



Peasant Protest as Environmental Protest. Some Cases from the 18th to the 20th Century

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Introduction

I Social history has more often than not focused on the study of typical industrial class protests with urban roots and predictable behaviour patterns from a modern rationalistic perspective. The current crisis of the discipline reflects the crisis of industrial society itself, the emergence of new social movements, and the rise of new issues and new means for the expression of protest. Furthermore, the

growing importance of the struggle for natural resources and Green political movements has led to the emergence of environmental conflicts as a historiographical subject.

This text aims to further explore this type of conflict from a theoretical point of view, whilst at the same time researching its practical dimension. We will start by applying the conceptual outline below to the case of peasants. Our intention is to discover the underlying logic in this type of conflict and to highlight its causes, its deepest roots. We reject any simplification based on class background, economic decline or poverty, or the simple effects of environmental damage.

To begin with, we will develop a theory on environmental conflicts from a historical perspective. Secondly, we will analyse the importance of environmental conflicts in a social context, placing particular emphasis on their impact on the relationship between man and nature. The practical cases covered in this article refer to peasants. The examples used are taken from a wide range of regions and time scales covering Africa, Asia, Latin America and Southern Europe during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century. This article does not seek to provide an exhaustive overview of environmental social unrest in the contemporary world; it endeavours, instead, to formulate a theoretical model for social protest and a proposal for interpretation. We conclude with a proposal allowing us to classify and, consequently, interpret the environmental conflicts staged by peasants, and their evolution, over the last two centuries.

The nature of environmental conflicts

In recent years, a trend has emerged in the fields of sociology, anthropology, ecological economics, and political ecology which has

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highlighted the importance of environmental conflicts and social protest. This historical current strives to show how a considerable part of past conflicts had one or several natural resources at their core, even in those moments of industrial civilisation when class conflicts were apparently hegemonic. Environmental conflict cannot be relegated to a socially marginal role or be dismissed as a historiographical fad. It is a fundamental part of social conflict, for several reasons; including the fact that, in an active or passive way, it is rooted in the very conditions of human existence and reproduction and implicates every level of the social hierarchy.

Environmental conflict must be positively or negatively evaluated according to whether it promotes or undermines sustainability. This is in contrast both with Marxism, which regards class conflict as always positive, and with liberal functionalism, which regards conflict as a negative expression of a society's organisational imbalance. In this perspective, conflict becomes one of the determining factors - although not the only and not always the main one - in environmental evolutionary dynamics. Environmental conflict can even produce changes in the relationship between nature and society.

It is true that some conflicts are more relevant than others in ecosocial dynamics, but this relation is not predetermined by a universal law; it derives from the specific organisation that each social metabolism establishes between its parts.¹ Each social metabolism produces specific conflict types and, consequently, different types of environmental conflict. For instance, in current societies, where social metabolism has an industrial base and its dimension is increasingly more global, we often see conflicts over waste management. Other conflicts arise at a practically planetary scale, such as

¹ On social metabolism, see M. Fischer-Kowalski, "Society's Metabolism: The Intellectual History of Materials Flow Analysis, part I, 1860-1970", in *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 2, 1998, pp. 61-77. M. Fischer Kowalsky, W. Hüttler, "Society's Metabolism: The Intellectual History of Material Flow Analysis, part II, 1970-1998", in *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 2, 1999, pp. 107-129. On agrarian metabolism, see also M. González de Molina, G. Guzmán Casado, *Tras los pasos de la insustentabilidad. Agricultura y Medio ambiente en perspectiva histórica (siglos XVIII-XX)*, Icaria, Barcelona 2006.

those sparked by global warming. Environmental conflict cannot be assigned an ontological dimension in socio-environmental change. It is not the only factor to be considered when analysing socio-environmental change; demographic, technological, economic or cultural changes play an important role.² Still, environmental conflict is one of the factors of socio-environmental change.

In accordance with these premises, we can differentiate between environmental conflicts of a reproductive nature and those of a distributive nature. This distinction is based on differences in resource management and on whether they result in an improvement, a deterioration, or a conservation of ecosystem sustainability. From our point of view, this distinction is fundamental for a correct classification and understanding of environmental conflicts. The issue is actually controversial, as reflected in the debate on the concept of “environmentalism of the poor”, introduced by Joan Martínez Alier and Ramachandra Guha.³ According to these authors, environmental struggles have occurred (as they still do today) in communities that did not necessarily possess an environmentalist ideology; however, these communities did in fact undertake defensive action regarding environmental conditions, access to natural resources, and their

² V. Toledo, M. González de Molina, “El metabolismo social: las relaciones entre la sociedad y la naturaleza”, in *El paradigma ecológico en las ciencias sociales*, F. Garrido, M. González, J.L. Serrano, J.L. Solana (eds), Icaria, Barcelona 2006, pp. 85-112.

³ R. Guha, “The Environmentalism of the Poor”, in *Between Resistance and Revolution. Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, R. Fox, O. Starn (eds), Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1997, pp. 17-40. R. Guha, “From Experience to Theory. Traditions of Social-Ecological Research in Modern India”, in *Sustainability and the Social Sciences. A Cross-disciplinary Approach to Integrating Environmental Considerations in Theoretical Reorientation*, E. Becker, T. Jahn, (eds) UNESCO/ISOE/Zed Books, London 1999, pp. 96-112. R. Guha, and J. Martínez-Alier, *Varieties of environmentalism. Essays North and South*, Earthscan, London 1997. J. Martínez-Alier, “Justicia ambiental, sustentabilidad y valoración”, in *Naturaleza Transformada*, M. González de Molina, J. Martínez Alier (eds), Estudios de Historia Ambiental en España, Icaria, Barcelona 2001, pp. 289-337. J. Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres. Conflictos ambientales y lenguajes de valoración*, Icaria, Barcelona 1995.

egalitarian distribution. This thesis contradicts Inglehart's view that environmentalism is typically found in societies that have reached a certain level of social welfare and can hence concern themselves with "post-materialistic" issues such as environmental protection.⁴

Although there is considerable evidence that certain conflicts can be categorized as "environmentalism of the poor", not all environmental conflicts are environmentalist in nature, nor, of course, are all environmentalist protests led by the poor. Our proposal is to reserve the concept of *environmental* conflict simply for all conflict over a resource. None of the actors involved need manifest an implicit intention of sustainability for the definition to apply, and the main issue does not necessarily have to be resource management. Only those environmental conflicts in which there is an explicit intention to conserve resources or to strive for a higher degree of environmental justice, however, can be classified as *environmentalist*, because in this case sustainability is the declared objective. Hence, under our definition environmentalist conflicts are a special case of environmental conflict where the intention of one of the parties to conserve resources in a sustainable direction is explicitly manifested. The question arises whether the definition "environmentalist" applies to struggles for the conservation of one or several resources carried on by social movements before Green movements appeared on the scene. Obviously the answer is yes. It would actually be a good idea to further distinguish between *environmentalist* and *Green* conflicts. The latter term should be reserved for the current Green movement and only gained currency in the Sixties and Seventies. Such a distinction could help us to differentiate between movements animated by an explicitly Green ideology and those which, while not Green, may be still regarded as environmentalist, even though they have different ideological motivations (e.g., religious) or objectives (e.g., survival).

We also need clear criteria to differentiate between environmental and environmentalist conflicts in the course of time. One way would be to take into account the protest's objective and role as regards the

⁴ R. Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1977.

sustainable reproduction of socio-environmental conditions. To this effect, the distinction posed by Guha and Gadgil between *intramodal* and *intermodal* conflicts may be useful.⁵ The example of peasant protests may help clarify this distinction. When the *peasant* or *agricultural* use of resources comes into contact with the *industrial* use (based on very different economic, ecological and social principles), an *intermodal* conflict arises. The objective of the protest is to defend the peasants' particular mode of use of natural resources against industrial society's attempts to subjugate it or transform it. The defence of communal assets that played such a central part in the peasant protests of the 19th and 20th centuries are an ideal example of intermodal conflicts.

On the other hand, when peasants dispute with other social groups, or among themselves, over the access and allocation of natural resources or the goods or services derived from them, within an already established pattern of resource use, the conflict is *intramodal*. A typical example would be a dispute for access to water between farmers in irrigated areas. Other disputes that fit in this category are those that arose between peasant communities in the 18th and 19th centuries over access to common land, boundaries, or exploitation quotas in communal pastures.

We can regard intramodal conflicts as distributive and intermodal conflicts as reproductive. It is especially in the latter that sustainability may be at stake, and these are hence more easily categorised as environmentalist conflicts. In other terms, intermodal conflicts are more likely to provide favourable conditions for the rise of environmentalist and Green protests. Conversely, struggles for sustainability do not usually feature prominently in intramodal conflicts, even when the dispute is explicitly over resources or environmental damage. This leads to the connection between conflicts and socio-environmental dynamics. What criteria should we use to define it? We should consider at least two: The objectives pursued by the parties involved in the conflict, and the impact of the conflict itself on the environment. First of all, we should look at the use of resources promoted by the

⁵ M. Gadgil, R. Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, pp. 11-68.

protesters: Is it a sustainable use? Is the promoted use more sustainable than the existing one, or than the one to be implemented? For example, the Green movement and an irrigation-dependent community will hold different views on the sustainability requirements of water management, with the latter usually demanding more water and reservoirs. These two different viewpoints reflect different, and often conflictive, intended uses of resources. Still, Mexican peasant communities' efforts to keep resources out of the market, as part of their struggle to stop the drying out of the lakes along the upper course of the Lerma river, protect the lakeside ecosystem and can hence be regarded as Green, even though they are not framed in a "Western Green" discourse, as Martínez Alier argues.⁶

But what is sustainability? The definition given by the Brundtland Report is well known: It consists of the capacity of a social ecosystem to meet the basic needs of the population without degrading the natural resource base. To evaluate sustainability we have to take into account basic criteria such as productivity, stability, resilience, autonomy, and equity in the distribution of goods and services produced. However, there are no single parameters for measuring the sustainability of a specific social metabolism. In fact, sustainability is an objective to be reached, and can be measured in degrees, being a theoretical concept that depends on the scale of time and space considered. What may be sustainable at one scale may not be considered sustainable at another. According to exponents of New Ecology,⁷ no ecosystemic equilibrium can be maintained over time; hence, the unsustainability of an agro-ecosystem cannot be measured in relation to a non-existent optimum state.

Environmental history has demonstrated that in nature one does not find a single equilibrium, but a series of equilibriums, and that ecosystems shift from one equilibrium to another. In the dynamics of ecosystems, unexpected changes are often produced, which are the

⁶ J. Martínez Alier, "Temas de Historia Económico-Ecológica", in *Ayer*, 11, 1993, pp. 19-48.

⁷ I. Scoones, "New Ecology and the Social Sciences: What Prospects for a Fruitful Engagement?", in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28, 1999, pp. 479-507.

result of many interacting factors. This is why resilience and stability have gained special significance in the evaluation of sustainability. Different resource management methods achieve the objective of sustainability at a higher or lower degree. What is sustainable today may be unsustainable tomorrow, not only because of scientific developments but due to the new equilibriums produced by ecosystem dynamics, which in their turn call for new resource management methods. It is not possible to abstractly pronounce an agroecosystem to be sustainable or not; it is useful, instead, to evaluate the degree of sustainability of the modes of use and organisation of a given agroecosystem compared to others over a long period of time.⁸ We think that social conflict between different resource uses is relevant to explain socio-environmental change in a historical context.

Secondly, it seems appropriate to set a general criterion that could be applied to any type of conflict, whether environmental or not, with or without an explicit intention of sustainability. This criterion should take into account the environmental impact that any protest has on the environment and on the relationship that society establishes with nature, i.e., on social metabolism. Any social practice has an impact on the environment, whether intentional or unwitting. For example, the defence of the communal forest that many communities have engaged in for a long time, keeping it out of the market and preventing it from being cut down, has had a positive impact from a sustainability point of view. Many examples could be cited. In the 1970s, indigenous Himalayans organized in a movement known as “Chipko” to prevent deforestation for the purpose of industrialisation of forests that were essential for the survival of indigenous communities.⁹ More than a century before, rural Galician (NW Spain) communities fought to preserve communal land from attempts at

⁸ Obviously the application of sustainability has many more implications than those mentioned here for the study of agrarian systems in present times and from a historical perspective. A more involved discussion applied to the study of agriculture can be found in González de Molina, Guzmán Casado, *Tras los pasos*, cit., pp. 16 ff.

⁹ R. Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1989.

privatisation and industrialisation by the conservative Spanish governments. This had a decisive influence on the survival of an agriculture based on solar energy.¹⁰ On the other hand, other European farm workers' struggles determined an increase in labour costs that led to the mechanisation of most agricultural tasks. The mechanisation process formed part of the technological package that came with the "green revolution", bringing on the current rural environmental crisis.¹¹ For example, in Andalusia (southern Spain), in the late 1970s land occupations by farm workers (Sindicato de Obreros del Campo [Trade Union of Rural Workers]) led to the conversion of pastureland into intensively exploited, mechanized farmland, causing a reduction in biodiversity.¹² Elsewhere, similar protests carried out by farmers or local communities, demanding more reservoirs or the transfer of water from other basins, have often led to analogous results. Such demands determine an increase in the cost of energy and materials, and raise the degree of unsustainability.

Finally, and with regard to these last examples, it is worth examining the relationship that environmental conflicts have maintained and continue to maintain with class conflicts. There are those who think, for instance, that the disputes between farmers in irrigated lands throughout contemporary history are just another form of class struggle. However, these two types of conflict are essentially different in nature; although, under certain circumstances and at specific moments in the past, many environmental and even environmentalist conflicts were, in fact, conflicts between classes as they are conventionally understood. Indeed, in some societies conflicts over resources take

¹⁰ X. Balboa, *O monte en Galicia*, Xerais, Vigo 1990.

¹¹ This is not to say that farmers' pitiful conditions of life and work were not improved.

¹² On the history of the Sindicato de Obreros del Campo [Trade Union of Rural Workers], see R. Morales Ruiz, "Aproximación a la historia del Sindicato de Obreros del Campo en Andalucía", in *La Historia de Andalucía a debate (T. I.): Campesinos y Jornaleros*, M. González de Molina (ed.), Anthropos, Barcelona 2000, pp. 179-206. L. Ocaña, *Los Orígenes del SOC (De las Comisiones de Jornaleros al Primer Congreso, 1975-77)*, Atrapasueños, Madrid 2006.

centre stage in a social conflict situation and become the basic grounds for confrontation between the main social groups involved.

The relevance of a conflict over the use of public woodland in a society such as Spain in the later 19th or early 20th centuries is not the same as it was two centuries before. In earlier times, resources obtained from woodlands were essential for farming economies, and not only for their poorest sector. Spanish historiography has demonstrated that in the 18th century a large part of rural protests were centred on the defence of rural produce against attempts at usurpation by the nobility. This type of protest took centre stage in antifeudal protest, and has hence received much attention from historians. While studies on this phenomenon tend to focus on class issues, the environmental component also played a role in them, if we consider that the communal lands offered essential resources such as wood, pasture and nutrients for traditional organic agriculture.¹³ A more important social unrest developed throughout Spain in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when the State attempted to privatise communal land to place it on the free market.¹⁴ Nevertheless, unlike the earlier protests to maintain organic agriculture in the 18th century, these later conflicts were overshadowed in histories of the period by the prominence of workers' protests.

Our thesis is that peasant conflicts frequently had a strong environmental component throughout history, and many of them have been environmental, and even environmentalist. To understand the

¹³ M. González de Molina, A. Ortega Santos, "Bienes comunes y conflictos por los recursos en las sociedades rurales, siglos XIX y XX", in *Historia Social*, 2000, 38, pp. 95-116. A. Ortega Santos, *La Tragedia de los cerramientos. La desarticulación de la comunalidad en la Provincia de Granada*, Fundación de Historia Social, Valencia 2002.

¹⁴ F. Cobo, S. Cruz, M. González de Molina, "Privatización del monte y protesta campesina en Andalucía Oriental, 1836-1920", in *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 65, 1992, pp. 253-302. I. Iriarte Goñi, *Bienes comunales y capitalismo agrario en Navarra*, Serie Estudios M.A.P.A., Madrid 1997. A. Cabana, "La política forestal en la España contemporánea", in *De la conservación a la ecología. Estudios históricos sobre el uso de los recursos naturales y la sostenibilidad*, M.L. Allemeyer, M. Jakubowski-Tiessen, S. Rus Rufino (eds), Klartext, Essen 2007, pp. 173-186.

dynamics of peasant conflicts as environmental conflicts, one must start from an adequate understanding of the nature of peasantry. It is not possible to give a detailed presentation of the concept of peasantry from an environmental perspective, but some points need to be taken into consideration in our theory of conflict. From our point of view, peasants are a social group who in spite of their history and being subject to change are associated with economies based on organic energy, which are therefore negatively impacted by the industrial use of natural resources.¹⁵ As a number of studies explain, organic economies are dependent on solar energy and therefore subject to strong limitations:¹⁶ dependency on land for energy and material, the impossibility of sustained economic growth,¹⁷ and the need to maintain a rigid balance between land to be used to feed humans, pasture land, and forests. This need is also accentuated by difficulties in transporting energy and material over long distances. This explains the high degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency of peasant communities, as well as the fact that they produce low surpluses. These limitations can only be overcome by massive fossil fuel

¹⁵ An important development of this thesis can be found in M. González de Molina, E. Sevilla Guzmán, “Perspectivas socioambientales de la historia del movimiento campesino andaluz”, in *La Historia de Andalucía a debate I: Campesinos y Jornaleros*, M. González de Molina (ed.), Anthropos, Barcelona 2000 pp. 239-288. In this article, the concept of “peasant” is mainly referred to family farmers, as distinct both from large-scale exploitations in general, and from industrial farms based on the exploitation of fossil fuels.

¹⁶ E. Wrigley, “Dos tipos de capitalismo, dos tipos de crecimiento”, in *Estudios d’Història Econòmica*, 1, 1989, pp. 89-109. E. Wrigley, *Cambio, continuidad y azar. Carácter de la Revolución Industrial Inglesa*, Crítica, Barcelona, 1993. R.P. Sieferle, “The Energy System-A Basic Concept of Environmental History”, in *The Silent Countdown. Essays in European Environmental History*, P. Brimblecombe, C. Pfister (eds), Springer, Berlin 1990, pp. 9-20. R.P. Sieferle “¿Qué es la Historia Ecológica?”, in *Naturaleza Transformada* cit., pp. 31-55.

¹⁷ Daly has coined the concept of “stationary state economy”, i.e., one that is based on organic agriculture. This does not mean that such economies don’t go through changes, but that their dependency on solar energy does not allow major economic growth. H.E. Daly, *Toward a Steady-State Economy*, W.W. Freeman, San Francisco 1997.

consumption, both in agriculture and in the industry.¹⁸

Peasant practices were, overall, sustainable because maintaining an adequate balance of resources was fundamental for the survival of families. The price of unsustainability in organic economies was hunger and illness. The realization of this, however, should not be confused with a utopian vision of peasants. Since the introduction of capital and external inputs in farming, peasant resource management and land use have progressively become less sustainable. We believe that in many places and moments in time it is hard to understand this process without paying due attention to conflict. Conflict takes on an environmentalist aspect when the confrontation is between different modes of resource management.

A specific example relevant to the comprehension of environmental peasant conflict is that of communal property and communal use. Communal property was needed for production based on solar energy wherever there was little possibility to introduce large quantities of energy from outside. As long as the basic source of energy was the biomass harvested on the land, stability depended on the fluctuating balance between the production of food, forage and fuel. The factors of production and consumption - land, water, animal power, manure, and human labour - were determined by the extension and availability of land in each community.¹⁹

However, the domestic farming group could only manage one part of the agroecosystem. The management and control of the agroecosystem as a whole was essential for its survival, and this task fell to the peasant community. Local communities had extensive competences over all production factors. They owned or administered large extensions of land, the decisive production factor, and managed many other aspects of production. The maintenance of property and communal use was decisive to ensure survival of peasant use of natural resources; hence, a significant part of peasant conflict

¹⁸ F. Krausmann, H. Haberl, R.P. Sieferle, "Socio-ecological Regime Transitions in Austria and the United Kingdom", in *Ecological Economics*, 65, 1, 2008, pp. 187-201.

¹⁹ González de Molina, Guzmán Casado, *Tras los pasos* cit.

in the transition period from organic agriculture to industrialised agriculture was about the defence of these spaces against nation states' attempts to privatise and market. This does not mean that communal property by definition was more sustainable than private property, nor that the latter was unsustainable. Today, it is common to find examples of communal land managed in an unsustainable way.²⁰ But in the context of agriculture based on solar energy, the defence of communal spaces was essential for the maintaining of land equilibria and, hence, for the sustainability of the peasant economy

For a typology of peasant protest

In the first two sections of this paper, we have developed a general theory of environmental conflicts and their application to the peasant world. In this last section, we are going to propose a typology for environmental conflicts involving peasants from the 18th to the 20th century. We have not included in our analysis conflicts of a similar nature (e.g., over fishing resources), but involving different social groups.

In our theoretical proposal we have proposed a basic criterion to differentiate environmental protest in terms of sustainability, i.e., the use or uses that are promoted in the conflict. This criterion is essential for our distinction between environmental and environmentalist conflicts. Reproductive intermodal conflicts have the most significant impact on sustainability, but this does not mean that purely environmentalist conflicts cannot have an impact on social metabolism.

Now, we have also pointed out that an important element in the theorisation of environmental conflicts lies in the protest's discourse type. Relevant bibliography reveals that it is not just environmental conflicts established around an explicitly Green ideology or discourse that promote more sustainable management methods.²¹ On the contrary, most peasant conflict throughout history has been

²⁰ Grupo de Estudos da Propiedade Comunal, *Os montes veciñais en man común: o patrimonio silente. Naturaleza, economía, identidade e democracia na Galicia rural*, Vigo, Xerais 2006.

²¹ Guha, *The Unquiet Woods* cit. Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres* cit.

expressed in other languages drawing on the peasants' own historical experience. These were often languages of a mythical-religious type, reflecting ideas about property rights that differ from the liberal view. Others were simply down-to-earth discourses in defence of customary rights of access to natural resources. In both cases, these protest languages are frequently linked to the defence of the peasant moral economy. From our perspective, it is of little importance that the language adopted is not linked to explicitly Green ideologies. We believe that it is more important to determine the material objectives of protest. As we shall see, conflicts have even developed between peasants' management of resources and Green proposals, or proposals influenced by Green ideals.

In practice, and until very recently, peasant protests have been informed by discourses of the types mentioned above. Scholars have highlighted a trend among peasants in different parts of the world to frame their relationship with nature in religious terms. The most significant example is that of the sacred character of certain forests in different cultures in Asia and Africa, which has served the function of preserving large parts of the forest from economic exploitation.²² In the Kirinyaga district in Kenya, sacred forests were ceremonial places or inhabited by powerful spirits, which protected them from being converted into farmland.²³ In Southern Africa, sacred forests also functioned as reserves in times of drought and famine. The colonial administration, and Christianisation, often came up against such religious forms of relationship with nature. Environmental protest is frequently framed in religious terms.²⁴ This is the case, for

²² Gadgil, Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature* cit. B.A. Byers, R. Cunliffe, A.T. Hudak, "Linking the Conservation of Culture and Nature: A Case Study of Sacred Forest in Zimbabwe", in *Human Ecology*, 29, 2, 2001, pp. 187-218. R. L. Wadley, C.J.P. Colfer, "Sacred Forest, Hunting and Conservation in West Kalimantan, Indonesia", in *Human Ecology*, 2004, 32, 3, pp. 313-338.

²³ A.P. Castro, "The Political Economy of Colonial Farm Forestry in Kenya: The View from Kirinyaga", in *Tropical Deforestation. The Human Dimension*, L. Sponsel, T.M. Headland, R.E. Bailey, (eds), Columbia University Press, New York 1996, pp. 122-143.

²⁴ Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres* cit.

example, with the Chipko movement in India, where Ramachandra Guha found a considerable influence of Gandhi's thought.²⁵

In other cases, and particularly that of peasant conflicts in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, protest discourses were centred on customary rights of use or property rights, and on the rejection of the notion of private property imposed after the liberal revolution. The lack of title deeds on common property was made up for by the claiming of possession from time immemorial of rights of use and property.²⁶ In areas under colonial control we also find radically different conceptions of property rights at the centre of environmental protest discourses. In many cases, the frontiers set by the colonial powers at the end of the 19th century did not respect pre-existing situations. This was the case with the conflict described by Donald S. Moore in southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), which arose in 1902 between chief Tanwena, on one side, and the colonial administration and the new white landowners, on the other. The main argument of Tanwena's claim was that the territory he controlled extended to both sides of the frontier between Rhodesia and Portuguese Africa (now Mozambique).²⁷

Different conceptions of property rights were also to the fore in the conflict that broke out between the Maori and the British Crown as a result of the interpretation of a treaty signed in 1840.²⁸ The English version of the treaty transferred the sovereignty of the Maori territories to Queen Victoria. This was used in the following century as a pretext to seize part of the territories and impose limits on the Maoris' management of the local agroecosystems. The Maori version, instead, only granted the Queen a limited rule and guaranteed Maori ownership of the land, forests, fishing grounds and other natural resources. In Mangatu, between 1880 and 1920, the Maori

²⁵ Guha, Martínez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism* cit.

²⁶ Balboa, *O monte* cit.

²⁷ D.S. Moore, "Contesting Terrains in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands: Political Ecology, Ethnography and Peasant Resource Struggles", in *Economic Geography*, 69, 4, 1993, pp. 380-401.

²⁸ B. Coombes, "The Historicity of Institutional Trust and the Alienation of Maori Land for Catchment Control at Mangatu, New Zealand", in *Environment and History*, 9, 2003, pp. 333-359.

tribe lost much of their forest land, which were confiscated by the Crown and seized by white farmers, who deforested much of the land to convert it into pasture. However, the social and governmental concern over soil erosion that developed in the 1950s attributed the principal responsibility to the Maori's inefficient land management. As a result, most of the areas subjected to forced reforestation were those that were still owned by the Maori. These past problems still weigh negatively on the implementation of environmental policies to this day, as the Maori are of course wary. In this case, the conflict arose between Maori traditional rights and liberal conceptions of property, ownership and sovereignty; but these were nevertheless, in their essence, environmentalist conflicts.

Thus, throughout history, most peasant protests of an environmentalist nature were expressed in languages that were not explicitly Green. Joan Martínez Alier describes many environmentalist peasant protests that saw the participation of a whole range of local and international environmental organisations.²⁹ It is difficult to clearly differentiate types of discourse, if we look at cases such as the destruction of mangroves in several parts of the world in order to set up shrimp farms, or protests against oilfields. The two most famous examples of peasant protest (which over time have incorporated elements of Green discourse, especially in the discourses of their leaders) are those that involved the Chipko movement and the Brazilian *seringueiros*.³⁰ Such cases, however, are very recent and still rare. In the typology of environmental peasant conflicts we are proposing, we have preferred to differentiate exclusively between environmental and environmentalist conflicts. The main reason is that they are the two basic forms assumed in history by conflicts over resources involving peasant communities.

Thus, the typology of contemporary environmental peasant conflicts that we propose is based on the sustainability of the management methods promoted by the different parties in the conflict, and allows us to differentiate between environmental and environmentalist conflicts.

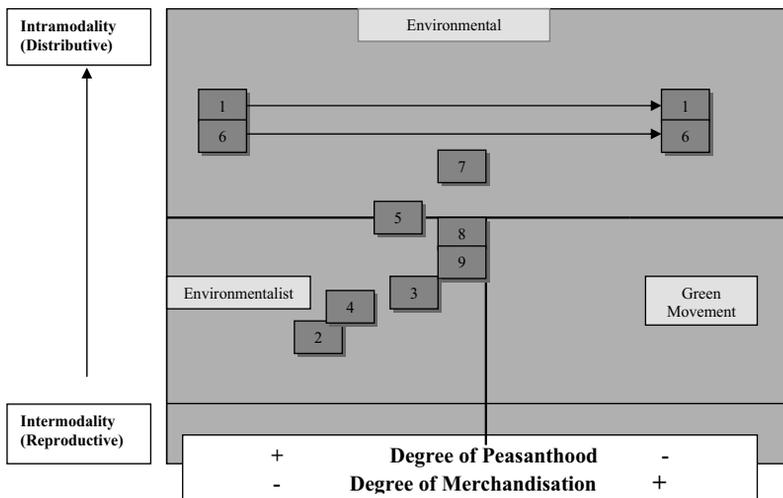
²⁹ Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres* cit.

³⁰ Guha, Martínez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism* cit.

We have not assigned the same importance to the presence or not of an explicitly environmental ideology, having observed the rarity of its occurrence in the history of peasant protest discourse. This does not imply, however, that all peasant conflicts are environmentalist conflicts.

Our typology is illustrated in Figure 1. It aims to offer an interpretive framework that we believe is valid for peasant environmental conflicts, and possibly also for other types of environmental conflicts. The different types of peasant environmental conflict are described by two value axes, one indicating sustainability, the other the degree of peasantry.

We believe that, as the market encroaches onto the rural world, the constituent elements of peasantry, as defined in this article, gradual-



<i>Key. Typology of Environmental Conflicts</i>	
1/ Dispute over Access to Water	8/ Protest against mining impacts/pollution
2/ Defence of Traditional Water Management Systems	9/ Conflicts against environmental policies
3/ Defence of Common Property	10/ Defence of Indigenous Territories
4/ Defence of Common Uses	
5/ Woodland Harvesting Practices	
6/ Territorial Disputes	
7/ Agricultural Reform Claims as Distribution	

Figure 1. Typology of environmental peasant conflicts

ly decline. Exclusively distributive conflicts have been abundant in the agricultural social metabolism, even before the 18th century. When industrial metabolism takes over agricultural production, the probability of conflict between different forms of management increases. However, the stronger the involvement of the market, the less probability there is of environmentalist intermodal conflicts arising. Environmentalist conflicts may then acquire a Green slant, but in this case fall outside the scope of this article, which only deals with conflicts involving peasant communities. Our typology proposal does not aim to cover absolutely all forms of environmental peasant conflict, but it does endeavour to offer a general interpretive framework that they can all fit into. Consequently, this typology is open to subsequent inclusions.

The first two types of conflict in our typology are those that arise around access to and management of water. We have distinguished it in two types, according to the previously established criteria. Environmental conflicts over water distribution are very common in the peasant mode of resource use; in these, what is at stake is not the management methods, only the distribution of the resource. An example of a conflict over water, which has been going on in the Purepecha plateau in Michoacan over the last 40 years, was illustrated by Patricia Ávila.³¹ Anthropologists have described a number of such disputes between indigenous communities for access to and control of springs for human use, irrigation and farming activities. The settlement of the Purepecha plateau controversy was achieved through an intercommunity pact to finance all the work and canalisation needed to ensure a minimum water supply for all. This kind of conflict is not unusual in present-day Mexico, where the expansion of capitalism is currently in full swing; a similar dispute over water, however, was recorded in the region of Toluca as early as the 18th century.³²

³¹ P. Avila García, *Escasez de Agua en una región indígena. El caso de la Meseta Purépecha*, El Colegio de Michoacán, Morelia 1996.

³² M.P. Iracheta Cenecorta, "La disputa por los recursos acuíferos en la región circundante a la villa de Toluca, México, siglo XVIII", in *IX Simposio de Historia Económica, Condiciones Medioambientales, Desarrollo Humano y Crecimiento Económico*, Departamento de Historia Económica, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Barcelona 2002.

Another, substantially different case is that of conflicts in which the objective of the protest is to defend traditional water management systems, which essentially means irrigation. Such conflicts are much more complex, as they involve water consumers, the State, industries, etc. In the case of Mexico, they generally involve the transfer of water as a common good to private subjects in the context of an overarching discourse preaching a development model where commonly held goods appear as hindrances from the past. In all cases, water is converted to industrial and energy producing uses. In Mexico, this situation led to a series of organised protests where a community discourse was formulated in defence of common ownership, and the protesters even took legal action to defend their water rights. There were also forms of violent direct action against installations, constructions and infrastructure, and hydraulic works. Some cases are described by Castañeda González for the area of Toluca, and by Alejandro Tortolero for Chalco.³³ Similar conflicts have also been documented in colonial and post-colonial India.³⁴

A similar case, but made worse by the addition of a genocide angle, was the protest against the construction of hydroelectric facilities in Guatemala (the “Chixoy Case”).³⁵ This conflict is an example of a confrontation between peasant uses and large state infrastructure projects, an intermodal protest aimed at defending people’s subsistence means. A similar case was that of Narmada Bachao Andolan in central India.

³³ R. Castañeda González, “Los primeros pasos de la centralización del agua en México, El caso del río Nexapa, Puebla, México 1880-1910”, in IX Simposio de Historia Económica, Condiciones Medioambientales, Desarrollo Humano y Crecimiento Económico, Departamento de Historia Económica, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Barcelona 2002. A. Tortolero, “Tierra, agua y bosques en Chalco (1890-1925), la innovación tecnológica y sus repercusiones en un medio rural”, in *Agricultura Mexicana, Crecimiento e Innovaciones*, M. Menegus, V.A. Tortolero (eds), Instituto Mora, Colegio de Michoacán, Colegio de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, México 1999, pp. 174-236.

³⁴ V. Saravanan, “Technological Transformation and Water Conflicts in the Bhavani River Basin of Tamil Nadu, 1930-1970”, in *Environment and History*, 7, 3, 2001, pp. 289-334.

³⁵ V. Shiva, *Las guerras del agua. Contaminación, privatización y negocio*, Icaria, Barcelona 2004.

This protest against the construction of hydroelectric dams involving the displacement of several peasant communities attained emblematic status and global exposure.³⁶ In Africa, the construction of the Cahora Bassa dam in Mozambique in the early 1970s also entailed peasant population displacement. This dispute generated a cycle of conflicts where environmentalist claims interwove with the armed confrontation that arose following the Portuguese colony's decolonisation.³⁷

Protests in defence of common property and communal uses have occurred extremely frequent ever since the 18th century in the context of the confrontation between peasant and industrial uses. This form of conflict is the most historiographically interesting and relevant of all. Resources such as forests, pastures, hunting grounds, collective manure heaps, shifting cultivation, etc. are essential for agricultural societies to run properly. It is not surprising that privatisation and marketing from the 18th century onwards posed a threat to the functioning of agricultural social metabolism, and consequently gave rise to frequent conflicts. To better interpret this process, however, it is important to differentiate between conflicts in defence of ownership and conflicts in defence of communal uses. Intermodal conflict is usually regarded as a defence of agricultural societies' rights of use, but it occurs in the context of a wide range of ownership forms. Resource ownership was not always strictly communal. Resources could be directly owned by peasant or indigenous communities, but there were often other owners; notably, common resources could be formally owned by the State, the local government, or the nobility, but still subjected to exploitation by peasant communities.

Conflict is sometimes characterized as a fight for property rights; for example, against the attempts of the liberal state to transfer peasant communities' property rights to the State or town councils. Cases such as that of Galicia (northwestern Spain) and northern Portugal throughout the 19th and 20th centuries show how the State denied

³⁶ Shiva *Las guerras del agua* cit

³⁷ A. Isaacman, C. Sneddon, "Toward a Social and a Environmental History of the Building of the Cahora Bassa Dam", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 4, 2000, pp. 597-632.

the existence of common property. Nation-states privatised or commercially exploited common forest resources. This form of conflict is clearly aimed at the defence of common property rights but also, and particularly, of peasant forms of management. This is proved by the fact that many communities opted for privatising the community lands themselves. Local authorities divided the land among neighbours in order to preserve the multifunctional management of the old communal areas. In these cases privatisation allowed peasant management to persist until the middle of the 20th century.³⁸ These examples demonstrate that the degree of sustainability does not depend strictly on the form of land ownership, but rather on how the land is used.

Conflicts against the privatisation of common property all over Europe were widespread throughout the 19th century. Spain provides a number of good case-studies.³⁹ Here a large number of conflicts have been studied, including open and even violent disputes, as well as covert ones. All arose over the liberal state's confiscation of common lands. In many cases, despite being officially owned by the town councils, in practice the land was used by the locals. Thus, throughout the 19th century communities reacted to confiscations by seizures and illegal occupations. The struggle for the returning of common assets lived on even after privatisation, and was reflected in left wing parties' programs during the Second Republic. There were also conflicts in defence of common property in colonised countries, but in this case they were in defence of indigenous territories, as we shall see later.

In many cases, peasants' protests are exclusively aimed at defending rights of commons against their restriction or total cancelling by different liberal state bodies in Europe, or colonial administrations elsewhere, e.g. in Bengal.⁴⁰ The commercial exploitation of common

³⁸ Balboa, *O monte* cit. D. Soto, *Historia dunha agricultura sustentable. Transformacións productivas na agricultura galega contemporánea*, Xunta de Galicia, Santiago 2006. D. Freire, "Os baldíos da discordia: as comunidades locais e o Estado", in *Mundo rural. Transformação e resistencia na Península Ibérica (século XX)*, D. Freire, I. Fonseca, P. Godinho (eds), Edições Colibrí, Lisboa 2004, pp. 191-224.

³⁹ González de Molina, Ortega Santos, *Bienes comunes y conflictivos* cit

⁴⁰ K. Sivaramakrishnan, "A Limited Forest Conservancy in Southwest Bengal, 1864-1912", in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56,1, 1997, pp 75-112.

spaces (mostly, but not exclusively, forest areas) clashed head on with peasant exploitation. This form of management, much more diversified than, and considered to be incompatible with, scientific forest exploitation, developed in the 19th century. The peasant communities saw their basic resources put at risk: land for pasture, wood for construction or as a source of energy, products from the forests used as food supplements or as medicine, or the scrubs used as crop fertiliser.⁴¹ These limitations to use gave rise to conflicts both in Europe and in the colonial territories.⁴² The anticolonial uprising against German occupation in Tanzania between 1905 and 1907 has been recently reinterpreted as having been sparked by the colonial administration's imposing of limits on traditional uses of the forest. The uprising began in the exact places where the impact of the prohibition was strongest and commercial exploitation was being implemented. The German victory brought on even further restriction of indigenous forest use.⁴³

The most evident example of the limitations imposed by liberal states on common usage of woods and forests is the restricting of shifting cultivation. The forestry services that were organised worldwide in the second half of the 19th century believed that this practice depleted the soil and provoked erosion. Limitations to shifting cultivation and conflicts around this restriction have been described with reference to India, Indonesia and Europe (notably Galicia in Spain).⁴⁴ These studies prove that shifting cultivation (as a complementary ac-

⁴¹ Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. There is abundant literature about the multifunctionality of common spaces. For example: Gadhil, Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature* cit. X. Balboa, "L'utilizzazione del monte nella Galizia del secolo XIX", in *Quaderni Storici*, 81, 1982, pp. 883-872., N.L. Peluso, "Fruit Trees and Family Trees in an Anthropogenic Forest: Ethics of Access, Property Zones, and Environmental Change in Indonesia", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38, 3, 1996, pp. 510-548. Ortega Santos, *La Tragedia de los cerramientos* cit. T. Sunseri, "Reinterpreting a Colonial Rebellion: Forestry and Social Control in German East Africa, 1874-1915", in *Environmental History*, 8, 3, 2003, pp. 430-451.

⁴² Gadhil, Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature* cit. González de Molina, Ortega Santos, *Bienes comunes y conflictivos* cit

⁴³ T. Sunseri, *Reinterpreting a Colonial Rebellion* cit

⁴⁴ Gadhil, Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature* cit. Peluso, *Fruit Trees and Family Trees* cit. Balboa, *O monte* cit.

tivity of sedentary peasant communities in Galicia and Indonesia or as a main activity in the case of India) was a perfectly regulated practice with set rotation shifts that were sufficiently distanced to ensure the regeneration of nutrients, in some cases through the reforestation of the land when the cultivation shift was over. Restriction of shifting cultivation may cause significant changes in the social metabolism of affected communities or even their complete sedentarisation.⁴⁵

The heading “woodland harvesting practices” covers a type of conflict that is directly linked to conflict over common property and uses, but embraces a much more extensive reality. Protests against loss of ownership or against a prohibition to continue using a common asset frequently adopt the strategy of continuing, both individually and collectively, peasant uses that have been banned. Pasture, hunting, harvesting of various products, all these practices become criminal acts in the eyes of the administration. Under this regard, this type of conflict is not different from the environmentalist conflicts discussed above. It is, however, specifically characterized by the prohibition to exploit woodland. Furthermore, it remains within the boundaries of peasant uses of resources: management does not come into question, only access. Thus, such a conflict may arise between different communities, within the community itself, or between the community and the local authorities or nobility. In early to mid-19th century Spain, as pressure increased on resources, for demographic reasons or due to the opening of new commercial opportunities,⁴⁶ conflicts over woodland pasture multiplied. Some were over access to pastureland that had been previously available to several communities, others broke out between peasants and local oligarchies.

Conflicts over the ownership of private or community areas that

⁴⁵ N.L. Peluso, *Rich Forest, Poor People. Resources Control and Resistance in Java*, University of California Press, Los Angeles 1992. Gadhill, Guha, *The Use and Abuse of Nature* cit.

⁴⁶ C.F. Velasco Souto, “Conflictos sobre montes en la Galicia de la primera mitad del siglo XIX; una etapa en la larga lucha contra la privatización”, in *Historia y Economía del bosque en la Europa del Sur (siglos XVIII-XX)*, J.A. Sebastián Amarilla, R. Uriarte Ayo (eds), *Monografías de Historia Rural 1*, Sociedad Española de Historia Agraria, Zaragoza 2003, pp. 121-143. Ortega Santos, *La tragedia de los cerramientos* cit.

do not call into question the mode of resource management are designated as “intramodal”, and frequently occur in the history of peasant conflicts. We have included this type under the heading “territorial disputes”, which covers conflicts over boundaries or disputes over the ownership of common spaces between communities or between a community and local authorities or nobility. There were also struggles for the distribution of common property; in this case, not to protect multifunctional woodland practices, as in northwestern Spain and northern Portugal, but to meet the subsistence needs of the poorer peasants. Protests of this type were very common in Spain during the crisis of the Ancient Regime and the liberal revolution.⁴⁷

In our typology, struggles for agricultural reform (exclusively understood as land distribution) are mainly distributive in nature. In this type of conflict situation, one rarely sees a defence of the peasants’ methods of managing the land.⁴⁸ This is not surprising if we consider the two approaches that have historically played an important part in reforms. According to liberal theories of the modernisation of the countryside, the aim of agricultural reform is to transform the land organization of a State in order to improve techniques and increase production. The objective here is basically technical, although it does not rule out the improvement of social conditions. For agrarian Marxism, instead, the main objective is social, viz., the transfer of ownership from one class to another, although this does not rule out improvements in production resulting from this transfer. In production terms, the objective of both of these visions is to industrialise agriculture. The example of the Spanish agricultural reform in the Second Republic (1932) allows us to appreciate this dimension more clearly. Until the years 1918-20, during which there were significant conflicts, peasant demands focused on the return of common property. However, with the landless peasants receiving a salary, the ideology of agrarian Marxism (which directly linked the large estate system with productive inefficiency and questioned the ownership of the land) quickly penetrated this sector of the

⁴⁷ González de Molina, Ortega Santos, *Bienes comunes y conflictos* cit.

⁴⁸ J.M. Naredo, M. González de Molina, “Reforma agraria y desarrollo económico en la Andalucía del siglo XX”, in González de Molina (ed.), *La Historia de Andalucía a debate I* cit., pp. 88-116.

peasant community, although they understood the reform as a division of land into individual plots and not as collective farming. The 1932 law led to greater dependence on the market and an intensification of the industrialisation of agriculture, as peasants no longer had common resources allowing them to keep up their traditional sustainable agricultural practices, since by then they had all been privatised. The dependence on chemical fertilisers began to increase.

Many of the environmental and environmentalist conflicts that we have mentioned are directly related to class conflicts. Many examples show that conflicts associated with the management of, or access to, natural resources frequently oppose different sectors within the same society. On the other hand, in conflicts linked to the defence of indigenous territories the class aspect disappears. In these cases, the intermodal nature of the conflict can be appreciated much more clearly. The indigenous society as a whole participates in the protest, regardless of the social or gender differences that may exist within this society. Obviously acknowledging this does not imply an idealised vision of non-egalitarian indigenous societies. Often the rallying of a whole community to face an external threat does not mean that environmental conflicts at the heart of that community cease to exist, as Moore has shown in his discussion of gender-differentiated strategies for the access to natural resources in a community in Zimbabwe at the same time as a conflict linked to the restriction of access to a nature reserve was in course.⁴⁹

Conflicts of this type arose in connection with the extension of European colonial control from the second half of the 19th century onward, and particularly with the development of plantation agriculture. In the case of North Borneo, Cleary (1992) has shown how the development of European-style land ownership legislation since 1883 was linked to the wish to promote the cultivation of tobacco and then rubber. Paradoxically, the legislation aimed to differentiate between areas available for commercial exploitation and others subject to customary native rights. However, the legislation, which was implemented with considerable indigenous opposition, led to the commercialisation of the land. While the English colonial authorities

⁴⁹ Moore, *Contesting terrains* cit.

banned the sale of native land to foreign immigrants (Chinese), they aided and encouraged its sale to European investors. In the same way, both modern science's hostility towards shifting cultivation (examples of which we have mentioned earlier) and the claims of forestry departments restricted natives' access to forests.⁵⁰ In the district of Kirinyaga (Kenya), the Kikuyu natives did not lose their ownership of the cultivated land under the colonial government, although they did lose it in other parts of the country. However, the British administration took over the forests of Mount Kenya in 1910 in a controversial process that had a significant impact on the sustainability of the local crop systems, which were highly dependent on forest resources.⁵¹

The environmental impact of the industry and mining also gave rise to disputes with peasant communities, particularly since the end of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, copper mining in the "El Teniente" mine, financed by transnational capital (Braden Copper Co.), accumulated copper tailing deposits that were highly contaminant not only for humans but also for agriculture. This case realigned the affected social classes, farmers and citizens, against the mining multinational and the country's native owner oligarchies. The long legal and political dispute was eventually concluded by the implementing of Act 4/9/1916, which determined the causes of environmental impact and prescribed safety conditions to be met by companies operating the production plants. On a legal plane, this was a clear victory of the anti-contamination discourse, and it raised citizens' awareness about the danger of certain processes. However, by the time the legislation was enforced, the damage was already done.⁵² Other well-known protests against the impact of contamination in agriculture occurred in Río Tinto (Spain) in 1888 and in Ashio (Japan) in 1907.⁵³

⁵⁰ M.C. Cleary, "Plantation Agriculture and the Formulation of Native Land Rights in British North Borneo c. 1880-1930", in *Geographical Journal*, 158, 2, 1992, pp. 170-181.

⁵¹ Castro, *The political Economy* cit.

⁵² M. Folchi Donoso, "Conflictos de contenido ambiental y ecologismo de los pobres: no siempre pobres, ni siempre ecologistas", in *Ecología Política*, 22, 2001, pp. 79-100.

⁵³ Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres* cit.

Struggles against contamination in recent decades also provide good examples of how a protest based on environmentalist principles can lead to explicitly Green positions. Moguel describes a union-coordinated social mobilisation in North Mexico.⁵⁴ *Ejido* unions and popular defence committees mobilised against the company Celulosa Centauro's contamination of rivers and lakes in the area. They denounced the practice of using second-hand imported technology that did not have built-in sewage treatment mechanisms, which caused massive emigration among the local population. The heterogeneous nature of the political groups involved in the protest (grouped around the *Comité Duraguense de Defensa y Preservación Ecológica* [Durango Committee for the Preservation and Defence of the Environment]) was the cause of its failure, despite the fact that the Committee was relatively autonomous on a political and legal level compared to the *Comité de Defensa Popular General Pancho Villa*. The demands of the Durango Committee's ecological programme included the industry's compliance with water treatment standards and the reclamation of springs to supply water to humans and livestock. This was a typical 1980s environmental struggle, aimed at adding a social dimension to environmentalist discourses and organising people to carry on a multi-sector ecological struggle.

The confrontation between the agricultural and the industrial use of resources was not the only source of environmentalist peasant conflict in history. As the visibility of the environmental impact and costs for industrial society increased, individual voices and social movements sprang up to demand that modern States implement environmental policies. As demonstrated by Grove and Jepson & Whittaker, the influence of certain scientists and the socio-political elite from the 19th century onwards led to the adoption of policies with an environmental content,⁵⁵ even before the rise of the Green movement as far as the creation of protected natural spaces is con-

⁵⁴ J.E. Moguel, E. Velásquez, "Organización rural y lucha ecológica en una región del norte de México", in *Sociedad y Medio Ambiente en México*, G. López Castro (ed.), El Colegio de Michoacán, México 1997, pp. 135-161.

⁵⁵ R. Grove, "Conserving the Eden: The (European) East Indian Companies and their Environmental Policies on St. Helena, Mauritius and in Western India, 1660 to 1854", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1993, 35, 2, pp.

cerned, and before conservationist attitudes made their appearance in forest science. There was also considerable concern for the impact of soil erosion in a number of countries in the early 20th century.⁵⁶

However, these environmental management policies sometimes met with considerable opposition from peasant communities. These communities were often considered responsible for environmental decline, or not taken into account when measures that were not socially sustainable were implemented. This question has recently stirred an important debate between representatives of North American Deep Ecology and Environmentalism of the Poor,⁵⁷ although examples of this type of conflict situation began to manifest themselves a lot earlier. These are conflicts between different views of sustainability, that of the conservationist or forest scientist, on the one hand, and that of peasants, on the other. Peasants' resistance to environmental policies should not be read as an ignorant reaction against attempts to implement conservation or sustainable management, when they are really conflicts in defence of peasant rights of use. In many cases the sustainable nature of peasant management has been misunderstood by the promoters of environmental policies, as the following examples will show.

318-351. P. Jepson, R.J. Whitaker, "Histories of Protected Areas: Internationalisation of Conservationist Values and their Adoption in the Netherlands Indies (Indonesia)", in *Environment and History*, 8, 2002, pp. 129-172.

⁵⁶ W. Beinart, "Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development. A Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1, 1984, pp. 52-83. K.W. Showers, "Soil erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho: Origins and Colonial Response, 1830-1950s", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 263-283. F. Khan, "Rewriting South Africa's Conservation History. The Role of the Native Farmers Association", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 4, 1994, pp. 499-516. I. Scoones, "The Dynamics of Soil Fertility Change: Historical Perspectives on Environmental Transformation on Zimbabwe", in *Geographical Journal*, 163, 2, 1997, pp. 161-169. M. Singh, "Basutoland: A Historical Journey into the Environment", in *Environment and History*, 61, 2000, pp. 31-70. P. Delius, S. Schirmer, "Soil Conservation in a Racially Ordered Society: South Africa 1930-1970", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 4, 2000, pp. 719-742. Coombes, *The Historicity of Institutional Trust* cit.

⁵⁷ J.B. Callicott, M.P. Nelson (eds), *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, University of Georgia Press, Athens 1998. Guha, Martínez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism* cit.

The creation of protected natural spaces in the Third World throughout the 20th century has generated significant conflict due to the restriction of peasant use that it entails. Jepson & Whittaker have argued that it would be unfair to criticise the creation of natural parks, and have been convincing in their demonstration that the elites who promoted it ever since the late 19th century were defending a noble ideal of preservation. Their initiatives helped to spread the idea that the human race's increasing capacity to manipulate nature also implies a high degree of moral responsibility.⁵⁸

However, this is obviously not the critical point. Nature reserves have frequently been established in areas previously used by indigenous communities (and which therefore were not "virgin" nature). These communities maintained a sustainable relationship with their agroecosystem. Such is the case of the Bagak community in Indonesia, studied by Peluso, which lost part of its lands and forests to a nature reserve established in 1932. In spite of local resistance, in 1940, after several of their people had been imprisoned, they were forced to relocate and transform their production relationships with the environment.⁵⁹ The Nyanga national park in Zimbabwe was created in 1947 from an extensive property bought by Cecil Rhodes in 1896, and is one of the country's main tourist attractions (for Western tourists). In the adjacent lands, a considerable conflict developed from the early 20th century onward between white farmers and the natives. The local inhabitants, including the tribal chief, were forced to emigrate to Mozambique after 1972, only recovering their land after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. An attempt to extend the park's protection barriers in the early 1990s into the Tangwena tribe's resettlement area has resulted in constant tension between different branches of the State administration, the natives, and a white fishing club.⁶⁰ Regardless of how good the natural park system is, it is evident

⁵⁸ Jepson, Whittaker, *Histories of Protected areas* cit.

⁵⁹ Peluso, Foore, *Poor People* cit.

⁶⁰ Moore, *Contesting Terrains* cit. D. S. Moore, "Clear Waters, and Muddied Histories: Environmental History and the Politics of Community in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2, 1998, pp. 377-403.

that excluding the local communities from resource management generates conflict and puts the projects' social sustainability at risk.

In the same way, conflicts have arisen around the adoption of conservationist forest policies aimed at fighting erosion, sometimes supported by racist ideologies. In South Africa, policies aimed at solving the problem of soil erosion were also specifically aimed at the black population, as the erosion was blamed on their lack of knowledge about modern agricultural techniques. The political consequence was the application of coercive measures, particularly after the establishment of Apartheid.⁶¹ However, in the 1920s the Native Farmers Association had already placed special attention on the problem of soil erosion in its programmes and political action, which refutes the idea that concern for environmental decline was exclusively a white political objective.⁶²

Conclusion

The examples summarised in this article demonstrate how on many occasions peasant protest has had an environmental dimension that we should take account of if we wish to adequately understand the phenomenon. We have also argued – and believe that the analysed cases justify this assertion – that many of the said conflicts arose from struggles for a more sustainable use of resources. Moving from this consideration, we have developed a theory whose objective is to establish the role of protest in the dynamics of change in the metabolism of social organisation. Environmental protest is not the only or most important factor in these dynamics, but often does play a relevant role. The conflicts we have designated as “environmentalist” are those involving a confrontation between two approaches to agroecosystem management based on different visions. Such conflicts have a higher impact on socioenvironmental change. This is not to deny the importance of identity and ideology in conflict analysis (indeed, these criteria provide the basis for our distinction between environmentalist and Green protest), but they should not be the only criteria for the historical categorization of conflict.

⁶¹ Delius, Schirmer, *Soil Conservation* cit.

⁶² Khan, *Rewriting South Africa's* cit.