

JOURNAL FÜR ENTWICKLUNGSPOLITIK

vol. XXXII 4-2016

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS IN THE INDUSTRIALISED WORLD

Special Issue Guest Editors: Gertrude Saxinger, Gregor Seidl,
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Published by:
Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik
an den österreichischen Universitäten

Journal für Entwicklungspolitik (JEP)
Austrian Journal of Development Studies

Publisher: Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik an den
österreichischen Universitäten

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Essay

NICK KELESAU

STOP BARAM DAM

My Name is Nick Kelesau. I think I am the only Asian Hunting and Gathering person here at CHAGS¹. I am a Penan from Sarawak, a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo. We are traditionally a nomadic people who moved around in the forest living in simple huts hunting and harvesting wild plants for food. I was born in 1965. It was around the time my family settled and formed the village of Long Kerong, but we would still go out in the forest for weeks at a time living the nomadic life. When I was a boy my father would take me out in the forest and teach me many skills. We would take the blowpipe for hunting wild boar, deer, birds, monkeys, and for collecting rotan for mats and baskets, wild fern, leaves and other greens. Our main food was sago, which we get from a certain type of palm. If we find a grove of these trees we cut the select trunks and process it into a flour, which we can dry and keep for two to three weeks. This we share with all the people in our village. If we find a big fruit tree we sometimes need to cut the tree to harvest the fruit. We can only take so much for ourselves, so we tell all our neighbours. This way, they won't have to cut another tree, so the food is used efficiently and the forest is protected. If you ask, »Do Penan people love the forest?« I would say that we think of the forest like it is our body.

About 1980, when I was 15, we heard stories about logging downriver along the Middle Baram. We did not believe that they could ever reach our area, but within five years they were actually building camps on our traditional land. The legal term for this land is Native Customary Rights. We are granted the rights to this land by the constitution of Sarawak.

When the chainsaws are heard in the forest, the wild animals run away. The logging roads wash away, the rivers become muddy, and the fishing becomes hard. We cannot get our drinking water from a muddy stream. Our life suddenly becomes very difficult. My father, Kelesau Naan, was the headman of our village. He was aware of our rights and began to organise with our neighbouring villages, and they all decided to erect blockades to keep the loggers from our land. The police came and used tear gas on us and arrested my father and others. They were taken to the city of Miri and held there for about a month.

From this time, my father actively resisted the timber companies in every way. Within a few years, in 1998, he and others in our area brought a court case against the government for granting a logging concession, and against the logging company, Samling. The court had to acknowledge our rights over the land. Then, on October 23, 2007, Kelesau Naan told my mother he was going to check on his animal traps. He never came home. Soon all of our village went to search for him. We looked everywhere but found no sign of him. Weeks went by. Then about two months later local people found his bones in a place we had searched before. We strongly suspect that he did not die from natural causes. The police never investigated what had really happened to him.

At this time I gave up my job so I could continue the resistance work of my father to protect our land. I began to visit others who faced the same situation and advise them on their rights and how to resist. My mother often tried to convince me not to do this because she was afraid that something would happen to me. However, even until now I have continued.

In recent years the logging has only increased. Then, when the valuable trees are all taken, the company comes back with bulldozers and levels the land to create huge oil palm plantations. At this point the forest will never recover. The soil will be depleted and the chemicals used leave the area poisoned and barren.

Now, the government has devised a scheme called The Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy, or SCORE. The plan is in no way 'renewable'. They plan to build a total of 14 huge hydroelectric dams on every major river in Sarawak. The reservoirs will inundate vast tracts of the local peoples land, displacing up to 50,000 people. The Baram Dam is the next to be built. This is the river of my own people. Even though our village is

above the level to be flooded, 20,000 people will lose their homes and land from this dam alone. They will be forced into resettlement camps or will try to move up from the valley to lands that belong to others. Neither way is sustainable. The camps do not provide enough farmland and the high ground cannot support so many people. In effect, this will truly kill our way of life.

But the good news is that we have united our efforts to stop the dam. Two years ago, local residents and others from the area erected a blockade to stop construction of an access road and preparations for the dam construction. In spite of threats and interference by the Forest Department, we have maintained the blockades up to the present. On October 23, we hosted the World Indigenous Summit on Environment and Rivers, WISER. We invited anti-dam activists from all over the world with delegations from Brazil, Honduras, US, Myanmar, and India, among others. We hope to encourage a global solidarity movement to prevent destructive development in similar areas vital to the environmental health of our world. Please support our efforts by spreading the word to raise awareness with your voices, articles and letters to the Sarawak governments to STOP BARAM DAM.

1 This Essay is based on a speech that was delivered at the Eleventh Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS), September 7-11, 2015, Vienna.

Aníbal Quijano: Kolonialität der Macht, Eurozentrismus und Lateinamerika (es kommt darauf an 17). Wien/Berlin: Turia + Kant 2016, 122 Seiten, 16,00 Euro.

In den letzten Jahren ist es in der kritischen Entwicklungsforschung chic geworden, sich mit dem Label „dekolonial“ zu schmücken. Schließlich sind die wilden Zwillinge Postkolonialismus und Postdevelopment in die Jahre gekommen und heute zu etabliert, um noch ernsthaft als radikal gelten zu können. Zudem scheint in der krisenhaften Gegenwart wieder mehr materialistische Schärfe gefragt als zu jenen Zeiten, da nach der Moderne vermeintlich auch die Geschichte an ihr Ende gekommen war und die Kulturwissenschaften zu ihrem großen Siegeszug ansetzten. Von daher kommt eine intellektuelle Bewegung, die es sich zum Ziel gesetzt hat, die ewig unversöhnlichen Gegensätze von Ökonomie und Kultur, von Materialismus und Idealismus, von Sein und Bewusstsein zu verbinden, natürlich wie gerufen. Und noch etwas macht diese Strömung attraktiv: Ihre Vertreter_innen kommen aus Lateinamerika, jenem Subkontinent, der dem eurozentrischen

Imaginären über Jahrhunderte als Nicht-Ort der Geschichte, der Kultur und der Wissenschaft, als bloßer „Widerhall der Alten Welt“ gegolten hat¹. Jener Subkontinent aber auch, der als erste Kolonie und Schauplatz gefährlicher Subversion die Harmonie der europäischen Fortschrittsgeschichte immer wieder empfindlich gestört hat und zur Projektionsfläche für die revolutionären Phantasien der europäischen Linken wurde. Eine intellektuelle Gruppe, die aus der Marginalisierung des „Globalen Südens“ heraus in die eurozentrische Wissenschaft einbricht, ihre ewigen Dichotomien überwindet und das kapitalistisch-moderne Weltsystem in seinen Grundfesten herausfordert – das erscheint als das Höchstmaß möglicher Radikalität.

Nichtsdestotrotz bleibt das dekoloniale Denken im deutschsprachigen Raum ein Phantasma, das zwar immer wieder auftaucht, aber keine systematische Rezeption erfährt. Und so wird die „dekoloniale Option“ hierzulande gern essenziellistisch banalisiert – zur Romantisierung „indigenen Wissens“ auf der einen und zur „Eurozentrismus-Keule“ auf der anderen Seite. Diese stereotype Rezeption ist nicht zuletzt der Tatsache geschuldet, dass