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Climate Change and Injustice

Those who Give the Most, Benefit the Least: The Injustices of Extractive Industries *Shauna Butterwick*

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Report on the PIMA 10 February 2021 webinar

On February 10th, PIMA held the third webinar in their series exploring the links between climate justice and adult learning and education. PIMA's goals are to educate, collectively face the climate emergency, and consider what it means for adult education in the context of social solidarity, human development and socio-ecological justice. *Linkages amongst climate change, resource extraction and adult learning and education* was co-hosted by PIMA, CASAE *Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* and SCUTREA (Standing Committee on University Teaching and Research into the Education of Adults). There were 120 registrants with 75 attending from numerous countries including South Africa, Serbia, Cypress, Singapore, Australia, Canada, United States, Scotland, England, Ireland, Nigeria, Uganda, and Timor-Leste. The recording of the webinar is posted on the CASAE website: <https://www.casae-aceea.ca/webinars/>

The working group for this event included: Shirley Walters, Jane Burt, and Shauna Butterwick. Particular appreciation goes to Tim Howard of the CASAE secretariat who managed the zoom hosting technology and to Mary Kostandy, UBC PhD student, who was on standby to offer technical assistance to registrants. And huge gratitude to the keynote speakers Trusha Reddy and Judith Marshall. This was a very successful collaboration amongst the three networks of PIMA, CASAE and SCUTREA.

Shirley Walters, PIMA President, opened the webinar and posed a key question for consideration: "Is mining vital to modern life on Earth – under what conditions?" Jane Burt, an adult educator and environmental activist from South Africa, currently living in England, facilitated the remainder of the programme. She noted that our presence on this webinar meant that we all owned and consumed products and materials that are extracted from the earth, illustrating our complicated and paradoxical relationship with mining. On the one hand, it creates massive environmental degradation and is a major force behind migration and displacement of peoples. On the other hand, it is also a source of income and employment for many communities. As the speakers subsequently outlined, however, those who give and who are negatively impacted the most, benefit the least. This imbalance and injustice threaded its way throughout programme presentations as well as participants' active engagement in the lively chat and their verbal comments and questions.

Trusha Reddy, the first speaker on the programme, has been involved for over 15 years as the Programme Head of Women Building Power: Energy & Climate Justice at WoMin African Alliance (<https://womin.africa/>). Her work and that of other women in this alliance, a Pan-African ecofeminist organisation, is focused on exposing the impacts of extractivism on African women, and on organizing and defending the land from resource extraction. Their activism is underpinned by women-centred and just development alternatives grounded in a radical and African ecofeminist agenda.

This approach challenges the dominant patriarchal view that nature and natural resources are at the service of humans, an orientation which “reduc[es] nature and natural resources to inputs to extractive production processes, such as power stations, dams, and agricultural projects, which ultimately destroy these resources upon which humans and all species survive” (Randriamara, 2019, p. 19). From an ecofeminist orientation, patriarchy dehumanises and excludes women from decision-making and “brings women’s labour into exploitative service of the dominant economy and men’s interests in households and communities” (p. 19).

Trusha began her talk outlining the devastation brought on by climate change, specifically the latest cyclones in southern Africa which are occurring far more frequently, flooding vast areas of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and South Africa, resulting in many deaths and the displacement of thousands. The African communities which have suffered the most and which have the least capacity to adapt have contributed *the least* to creating climate change. This injustice is at the heart of climate chaos. Trusha and WoMin have called for support for African communities who must now ‘be in a constant state of disaster preparedness’. They also are having to resist another source of devastation to the land -- the rapidly expanding mining industry. This heavy burden leads to their precarious existence all in the name of infinite economic growth. Those most devastated by these climate events are the *sacrifice zones*: “Low-income and racialized communities shouldering more than their fair share of environmental harms related to pollution, contamination, toxic waste, and heavy industry. On this account, disparities in wealth and power, often inscribed and re-inscribed through social processes of racialization, are understood to produce disparities in environmental burdens.” (Scott & Smith, 2017, p. 861)

Sacrifice zones, both human and environmental, were also an issue of concern for Judith Marshall who was the next presenter. Judith worked for many years with the Steelworkers Union in Canada, conducting member education on global issues, coordinating union cooperation projects in southern Africa and international worker exchanges, many of them in the mining sector. Judith researched the collapse of the tailing ponds in British Columbia at the Mt. Polley copper mine owned by Imperial Metals (Marshall, 2017). As Judith noted in her talk: “The dam collapsed in August 2014, spewing twenty-five million cubic meters of toxic muck into Quesnel Lake, a pristine glacial fjord. The spill then surged onward into the Fraser River system. There were no deaths, but ecosystems were severely damaged including important salmon spawning areas. Habitat and livelihoods of more than 50 Indigenous communities in the Fraser River Basin were affected, some of them as far away as 200 km from the actual mine site”.

Judith's research led her to make connections with other researchers and activists investigating tailings dam collapses, particularly the Samarco mine in Mariana, Brazil, owned by Vale an Australian mining company BHP. That human-made disaster instantly killed 19 people in the community closest to the mine. Six hundred kilometres of the river basin of the Rio Doce were impacted, destroying a hydro-electric dam as well as farms, livestock, property, and livelihoods, reaching the Atlantic ten days later. Judith noted how these tailing pond failures, while happening far away from each other, were shockingly similar, illuminating the global policy of profit ahead of safety. Like Trusha, Judith also brought attention to the complicity of governments with the larger mining industry. Judith called on adult educators to support the development of basic literacy to teach communities about the realities and impact of extractive industries and the immense footprints these industries leave behind, all the while not benefiting local or national communities in the ways promised. The extracted resources are sent to far-away markets.

Shauna Butterwick, adult educator and Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, then provided an overview of the film *Women Hold Up the Sky* created by WoMin; participants had been encouraged to review the film before the webinar. This documentary tells a powerful story, similar to the accounts provided by Trusha and Judith, about the exploitation enacted by extractive industries who have utter disregard for the lives of humans and the land. The film is also a hopeful story as it highlights the courage of women at the grass roots fighting these industries to protect the land that feeds and sustains their families and communities. In the film, activists like Fakazile, Margaret, Belly, July, Lucy, Alice, Monica, Nora, Violet, and Flora among others, describe how extractive oil, coal, and hydro industries have colluded with patriarchal power systems and governments which deny women's ownership of land. The women describe themselves as 'squirrels against an elephant'.

In Uganda, the Congo, and South Africa, companies such as McAllister Energy are given access to land without the necessary consultation with affected communities. The film provides shocking images of how these companies drive over, burn, and bulldoze smaller communities where women are the major providers, turning rich, green, fertile lands into dead, grey, flattened landscapes. Fighting against this devastation, women have organized and resisted using popular theatre, song, study circles and grassroots exchanges, revealing the lies told by mining companies about the benefits that will come to communities if they agree to industry terms. The women have also asserted their rights through legal resources and the courts, with some victories. These grassroots activists remind us, however, to remain vigilant as corporate powers are always searching for new ways to expand.

Discussion

Following the presentations, participants were invited to consider three questions: i) based on what we have heard, what are we learning as Adult Educators? ii) what does this mean for ALE? and iii) what struck you about this webinar and where would you like this conversation to go from here? In the subsequent discussion, several themes emerged including:

- the complicated relationship many communities have with mining companies

- the importance of solidarity networks
- the development of adult education strategies including mining literacy
- the importance of crafting an alternative narrative.

Employment vs the Environment

Presenters drew attention to the paradoxical relationship we have with mining and how mining companies exploit a false binary between the environment and employment. Webinar participants noted other examples such as in Puerto Rico, where popular educators were teaching the community about the poisonous waste emitted by a Coca Cola plant. The locals responded by saying that while they recognised the pollution, they still wanted the plant to continue, as it was the sole source of income for landless families. The seduction of mining companies who engage with local economies, which have few if no other alternatives for employment, is a central issue for adult educators.

Building Solidarity Networks

Participants brought attention to other examples of activists engaging in various interventions to resist the expansion of extractive industries into their communities. Like the activists in Women Hold Up the Sky, in Ireland, campaigners used the courts in their fight against Shannon LNG US and Fortress Energy in North Kerry (South-West of Ireland), which were seeking permissions to build a fracked gas import terminal on the Shannon Estuary. After 13 years, they were victorious (<http://www.shelltosea.com>). In Alberta, Canada, a network of ranchers, environmentalists and Indigenous communities have come together to protest the licenses given by the provincial government to Australian mining companies for open pit mining on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains (Beers, 2021).

While their efforts led to the temporary restoration of previous policies to not permit licenses for extractive mining operations, activists are watching carefully for the government's behind the scenes collusion with mining companies. The economic imperative fuelling natural resource extraction in Alberta has a long history. Transforming how Alberta relies on extractive industries to fuel the economy is a long-term project but there are signs of shifts taking place. Many other examples of resistance to extractive industries are taking place throughout the world. For example, for years protestors have pushed against the building of the Keystone pipeline running from Canada to the United States, through Indigenous territory. The efforts of these activists paid off, as within days of becoming the new US President, Joe Biden, cancelled the pipeline.

Building Economic and Mining Literacy

In her presentation, Judith noted the role of adult education in creating basic literacy programmes to demystify the false promises made by mining companies. But it is not just those concerned with climate justice who is engaged in adult education, Judith warned. Mining companies are developing programmes and using their power to create a narrative to keep mining in the public eye. Using skilled and persistent PR initiatives, mining companies are making multiple incursions into the public school system, universities, museums and high-profile philanthropy in order to, as Judith notes, “buy community good will through

corporate social responsibility projects.” As she said when looking at what mining companies promise, “there is a lot of un-coding to do”. (For another exploration into corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its role in influencing communities about mining, see George Sakodie’s UBC thesis).

Participants listed other events and resources focused on the relationship between climate change and adult education. Decades ago, participants observed how the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* predicted, despite some errors in modelling and timing, the current climate and environmental crisis (Meadows et al, 1972, 2004). More recently adult educators have organized conferences on this theme such as the *6th Biannual Nordic 2015 Conference of Adult Education and Learning*. Events like these point to how adult education must bring a global view, teaching how trans-nationalism, the erosion of the cultural and political influence of nation-states, is enabling the expansion of exploitative industries. (Harju & Heikkinen, 2016).

Analysing climate change by attending to both power and place is yet another aspect of developing a form of mining literacy (Klutz & Walter, 2018). While building a form of mining literacy in which the devastation wreaked by mining and other extractive industries is illuminated is important, another role of adult education, participants noted, must include assisting communities in learning about energy alternatives and working with communities to help them think creatively about what these alternatives might be. Adult educators must help learners navigate ‘mountains of information’, in order to unearth hidden truths, including the link to COVID 19 and disaster capitalism (Foster & Suwandi, 2020). The question of whether there was such a thing as ‘good mining’, and if there exist principles that can guide mining development, is an area needing further research.

Educators are also finding ways to assist learners to find their voices and place their concerns on the public agenda. This is a central concern of Canadian researcher and activist, Joan Kuyek, who has recently published *Unearthing Justice: How to Protect Your community from the Mining Industry* (2020), based on years of activism with numerous communities. Her book seeks to educate communities about the false equation between mining and prosperity. Illuminating the various tactics used by extractive industries, particularly as they engage with Indigenous communities, such as “extraction contracting” (Scott, 2020, p. 269), is another area of adult education curriculum development needed in climate justice movement.

Participants pointed to other resources such as Charles Eisenstein (2018), for understanding and intervening in the climate crisis. Eisenstein challenges activists to see the dangers of limiting climate change interventions in reducing carbon emissions. “The rivers, forests, and creatures of the natural and material world are sacred and valuable in their own right, not simply for carbon credits or preventing the extinction of one species versus another”.

Crafting an Alternative Discourse

For people working for climate justice, challenging frames and narratives are essential. What language we use in addressing climate injustice is significant. Participants argued against

using terms like ‘natural disasters’ as there is nothing natural about these events. Rather they are human-induced. Indigenous scholars and activists have much to teach us concerning the significance of how dominant corporate and colonial interests engage in using terms that sever our relationship to the earth as a source of life. Botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen, Potawatomi Nation, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), calls for replacing the concept of ‘natural resources’ with the idea of “earthly gifts”. Terms such as those articulated by Kimmerer, help us to “acknowledge and celebrate our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world ... to understand the generosity of the earth and give our own gifts in return”.

Changing the narrative involves adult education initiatives navigating the difficult space between hope and despair. Elin Kelsey in *Hope Matters – Why Changing the Way We Think is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis* (2020) calls on activists and advocates for climate justice to engage with radical hope, a concept similar to Freire’s *Pedagogy of Hope – Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006). For Kelsey, “hope is not about turning our back on the facts. It’s precise because we *do know* how much trouble we are facing ... hope plays a crucial role in mobilizing individuals to take part in collective action” (p. 43).

Conclusion

The webinar offered much food for thought and identified possibilities in response to ‘what’s next?’ The next webinar in this series continues the conversation focusing on “Climate justice and related struggles: Aesthetic, creative and disruptive strategies”. (More information to follow) The February 10th webinar served as a kind of reunion of adult educators from different parts of the world who, from their lively engagement and comments on the chat, were hungry to connect and to continue the conversation about the role of adult education in promoting climate justice.

Presenters and participants brought attention to the everyday and global details of climate injustice. Thomas Berger (2008) reminds us of the “countless personal choices, encounters, illuminations, sacrifices, new desires, griefs and, finally, memories which the movement brought about ... [while] the promise of a movement is its future victory ... the promises of the incidental moments are instantaneous ... experiences of freedom in action” (p. 8). In many respects, Trusha, Judith and the film *Women Hold Up the Sky* point to the possibilities for freedom in action. Education for democratization is one way to think about the role of adult education in relation to climate justice, that is, advocating for political decision-making processes based on authentic and respectful consultation with an educated citizenry.

This report concludes with a poem Judith had cut because of time constraints. Activists in the international network of those affected by Vale, the Brazilian mining giant, were contacted by a Brazilian lay priest working in Mozambique. His parishioners reported strangers arriving in their rural villages, asking about crop yields, and offering payments higher than last year’s earnings in return for signatures. Vale’s name was on the receipts. Vale wanted land access to

build a railway linking its coal mines to a deep-water port. Didi, one of the trade union founders of Affected by Vale network offered a poem, one that captures well the nature of the struggle.

*They move about as if they own the earth,
with receipts and whatever else they might need
to demonstrate that they are lords at
every level, above ground and sub-soil,
from beginning to end of life.
They conjugate verbs like divide, profit,
possess, command.
And us?
We respond with unite, share,
resist and dream.*

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