroyers’*.

The power of corporations

The corporation is the most powerful institution of contemporary economic life. The key questions on their environmental impact have been framed by Markowitz and Rosner in their

compelling book, *Deceit and Denial: The deadly politics of industrial pollution*, “How can the physical environment be protected from the actions of huge multinational corporations whose activities have, until recently, gone virtually unchallenged and unregulated. How can people separated by language, politics, nationality and culture come together to challenge corporations whose power transcends national boundaries? How can the poor and disenfranchised have their voices heard.”(Markowitz and Rosner, 2002: 2)

The difficulties involved in such environmental protection are compounded by the widespread corporate practices of deception, deceit and the suppression of scientific evidence. The epidemiologist Debrah Davis has (2002) exposed how the oil companies and car manufacturers fought for decades to keep lead in petrol while knowing it caused brain damage. She describes how major corporations have lobbied and manipulated scientists and the government regarding the hazards of toxic chemicals and provides clear evidence that many pesticides and industrial pollutants cause significant numbers of cancers.

Obtaining compensation for communities whose health and livelihoods have been damaged by environmental pollution is complicated by a reductionist type of science which attempts to link specific toxic substances to specific diseases. “In the realm of environmental health , it is extremely difficult to say that a particular substance causes a particular health problem usually only after decades of observation can a statistically significant correlation be made between exposure to a chemical and increased death and disease in a large population. Even then it may not be possible to establish a connection conclusively and to the satisfaction of the entire scientific community” (Markowitz and Rosen, 2002: 6) But Davis maintains that, while toxicology cannot pinpoint a specific cause, an epidemiological approach can recognise patterns of unnecessary death and disease, above the average for a population without pollution.

Such ‘unnecessary death and disease’ often results from the corporate pursuit of profit.

Corporations as ‘psychopathic’ institutions

It has been suggested that the modern corporation is a ‘profoundly dangerous’ ‘psychopathic creature’ which ‘inflicts harm on workers, consumers, communities and the environment. They are “singularly self-interested and unable to feel genuine concern for others”, irresponsible refusing “to accept responsibility for their own actions, and unable to feel remorse”, able to relate to others only ‘superficially, marked by “a lack of empathy and asocial tendencies”, manipulative and grandiose. (Bakan, 2004:57) In his compelling book, *The Corporation: The pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, Joel Bakan points to “characteristics common to all corporations: obsession with profits and share prices, greed, lack of concern for others, and a penchant for breaking legal rules. These traits are, in turn, rooted in an institutional culture, the corporation’s, that valorizes self interest and invalidates moral concern. (Bakan, 2004:58)

Increasingly these corporations are relying on a form of manipulative advertising termed ‘greenwash’ to try and persuade us of their legitimacy. In Bakan’s analysis corporate social responsibility (CSR) is ‘an oxymoron’, but CSR along with ‘greenwash’ are powerful tools. These psychopathic tendencies were demonstrated in a dramatised event in Durban last year, termed ‘the corpse awards’.

The Corpse awards

In 2005 a theatre at the University of Natal was the site of 'the Corpse awards' an innovation by the environmental NGO Groundwork to expose the worst corporate practices producing environmental injustice. Dressed as the Grim Reaper, the Master of Ceremonies, handed out mini-coffins to some of South Africa's most powerful companies. The awards were accepted on behalf of the absent company CEOs by men dressed in grey suits with paper bags on their heads. The leading contenders for the awards were the big oil refiners Sasol, Safref and Engen, steel giant Mittal, pulp and paper giants Sappi and Mondi, Monsanto and South Africa's power utility, Eskom. All these corporations boast about their commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility and to environmental protection. But on this occasion representatives from neighbouring communities living with health problems such as cancers, asthma, excemas and allergies told a different story.

Sasol was one of these corporations nominated for a corpse award. Since 1994 Sasol has expanded into a multinational corporation with operations in Africa, Europe, North America and East Asia. In South Africa it has expanded production and pumps out 300 thousand tonnes of suplur dioxide, 120thousand tonnes of hydrogen sulphide, 446 thousand tonnes of volatile organic compounds and produces 420 thousand tonnes of solid and liquid toxic waste. There have been numerous 'incidents' inside their plants in which workers were injured, more than one a day from 2000 to 2002 and between 2002 and 2004 there were 50 incidents the firm termed 'significant' killing 15 workers. The petrochemical giant has refused to accept any responsibility for this, until a statement by Sasol chief executive referring to the victims of the 2004 explosion that left 10 dead and hundreds more injured, "I am deeply distressed and regret the loss of life and suffering we have caused. This is something we will fix." (Cited by Richard Spoor, in *The Star* 19.7.2005) The health and safety conditions of Sasol workers are not the only problem. It is responsible for massive air pollution in the area. Caroline Ntaopane, a resident of nearby Zamdela township states, "For the people living here, the mine dumps are a problem, during the windy season, especially August, they have to sweep coal dust out of their houses everyday."

Another corporation nominated was Sapref, SouthAfrica's biggest crude oil refinery. It is jointly owned by Shell and BP and is the biggest polluter in the highly polluted south Durban basin. It emits over 13 thousand tonnes of sulphur dioxide and 1.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide as well as a mix of volatile organic compounds. Polluting incidents seem to occur with regularity. A study at a school situated between Sapref and the Engen refinery found the highest incidence of asthma recorded in the medical literature worldwide. There is also a high incidence of leukaemia and cancers in the area.

SAPPI is a globalised empire which was nominated. South Africa's foremost paper and pulp manufacturer now a multinational corporation listed on the New York Stock exchange. It directly controls some 470,000 hectares of indust rial plantation and effectively controls another 90,000 hectares through out-grower schemes. The land it controls was transformed from grasslands rich in biodiversity to monoculture plantations dependent on chemicals - 'green deserts'. This has dried out water catchments and destroyed soil fertility.

Other corporations nominated included Monsanto the world leader in toxic agriculture, which pioneered genetic engineering in the 1980s and which has enormous power in global seed production, controlling 40% of the seed market in South Africa, and Eskom which is South Africa's power utility and the biggest single polluter in the country. Its nuclear power plant at Koeberg near Cape Town generates 32 tonnes of high level spent fuel waste a year. This is stored on site, while 'medium' and 'low' level waste is taken to Vaalputs in Namaqualand where waste drums have already leaked radiation into the atmosphere. Many former workers at Koeberg and Penlindaba are suffering from cancers.

"The Sustainable Catastrophe Award' went to Mittal Steel for its Vanderbijlpark pollution. Presenting the awards anti-corporate activist Naomi Klein said, "We know corporates are not just satisfied with leeching your communities and poisoning your bodies. They want to be loved, which is why government invented corporate social responsibility. For them there is no problem that is so big that it can't be solved with fantastic public relations."

The need for sociological engagement may be demonstrated by a case study of this particular corporation.

The struggle against a globalised corporation: Mittal Steel¹

On a hot Saturday morning in the summer of 2003 about eighty people crowded into a small garage on the outskirts of Vanderbijlpark. Packed closely together on wooden benches and sitting on the concrete floor, they seemed to represent our 'rainbow nation' including black and white small holders and workers from the surrounding area.

The occasion was a meeting of the Steel Valley Crisis Committee (SVCC), a group formed in 2002 to indict ISCOR for their pollution of the air and water of the area which had resulted in loss of livelihoods, and serious health problems ranging from kidney disease to cancer for at least 500 people. The smoking stacks and dust from large dark slag heaps meant that the air pollution was clearly visible, but the planned indictment focused on hidden, toxic substances in the groundwater on which everyone in the area depended. Despite the heat and uncomfortable seating, all the people present listened intently as the legal team, led by Margie Victor, explained what the legal processes would involve. The meeting seemed like a vindication of the triumphalist claims sometimes made about the contemporary environmental movement; an illustration of the capacity of environmental issues to overcome ethnic, racial and class divisions and unite various 'particularistic identities' in a common cause. One of them was an elderly man, now 74, a practicing priest and *sangoma*, Strike Matsepo, whose smallholding adjoins the ISCOR slag heap which dominates the sky line. .

Strike Matsepo worked as a mechanic at the Coco Cola factory in Vanderbijlpark and cashed his pension to buy a smallholding in the area in 1990. "This was at the time of Mandela when people could buy where they liked", he said. He brought his large extended family, including his

¹ This case study draws on a research project conducted with my colleague and friend Victor Munnik 'Throwing stones at a giant: an account of the Steel Valley struggle' available at www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs under the listed 2004 funded research reports.

beloved sister Alinah, to live with him in his new home and states proudly,, “ a big sack of mealie meal was finished in two weeks”. He says, ‘It used to be a good place’. But in the past 15 years several of his animals were born with birth defects and many have died from what he claims is contaminated water. “In all 30 cows, 9 calves, 5 sheep, 6 goats, 3 tortoises, 7 dogs, 2 cats, 1 pig and 20 chickens have died.” Matsepo himself recently spent 6 weeks in hospital with kidney failure and presently suffers from tiredness and lack of concentration. His sister Alinah has just died and Strike asserts, angrily, ‘My sister would be alive now without ISCOR’. She had high levels of cadmium in her blood and scientific evidence has confirmed the presence of a number of other dangerous and carcinogenic substances in the groundwater. Other family members are also sick and report that they stay inside the house because the dust and air pollution in the area is so bad. Recently having suffered a stroke and then facing the threat of the sheriff of the court impounding all his possessions to pay legal costs from a failed court challenge he says, “My body is full of pain” and he is prepared to die fighting ISCOR.

ISCOR is now part of Mittal steel, the largest steel producing company in the world, operating in 14 different countries, employing some 220,000 people and generating billions of dollars. The chairperson, Lakshmi Mittal is estimated to be the third richest man in the world. (*International Herald Tribune* 4.2.2006) He recently bought a house in London for over seventy million pounds in what was described as “the most expensive residential property deal recorded in England”

The steelmaking on which Mittal built his fortune is a polluting process. Altogether a toxic mix of more than 100 chemicals is known to be emitted by steel mills. Recent Canadian research has shown that this mix not only affects all forms of life around the mills, but goes down to the genetic level in the form of hereditary DNA damage. In the case of the Vanderbjlpark steel works liquid wastes from Iscor were pumped into unlined evaporation dams. Much of the effluent found its way underground, carrying a load of undissolved and some toxic substances such as cadmium. According to chemical professor Phillip Lloyd, “By the late 1950s it was apparent that the polluted water was escaping from the property and threatening the neighbours, mostly small farmers who depended on underground water for farming and domestic use”. (Lloyd, 1999: 26)According to an anonymous Iscor insider/whistleblower, “Iscor management manipulates the results of water tests. “They show themselves to be concerned but what they say and what they do are very different things... pollution is not a high priority. Lots of data is available but is not being utilised. Nothing is being implemented. Good quality Vaal water is used to dilute the water (used in the production process) so as to comply with the Water Act permit.”(Carte Blanche programme) According to ecologist Pieter van Eeden, Iscor is “not serious about environmental issues. I told them, “we’re not only making steel, we’re killing people as well.”

ISCOR’s pollution of the groundwater on which the community depended was a hidden, undramatic, insidious process of contamination which developed over a forty year period. At the same time many people in the Vaal Triangle also suffer from serious air pollution.

Millions of tons of pulverized slag are stored in giant heaps at the perimeter of the ISCOR property in Vanderbjlpark. On windy days the resulting dust plumes can be seen and felt over a wide area, blowing thousands of tons of toxic dust into the atmosphere. A recent report by Yvonne Scorgie estimated the direct health costs associated with only three specific air

pollutants: sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and PM10 particulates (small enough to inhale) at around R289 million per year.

In a 2001 court case aimed at obtaining compensation for 16 households who had suffered from the water pollution ISCOR denied responsibility claiming there was no evidence of heavy metals in the borehole water. This denial is characteristic of corporate practices in more developed societies. (Markowitz and Rosen, 2004)

While an unknown number of people reliant on the polluted groundwater have died, many others have developed serious health problems including various types of cancers and kidney failure. Symptoms of illnesses reported in questionnaires administered to 500 people in the area pointed clearly to heavy metal poisoning from substances such as cadmium and manganese.

The impacts of water pollution are dramatically illustrated by the case of Lulu Geldenhuys (nee Cock). A talented and deeply religious woman, she has created a home filled with her own beautiful needlework and religious icons. Lulu used to work for ISCOR as a crane driver. She smiles a lot, but weeps when she speaks of her inability to have children. She has had two miscarriages and both foetuses had genetic defects. She has been diagnosed with three types of cancer and relates these to the canal water she played in as a child. According to her mother, "Scientists have found that the canal water contains heavy metals such as benzene, cadmium and naphthlane. " The Cock family lived for 14 years on a smallholding on the edge of the unlined ISCOR canal carrying water to the dams. Mrs Cock states, 'We were a farming family and had goats, sheep, ducks, horses, geese, but they all died. Many animals were born malformed. We left when the whole family got sick, skin growths, emphysema and cancer.. The doctors relate these cancers to the canal water. As a youngster she played in it and we drank it. The ISCOR water has made all my children and my grandchildren sick' (Interview, Cock,2004).

For a while the area around the ISCOR plant was described by informants as a "good place to live". Many of the people living in the area grew a variety of vegetables such as pumpkins, spinach, beans and maize for their own consumption. Some sold vegetables in nearby towns such as Sebokeng and Vanderbijlpark earning as much as R800 a week. People also kept livestock including chickens, cows, pigs, turkeys and ducks. The majority of the residents were subsistence farmers and described the area as a vibrant and productive community. But slowly their animals died and their crops failed.

For a long time the community was ignorant of this hidden and lethal pollution of the ground and canal water. As in the case of Love Canal in the USA where a working class community confronted contamination by a multinational corporation, "there were no walls of water, no bolts of lightning, no reports of multiple deaths and brave rescues. In short, the Love Canal situation was neither cataclysmic nor dramatic.". (Levine, 1982:179) Nevertheless it was hoped that - as in the case of Love Canal - the Steel Valley struggle would be a turning point, a catalyst in the development of a strong environmental justice movement.

The SVCC was formed to mobilize the community and coordinate efforts to engage ISCOR, the courts and the government to deal with the pollution crisis. Actions included a protest march to ISCOR in 2001, picketing action at the WSSD conference and litigation. As this failed, and the

pollution of the groundwater continues, the SVCC which must be analyzed as an example of a failed struggle against environmental injustice.

The main reasons for this failure was the power of ISCOR and the SVCC's reliance on a legalism which displaced social mobilisation. The collapse of the SVCC is part of the social disintegration of the entire Steel Valley community. This was previously 'a strong community' with social infrastructure in the form of shops, schools, churches and bus services, which have all now collapsed.. Mr Matsepe was part of the 2002 protest, but, he says, 'there is nothing happening now. The people who organized the protests are no longer here. There is no money for travel in buses. We are waiting for the people to unite again. We are now ruined and hopeless'.

Since Mr Matsepe expressed these sentiments in 2004 a new potential to challenge the globalised steel empire of Lakshmi Mittal has taken shape in the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance.

The Mittal steel plant in Vanderbijlpark is not an isolated case. All over South Africa corporations threaten the lives of vulnerable and marginalised people - mostly poor and black - both in the workplace and the surrounding community, by exposing them to substances which are dangerous to their health.

The most dramatic case of such environmental injustice involved Thor Chemicals. In Cato Ridge in Kwazulu-Natal, the British owned Thor Chemical plant claimed that they were safely extracting mercury from mercury waste. The incinerator technology used by Thor in their extraction process resulted in the deaths of three workers and the illnesses of many others who demonstrated symptoms of mercury poisoning. In addition they polluted a nearby river. Thousands of barrels of mercury waste were stored at the Thor facility. Many of the drums rusted and leaked. When it rained the holding ponds overflowed into the nearby Mgweni river which was found to have mercury levels 1500 times what the World Health Organisation considers safe. Close to half of the mercury waste on site had been sent to Thor Chemicals by US corporations in the 1980s and early 1990s. American Cyanamid was one of the corporations which shipped mercury waste under the guise of 'recyclable products'.

Globalisation from 'above' and 'below'

Some of the struggles against the giants of corporate globalisation illustrate globalization both from 'above' and from 'below'. Globalization from above is evident in the international linkages of the corporations involved. Lakshmi Mittal recently said of his bid for the steel giant, Arcelor, "This is a great opportunity for us to take the steel industry to the next level. Our customers are becoming global, our suppliers are becoming global, everyone is looking for a stronger global player". As one banker close to the Arcelor bid said, "This is globalisation in action". (*The Observer* 5.2.2006)

Grassroots globalisation or globalization from 'below' is evident in how these local struggles against powerful corporate interests attempt to link with international organizations. For example, the SVCC nomination of ISCOR /Mittal for the 2005 'corpse awards' was cited in a submission to the European Commission opposing Mittal's bid for Arcelor by the Ohio Citizens Action objection to the European Commission in February 2006 to support their objection to

Mittal's bid for the European steel company, Arcelor. This organisation with 100,000 members, mobilises against cancer causing air pollution from Mittal Steel's Cleveland works. The objection drew the attention of the Commission to poor safety problems at Mittal's Kazakh coal plant and Mittal's planned displacement of people in Jharkhand, India. The message of solidarity sent by the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance to the Ohio Citizens Action illustrates the potential of local groups to build a 'globalisation from below' to challenge Mittal's globalised steel empire.

Sociological questions

The case study raises a number of sociological questions, including:

1. What is the *power basis* of Mittal Steel, both in local and global terms? How did a foreigner come to control a South African strategic industry? How did a single man owning 88% of shares in the company which, if the bid for Arcelor is successful, come to control 10% of world steel production? Is Mittal Steel part of Hardt and Negri's (2004) conception of 'empire' a 'network power' including the dominant nation states, supranational institutions like the World Bank as well as the major corporations².

An urgent sociological task is to develop a theoretical understanding of power in the new global order, and specifically to examine the relation between global forces and the nation state. Hardt and Negri stress that the powers and functions of nation-states are being transformed in a new global framework. Saskia Sassen calls this a process of 'denationalization'. States continue to play a crucial role in determining and maintaining the legal and economic order, she argues, but their actions are increasingly oriented not toward national interests but rather toward the emerging global power structure. From this perspective there is no contradiction between the power of the national state and globalisation. (Sassen, 2002).

2. This raises another series of questions about the *capacity of the state* to control corporate power, to prevent pollution and obtain compensation for its victims. The independent left in South Africa has combined connecting with grassroots globalisation with making demands on the nation state to address the widening gap between basic human needs and rights.

3. What is the *social basis of resistance*? What are the social characteristics of the actors involved in the struggle against the pollution in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity, age and other crucial social variables. Are the organisations representative of the broader community? Are they democratic and accountable? What is the sociological nature of the networks involved? How should this 'social multiplicity' be theorised? Does it have the capacity to challenge the globalisation of capital?

Hardt and Negri answer optimistically in their conception of the 'multitude'. They define this as an open and expansive network, composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity, composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production. It is many-coloured like Joseph's coat, a social multiplicity that can communicate

² What Hardt and Negri call 'empire' is a new form of global order that they see emerging. This new form is a 'network power', and "includes as its primary elements, or nodes, the dominant national states along with supranational institutions and major capitalist corporations.

and act in common while remaining internally different. It is made up of all oppressed people and is not the working class (all waged workers), not an identity (like the people), or uniform (like the masses) “It is working.. to create an alternative global society. “ (Hardt and Negri, 2001:xvii)

4. What were the social, economic and health *impacts* of exposure to water pollution on the Steel Valley community? Obviously the ‘community’ is not a monolithic entity and requires a disaggregated analysis of the impacts on people with differential access to power, resources and knowledge of the pollution impacts.

5. How have reductionist and distorted conceptions of *sciences* (and scientists) been used to deny and distort an understanding of these impacts?

6. What are the definitions of the pollution issue? How can we promote a process of *social recognition*? As Beck (1992) has stressed, many of the environmental risks of modernity, the toxins and pollutants, are hidden from sensory perception. Mobilisation requires that the pollution achieves a level of social visibility

7. What are the policy *alternatives*? There has to be a formulation of concrete alternatives at the local and national level. As debate at the World Social Forum is increasingly emphasizing, we have to demonstrate that “another world is possible”. . Without such alternative social visions, we leave ‘the mobilisation of passion’ and ‘hope’ to right wing movements. (Mouffe and Laclau in Zournazi, 2003:126)

However whether engaged in exposure, analysis or theorisation, whether describing social impacts, conceptualising power or formulating policy alternatives, the sociologist cannot stand alone. Involvement means a kind of ‘organic public sociology’ “in which the sociologist works in close connection with a visible, thick, active and often counter-public” (Burawoy, 2005:269) . The participation of sociologists in such struggles may link formal knowledge to informal, direct, experiential knowledge in ways that help to create an active citizenship and in this sense, deepen democracy. But democracy demands an engagement with the state.

Engagement with the state: the linking of public and policy sociology

The state cannot be bypassed as Burawoy (2004) seems to do. Many of our most progressive social thinkers do this in exaggerating the transformative capacity and emancipatory potential of ‘grassroots globalization’ or ‘globalisation-from-below’. In much of this writing there is an implicit suspicion of the state as a threat, as a source of authoritarian, impersonal, bureaucratic power. **But we need to leverage the state to access resources and rights.** In Africa only the democratic state can meet the needs of the impoverished majority. As Vandana Shiva writes, we have to work at “reclaiming the state to protect people’s interests... The real issue of our times is how to reinvent the state”. (Shiva, 2002:19)

This engagement with the state implies **a linking of public and policy sociology**. C. Wright Mill’s notion of ‘the sociological imagination’ has a special potential for social mobilisation in

the translation of private troubles into public issues. This stress on the understanding of personal troubles as social or public issues has a special relevance in our “world of rampant ‘individualization’”. (Bauman, 2004:32).

But a vibrant public sociology needs to be strengthened by other kinds of sociology. Solutions to ‘public issues’ require the concrete, ‘real utopias’ of policy sociology. Burawoy points to the danger that “policy sociology is always in danger of subordination to the client...” (Burawoy, 2004:18) But such client driven research is only a ‘danger’ if the client represents the interests of the powerful and the privileged. The ‘client’ could be **the vulnerable, the dispossessed, and the marginalised** who need the expert knowledge of policy sociology to help devise solutions and formulate demands to meet their needs. Firstly we need to adopt the needs of the vulnerable and marginalised to access natural resources as research priorities. Secondly sociologists need to participate in collective, participatory research and policy formulation together with, rather than on these movements. As the natural resource base on which all economic activity depends is in danger of collapsing, these are urgent tasks.

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