

## Through the Working Class

Ecology and Society Investigated Through the Lens of Labour

edited by Silvio Cristiano

# Subaltern Environmentalism in Can Sant Joan, Catalonia

Sergio Ruiz Cayuela

(Välkommen till KTH, Stockholm, Sveriges)

**Abstract** In this piece I analyse the ways in which marginalized communities respond to intentional environmental discrimination by political and economic elites. In order to do so, I briefly reflect on the terms subalternity and environmentalism; and I characterize subaltern environmentalism in terms of political orientation, types of communities involved, conception of the environment and issues of concern, and positionality. In order to test the previously developed blueprint I use the case study of Can Sant Joan (Catalonia), a working-class migrant neighbourhood where a movement against waste incineration emerged when the Asland cement plant got a permission to use refuse derived fuels in 2006.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 About Subaltern Environmentalism. – 3 Methodology. – 4 The Struggle against Waste Incineration in Can Sant Joan. – 4.1 The Community. – 4.2. The Struggle – 4.3 Subalternity as the Main Feature. – 5 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Subaltern. Environmentalism. Waste. Incineration.

## 1 Introduction

Structural inequalities that sustain the domination of economic elites often simultaneously result in environmental discrimination of subaltern communities (Ageyman 2005). The *Cerrell Report*, written in 1984 by the Los Angeles consulting firm Cerrell Associates, at the request of the California Waste Management Board, sought to define the type of communities that were less likely to resist siting of locally unwanted land use (LULU). The study, that is purportedly believed to have been circulated throughout regulatory agencies and industries across the USA, proposed different political criteria for the selection of Waste-to-Energy sites and indicated that placing was not based on scientific criteria (Energy Justice Network s.d.). Consequently, most of the communities affected by nearby LULUs in the USA have something in common: they are, in some way, subaltern communities experiencing intentional discrimination (Bullard 2008). These highly polluted residential/industrial areas are called ‘sacrifice zones’, a

---

**Culture del lavoro** 8 ISSN [online] 2610-9379 | ISSN [print] 2610-8852  
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-296-3/003 | Submitted: 2018-07-20 | Accepted: 2018-08-31  
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-296-3 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-297-0  
© 2018 |  Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License

term used to designate dangerously radioactive areas resulting from the nuclear race that took place during the Cold War (Lerner 2010). Sacrifice zones, though, are not an exclusive phenomenon of the USA: subaltern communities inhabit these hot spots of pollution all around the globe (Armiero, D'Alisa 2012). When they realize - commonly by chance - the hazards they are being intentionally exposed to, subaltern communities usually undergo a similar process of awakening that culminates in subaltern environmental movements (Lerner 2010). My goal in this chapter is to analyze the main features of subaltern environmentalism. To this end, I begin by briefly reflecting on the terms 'subalternity' and 'environmentalism'. I characterize subaltern environmentalism in terms of political orientation, types of communities involved, positionality, conception of the environment and issues of concern. I then move on to introduce the Can Sant Joan community and their struggle against waste incineration in the Asland cement plant. Finally, I discuss whether the local anti-incineration movement is a case of subaltern environmentalism according to the previously developed blueprint.

## 2 About subaltern environmentalism

Subalternity is a controversial term that has been used and appropriated by many authors over the years. Gramsci - who inflicted the military concept of subaltern with a new meaning in the early Twentieth century (Green 2002) - considers that the subaltern are all the non-elite groups, those oppressed by the relations of hegemony within society. For him, the only way of leaving subalternity is by reversing the existing relationship of domination-subordination. Gramsci does not consider the subaltern groups as equivalent. Instead, he differentiates them by their level of political organization in their way to achieve complete autonomy, an ideal state contrasting subalternity in which a group is not subject to domination (Gramsci 2011). With the rise of subaltern studies in the 1980s, some authors embraced a relatively close vision to Gramscian subalternity (see Guha 1982), whereas others diverged. Gayatri Spivak is the most relevant author of the latter current. For her, the subaltern encompass only those so displaced that they lack any kind of political organization and representation. Thus, she argues, once they revert this situation and achieve visibility they are no more subaltern (Spivak 1988). Pulido's view on subalternity is in line with Gramsci. She defines subaltern struggles as "counterhegemonic, [...] exist[ing] in opposition to prevailing powers" (1996, 4). She also agrees with Gramsci on the impossibility of determining a single cause of marginalization of subaltern groups. Instead, they both identify an ensemble of political, social, cultural and economic relations, interdependent among them, as the multiple cause. Both authors also

concur in arguing that domination-subordination relationships are perpetuated through structural inequalities – based on class, race or culture among other factors. Such structural inequalities are in turn legitimized by the hegemony of the dominant group within civil society.

Environmentalism is a very disparate movement that covers different forms of activism (Armiero, Sedrez 2014). Historically, it has been thought to be a concern of the elites, or in the words of Nash (2014) a “full stomach” phenomenon. He foresaw western environmental activism as a luxury of the middle and high classes, almost like a hobby for those whose material needs were covered. Nevertheless, more comprehensive historical reviews have shown that Nash’s conception of environmentalism was very narrow. Martínez Alier (2003) provides a more exhaustive classification of environmental currents. He separates environmentalism in three groups, focused on: wilderness and preservation of endangered species; sustainable management of resources through technological advance; and livelihood conflicts that oppose structural inequalities, which he calls “environmentalism of the poor” (2013). By showing cases of the latter group as far back as the 1880s, Martínez Alier challenges the classical vision of American environmentalism represented by Nash, uncovering its US-centric bias. Arguably, though, Martínez Alier’s classification is not completely compelling; “environmentalism of the poor” denotes economic status as a main form of domination, leaving out of the spectrum other forms of alternative environmentalism. In line with Pulido and Gramsci, I argue that as well as being due to economic status, the causes of subordination of a group can also be political, social and/or cultural. Thus, I believe that the term subaltern environmentalism encompasses different forms of alternative environmentalism and helps us to achieve a more accurate conceptualization. Moreover, talking about subaltern environmentalism seems very appropriate in the current climate of escalating inequalities. Most of the environmental burdens placed on vulnerable communities respond to social and environmental subordination strategies used by political economic elites in order to perpetuate their ruling position (Egan 2002).

Thereupon, I will describe the main features of subaltern environmentalism that in many cases are shared with other forms of alternative environmentalism. First, subaltern environmentalism is charged with political claims of social justice and equity. Its claims are as social as they are environmental. Moreover, they have a specific political content that is usually related with the radical left. In subaltern environmentalism, social and environmental subordination is seen as a tool of political economic elites, in order to reinforce and perpetuate their ruling position (Egan 2002). Communities involved in these struggles perceive unequal power relations as the main threat to their environments and livelihoods; they, thus, seek to challenge the hegemony of the dominant group. A second trait of subaltern environmentalism is the type of communities involved. Subaltern

environmental struggles usually involve people that are already defined as a community or social group of some kind. Nevertheless, communities are influenced by the struggles to such an extent that their original communal identity is often reshaped through the development of a subaltern consciousness (Pulido 1996). Third, subaltern environmentalism embraces a broad conception of the environment, that constitutes the places where subaltern communities live out their everyday lives. For subaltern communities, the distinction between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, which has classically informed mainstream environmentalism, does not make sense. Rather, they perceive the environment as their source of livelihood and, thus, are willing to protect it (Guha 1989). In subaltern environmentalism, the boundaries of the environment are expanded, it becomes everything that surrounds communities (Armiero, D’Alisa 2012; Novotny 2000), including urban spaces. Finally, positionality is arguably the most defining feature of subaltern environmentalism. For the involved communities, environmental struggles are mainly materialist. Their livelihoods depend, to a greater or lesser extent, on the outcome of the struggles. As Pulido puts it, their “position in the socioeconomic structure, in turn, frame their struggles differently” (1996, 25). Communities involved in these struggles are subordinate to the hegemonic class, that has classically prioritized economic productivity over their well-being. More recently, increasingly rapid environmental degradation has stimulated the hegemonic class to adopt green economy strategies, which still seek to reinforce its dominant position (Goodman, Salleh 2013). Thus, subaltern communities embrace a counter-hegemonic position and live their environmental struggles in first person.

Table 1. Principal features of subaltern environmentalism

<b>Principal features of subaltern environmentalism</b>	
Political orientation	Seeks social justice and equity, challenges the dominant group, often aligned with radical left-wing politics.
Communities involved	Direct personal connection to the issues of concern. Existing communal identity that is reshaped in the struggle.
Conception of environment and issues of concern	The environment is everything that surrounds communities, including urban environment. Material conflicts directly related to sources of livelihood for vulnerable communities.
Positionality	Counter-hegemonic conflicts embraced by communities subordinate to political economic elites. Struggles lived in first person: their lives, their land.

### 3 Methodology

Fieldwork for this research was conducted during February 2017, but before arriving to the field I exchanged extensive correspondence with two key informants: J.L.C., president of the neighbourhood association of Can Sant Joan and member of the local platform against incineration (PAMiR); and N.V.L., member of *Ecologistes en Acció* and former worker of the local *Montcada i Reixac (MiR)* municipality in the environment area for 20 years. The main data source for this research consisted in a sample of 21 semistandardized interviews. For the selection of the interviewees I used both snowball (Berg, Lune 2012) and judgmental (Hagan 2006) sampling, building upon the information obtained from the key informants. Through this broad sampling approach, I tried to accurately represent all the parties in the ongoing local struggle against refuse-derived fuels (RDF) use, including members of the PAMiR, the neighbourhood association, the local women's and youth groups, local politicians and municipal employees, managers of the cement plant, scientists, practitioners, and members of regional and global environmental groups. The interviews conducted have only been used as data under the informed consent of the interviewees. There was only one interview where I could not obtain a signed informed consent form: the interview with the cement plant managers. Thus, none of the information that they provided during the interview have been directly used in this research study. Nevertheless, I considered licit to use information from my visit to the cement plant in form of direct observations as long as it did not make reference to the words of the interviewees.

I have decided to corroborate and augment the evidence obtained through interviews with several other data sources, in what is commonly known as a triangulation process (Yin 2003). These include: a) documentation: air quality reports produced by the community, scientific studies conducted by environmental organizations, peer reviewed scientific papers, and legal documents; b) archival records: municipal contracts, historical correspondence involving the municipality, the complete collection of the Can Sant Joan monthly magazine *Hoja Informativa* (1966-2017), organisational budgets, and economic and demographic data; c) direct observations: I kept record of my observations in the field by taking notes and pictures (without compromising privacy rights); d) physical artifacts: graffiti and other artistic forms, and a collection of dust samples kept in jars collected at balconies and homes by community members to make visible their exposure to pollution. I have only used documents and archival records whenever they were public or I could obtain permission from the copyright holders.

## 4 The Struggle against Waste Incineration in Can Sant Joan

### 4.1 The Community

The neighbourhood of Can Sant Joan is part of the municipality of Montcada i Reixac (MiR), in the outskirts of Barcelona. It was born as a place where the unskilled workers from the railway line and the Asland cement plant could settle down at the beginning of the Twentieth century. The mass migration from rural to industrial areas that took place in Spain during the 1950s and 1960s dramatically transformed the neighbourhood. During this period, it underwent a process of spontaneous urban development (Epstein 1973). It was in this context that the Can Sant Joan neighbourhood association was created. Its goal was to improve the living conditions in the neighbourhood and foster conviviality among the community. "Since I arrived to Can Sant Joan 44 years ago the neighbourhood has changed a lot, we have achieved some major improvements" (interview 1). During the first years of the Twenty-first century Can Sant Joan saw the arrival of a new wave of migrants from disparate cultural backgrounds that, thus far, have not been integrated with the old-time residents. Can Sant Joan is nowadays a working-class, poor, migrant neighbourhood. The positionality of the neighbourhood, compared to the city and the province of Barcelona, can be summarized in the following terms: very poor economic and educational levels, very low price of real estate properties, appropriate number of cultural spaces and poor level of urban services. Notably, though, it is important to keep in mind that the latter two were achieved through popular mobilization. Moreover, public and private institutions very rarely led the way in improving life in the neighbourhood. If we add to the analysis the deeply entrenched working-class consciousness among the community members (interviews 1, 2, 4-11, 13-17, 19, 20), there is no doubt that Can Sant Joan can be considered a subaltern community. Its existence is opposed to two prevailing powers of different scale: the center of MiR and the city of Barcelona. It is worth noting the influence that scale has in this analysis. If we set the boundaries at a municipality level the center of MiR is the dominant community, whereas if we set them at a regional level MiR becomes subordinate to the city of Barcelona. Thus, the same territory simultaneously plays two roles, as ruling and subordinate, depending on the scale. Nevertheless, although identifying geographical areas with specific social groups might work in small and unified communities, it requires further study of the social fabric.

Judging by the opinion of the neighbours and local politicians as well as economic, educational and real estate indicators, there are many communities in the surrounding neighbourhoods (both in MiR and in the Nou Barris district, Barcelona) that are in a similar situation and could also therefore be considered subaltern. Can Sant Joan, thus, is not a unique case.

Indeed, the area of El Vallès (of which MiR is part) is commonly referred to as the industrial park of Barcelona, because of the high concentration of industrial areas and working-class communities (interviews 1, 2, 4, 14, 15, 19, 20). Yet, there are some characteristics that make Can Sant Joan stand out as a special case. The most important one is the sense of attachment to a community that reigns in the neighbourhood. At the core of this community is the neighbourhood association. This communal identity has been shaped by decades of struggles for improving life in the neighbourhood in different ways: “this has always been a community where people have organized in order to fight, there is a special atmosphere in the neighbourhood that makes us feel from Can Sant Joan” (interview 1). Some 4,200 people in Can Sant Joan – out of the total 5,500 inhabitants – are affiliated to the neighbourhood association, which was the first one created in Catalonia. In 2015 and 2017 the association gained national recognition when received the prize to the most socially relevant neighbourhood association by the Confederation of Neighbourhood Associations of Catalonia (CONFAVC, Catalan abbreviation) (interview 1). Some of the individuals holding positions of responsibility in the association have a political past linked to trade unions and communist or anarchist groups. A few of them were even involved in armed antifascist groups during Franco’s dictatorship. Their background has permeated the neighbourhood association, which has become a very active political tool of the working-class neighbourhood in their quest for social and environmental justice. In fact, the association has had many open conflicts with the MiR municipality whenever their claims have been obviated and their protests violently suffocated (interviews 1, 2, 4-11, 13-17, 19, 20). “In one of the first protests against the Asland we blocked the main highway. Suddenly, we saw the riot police in full gear coming after us!” (interview 2). Yet, the neighbourhood association is not only a political tool, but an open ground for integration in the community. The local parish, that has since the 1960s been directed by an openly communist priest, has also played a very relevant role in fostering conviviality in the neighbourhood. In fact, the neighbourhood association and the parish have worked side by side to pioneer many self-organized activities that have contributed to build bonds and avoid conflicts among the neighbours while improving the quality of life in the neighbourhood (interview 14). Can Sant Joan is, thus, more politically organized than the rest of surrounding subaltern communities. As such, it arguably stands at a higher level in the Gramscian ladder towards autonomy and towards overcoming subalternity. As N.V.L. (interview 13), member of *Ecologistes en Acció* and former worker of the MiR municipality in the environment area during 20 years, puts it: “I believe that [the neighbours of Can Sant Joan] were destined to be subalterns, but they have rejected their fate. They fought back and freed themselves from marginality”.

## 4.2 The Struggle

The community of Can Sant Joan has a long story of engagement in different struggles for improving livelihood conditions in the neighbourhood. Reportedly, one of the most significant is the dispute against pollution from the Asland cement plant. This particular conflict has gone through different stages since the 1960s. What, some decades ago, was a moderate discontentment during episodes of heavy pollution has been gradually replaced by a general opposition to the very existence of the cement plant. Implementation of automated processes in the Asland, that reduced its labor force from several hundred to barely 50 workers nowadays - none of whom are from the neighbourhood - has had a crucial role in altering public opinion. "The cement plant used to employ many people from the neighbourhood, but today the story is very different. This has tipped the scale toward major opposition" (interview 15). The struggle reached a peak of intensity in 2006, when the cement plant received permission to use refuse-derived fuels, or in other words, to incinerate waste. At that moment, a movement arose in Can Sant Joan and a platform against incineration (named PAMiR for its Catalan abbreviation) was created in 2007, at the heart of which is the neighbourhood association. As is often the case, the movement went through a high intensity phase during its first 18 months, before then being consolidated in a low intensity phase that still lasts. The struggle has enhanced the subaltern consciousness of the community that, by bridging alliances with other communities involved in similar conflicts, has embraced a complex neighbourhood-detached subaltern identity. In other words, Can Sant Joan neighbours feel now part of a wider group of subaltern communities that are aware of being structurally discriminated by political economic elites. Incrementally, the conflict has become a quest for autonomy and social justice as much as a matter of environmental health. It is because of this that I argue that the movement against incineration in Can Sant Joan is a perfect example of subaltern environmentalism. Since the struggle lowered its intensity and was stabilized in 2008, the PAMiR and the community of Can Sant Joan have been all but still. The resistance has concentrated efforts in timely but significant actions, that can be organized in four interdependent groups: protest actions, legal actions, street science, and coalition building.

Very diverse and imaginative protest actions have been carried out by the PAMiR in the last decade. They have included demonstrations with up to 2,000 people, sabotaging of public events in which local authorities took part, themed Carnivals, shooting of the movie *Arcángeles* in which pollution from the Asland cement plant originates a zombie epidemic, organizing the *Estem Cremats* (We Are Burned) music festival, and gaining public support by celebrities in media appearances. Some of these protest actions have created great controversy due to direct confrontation with workers

from the Asland and other cement plants. As a Can Sant Joan neighbour puts it “several times LafargeHolcim [current owner of the cement plant] has fleeted buses from Sagunt and other Spanish towns in order to bring workers and threaten the neighbours that were demonstrating” (interview 20). When it comes to legal actions, the PAMiR has started two lawsuits against the Asland: one on irregularities in the environmental impact assessment related to RDF use in the cement plant that led to a moratorium in 2008; and another – still ongoing – on exceeding permissible noise levels in the neighbourhood. Several crowdfunding campaigns have been organized to defray the legal costs. Community members have made use of street science (Corburn 2005) to oppose Asland’s narrative about traffic being the almost exclusive source of pollution in the neighbourhood. PAMiR activists have taken part in the co-production of knowledge with scientists and practitioners. Moreover, dissemination talks chaired by renowned researchers have been organized in and beyond the neighbourhood, in order to raise awareness and increase the critical mass of the movement. Local activists have also engaged in joint activities with universities at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The PAMiR has also put a lot of effort in building coalitions. In fact, the platform is founding member of the Catalan and Spanish networks against waste incineration in cement plants, which hold regular meetings. As reflected in the fact that the 2nd international meeting against waste incineration, organized by the Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives (commonly known as GAIA), was held in the neighbourhood in 2015, Can Sant Joan has also been able to find allies at an international level.

Even if the local resistance to waste incineration in Can Sant Joan seems to revolve around the PAMiR, the real operational core is still the neighbourhood association. In fact, the PAMiR is not legally constituted as an association. Rather, for instance, the legal actions are carried out in the name of the neighbourhood association (interview 1). Whilst there is a divergence of opinions about how many people participate in the movement against waste incineration in Can Sant Joan, there is a consensus that its structure is organized in rings of engagement. At the core of the movement there are small groups with higher level of engagement, that are at the same time included in wider groups with a lower engagement in the struggle. Interviewees agreed about the main figures of the movement being, namely at the time of writing, J.L.C. (president of the neighbourhood association) and M.G. (member of the management board). They belong to a group averaging 8 people, most of whom are from the management board of the neighbourhood association, that are very active in the movement against the Asland and that carry out most of the tasks. The next ring is comprised by a group of 20-25 people who are involved in the decision making of the PAMiR and who attend most of the meetings and events. They do so even when this involves travelling out the neighbourhood for

meeting other communities or external organizations. “We have recently been in Sevilla, in November [...] and we have recently been in Italy fighting the Asland as well. We also held a huge meeting here in Can Sant Joan, and people from all around the world came” (interview 5). When a general assembly of the PAMiR is called, or local events organized, the group expands up to 80 to 100 people. When demonstrations or other big events are held, the social mass can reach from 200-300 up to 2,000 people. Among those actively involved in the movement, there is a majority of white Spanish aged males who have lived in the neighbourhood for decades. The PAMiR has identified this trend and is currently trying to reverse it. In 2016, for example, the neighbourhood association started a women’s group and in 2017 a youth group. Although the main goals of these groups are not directly related with the struggle against incineration, their members are showing a high level of engagement with the PAMiR and thus, helping to diversify the movement. Despite the existence of a hierarchy in the movement, determined mainly by the level of commitment, important decisions are taken through direct democracy. There are usually two or three general assemblies called every year, in which the members – the groups, associations and individuals that belong to the PAMiR – discuss the direction that the movement is heading. In every assembly, there is a vote among the participants over decisions that need to be taken, such as the investment of collected funds in attorneys or selection of which protest actions to carry out (interviews 1, 2, 4, 6-8, 11, 14-17, 19, 20).

### 4.3 Subalternity as the Main Feature

When trying to characterize the environmentalism that people from Can Sant Joan have embraced in their struggle against waste incineration in the Asland, the feature that stands out is positionality. The Asland company was funded by the Güell family (prominent among the Catalan bourgeoisie) in 1901, with the Can Sant Joan cement plant built in 1917. From the very beginning, the neighbourhood of Can Sant Joan was a place where the unskilled working class dwelt. In 1989, the French multinational Lafarge became the major shareholder of the Asland company (Lafarge Asland 2001), and in 2014 it changed to LafargeHolcim after merging with the Swiss company (Raymond 2014). Nevertheless, people from Can Sant Joan are not concerned about the ownership of the cement plant and they still call it the Asland. For them, whatever the nationality of the managers, the factory represents the oppression by a ruling group of a poor working-class community with the acquiescence of the authorities. This fact alone could be significant enough as to consider it a case of subaltern environmentalism. Nevertheless, by comparing the case study with the blueprint developed in section 2 (see table 1), more evidence will be given as to support this characterization.

People in Can Sant Joan have a broad conception of what constitutes the environment. For them, the environment is not only nature, but the urban spaces where they live and even their own bodies. They have learned to identify a strong relationship between the environment and their health, and thus they are concerned about waste incineration in the Asland. They relate the high rate of respiratory diseases and cancer in the neighbourhood (interview 18) with the cement plant activities. The movement against waste incineration in the Asland is about livelihood in the neighbourhood; it is a material conflict mainly played out in the environmental health field. As such, the community has a direct personal connection with the issues of concern: what is in dispute is their own bodies and lives. Even if the community had a previous identity before the start of the struggle, characterized mainly by being working-class migrants (interviews 1, 2, 4-11, 13-17, 19, 20), it has been reshaped through the conflict. The feeling of being despised and sacrificed because of its subordinated social and political position is now the main feature of the social group: a feature that has been expanded beyond the borders of the neighbourhood. In fact, the perseverance of the PAMiR to bridge alliances at regional, national and international level has led to the creation of a new social group formed by communities with similar problems, whose shared identity is based on material concerns, as well as subaltern consciousness. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the core of the movement in Can Sant Joan is formed by a group of people of similar characteristic: aged Spanish males. Whereas women and young people are currently trying to be integrated into the movement, groups of newly arrived migrants – mainly foreigners – are still not getting involved. Most of these recently arrived people are not involved because they do not perceive it as a livelihood struggle. Overcoming the social division and raising awareness among new groups of migrants is the biggest challenge of the PAMiR when it comes to increasing their social mass in Can Sant Joan. Another feature of the movement against waste incineration in the neighbourhood that is related to subaltern environmentalism is its political load. Among the core group of 8-10 people mostly involved in the PAMiR, most of them are openly communist or anarchist, and have been actively involved in political activism in the past (interviews 1, 2, 8, 14, 16, 17). This small group of people consider their environmental activism embedded in their political ideology. Ultimately, they seek to empower a subaltern community against the ruling group. Even if the PAMiR is not officially positioned in the political spectrum, what has permeated from the core group is an articulation of the struggle around social justice and equity. Thus, although most of the people involved in the movement are not aware of political theory, they perceive corporations and governments as the ultimate perpetrators of the environmental burdens that they are experiencing. Although the platform does not support any particular party, most of the people involved in the

PAMiR identify themselves with the new left movement and are openly positioned against neoliberal capitalism. “We know well that we are intruding into the heart of capitalism, but we are not afraid” asserts M.G., local activist and member of the neighbourhood association. Again, the political orientation of the PAMiR is strongly influenced by the positionality of the community of Can Sant Joan, that has emerged as the main feature of the movement. Although many of the aforementioned features could fit in different forms of alternative environmentalism, the subaltern consciousness of the people in Can Sant Joan (which has developed into a neighbourhood detached subaltern identity shared with other communities) shapes the struggle more than anything else. In fact, in Can Sant Joan the struggle is not only lived as an environmental health conflict, but as a quest for autonomy and outwards subalternity.

## 5 Conclusion

After the Asland cement plant secured permission in 2006 for using refuse-derived fuel, a movement against waste incineration emerged in Can Sant Joan as the last stage of a lifelong rivalry between the factory and the community. Organized around the heavily politicized neighbourhood association, the neighbours have been fighting for environmental health as much as for social justice. The environmental struggle is a vehicle to free themselves from what they perceive as structural discrimination. A strong tradition of struggles for improving livelihood conditions in the neighbourhood has infused a subaltern consciousness in the community. Nevertheless, by building coalitions with other communities at different geographical levels the Can Sant Joan identity is simultaneously being reshaped, becoming a subaltern geographically-detached complex identity, in common with other communities. The networks of resistance to waste incineration are protecting the environment as a way of protecting their own neighbourhoods, homes and bodies; and thus, they reject the idea of the natural in opposition to the urban. In the end, they live the environmental struggles as a way of reversing the relationships of domination – subordination through which they are being discriminated and, ultimately, move up in the Gramscian ladder outwards subalternity. All these characteristics match the blueprint developed in section 2. Accordingly, the case of Can Sant Joan presents a prime example of subaltern environmentalism.

To conclude, subaltern environmentalism is a very comprehensive type of alternative environmentalism. It is not focused on specific causes of marginalization of communities, but rather on resisting dynamics of intentional environmental discrimination of subaltern communities by political and economic elites. The movement is defined by four main features. First, subaltern environmentalists fight for social, as much as for environmental

justice and thus, it is a movement politically loaded and specifically close to leftist stances. Second, as obvious as it may seem, subaltern environmentalism is embraced by subaltern communities that are previously defined as a group, and whose identity is reshaped through the struggles. Third, in subaltern environmental struggles the city/nature dualism is left behind. Thus, the environment becomes the place where everyday life happens, including urban spaces and even human and more-than-human bodies. Last but not least, the movement is strongly shaped by the subaltern positionality of the involved communities. Accordingly, it results in materialist struggles, lived in first person, in which challenging domination - subordination relationships is the means for improving livelihood in the community.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am immensely grateful to professor Marco Armiero for his close mentorship and guidance in the research that led to this chapter. I am also grateful to the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory for the institutional support received during my research. Last but not least, I thank Alex Franklin for her English proofreading and further suggestions that helped me to improve this chapter.

## Appendix

List of the interviews referred to in the text, that I personally conducted during my fieldwork.

ID	Name	Description	Date	Place
1	J.L.C.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, president of the neighbourhood association	6/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
2	M.G.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, board member of the neighbourhood association	6/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
3	J.M.	Retired surgeon, activist at CAPS	6/02/2017	Online questionnaire
4	R.M.M.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the women group	7/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
5	N.F.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the women group	7/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
6	C.K.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the youth group	7/02/2017	Montcata Vins
7	A.D.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the youth group	7/02/2017	Montcata Vins
8	A.P.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, board member of the neighbourhood association	8/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
9	S.O.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the women group	8/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
10	C.M.	Public health inspector for the MiR municipality	8/02/2017	City Hall of MiR
11	A.R.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the women group	8/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
12	S.C.	Representative of APQUIRA	9/02/2017	La Garriga, private house
13	N.V.L.	Member of EeA and former worker of the MiR municipality in the environment area	10/02/2017	Barcelona, private house
14	S.H.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, former rector of the Can Sant Joan parish	13/02/2017	Can Sant Joan, private house
15	G.G.	CUP representative at the MiR municipaliaity	13/02/2017	City Hall of MiR
16	A.L.	MiR neighbor	14/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
17	L.L.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, board member of the neighbourhood association	14/02/2017	AVV Can Sant Joan
18	C.V.	Endocrinologist specialized in environmental health, former member of the Catalan parliament, member of CAPS	15/02/2017	Barcelona, private office
19	I.H.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, member of the parent's association of the Escola El Viver, member of ICV at the MiR municipality	15/02/2017	Escola El Viver
20	A.A.	Can Sant Joan neighbor, initiator of the campaign "Judici a la Cimentera"	10/03/2017	Skype

## Acronyms

AVV	Associació de Veïns (neighbourhood association)
MiR	Montcada i Reixac (name of the municipality to which Can Sant Joan belongs)
CAPS	Centre d'Anàlisi i Programes Sanitaris (Center for Health-care Analysis and Programmes)
EeA	Ecologistes en Acció (Environmentalists in Action)
APQUIRA	Associació de Persones Afectades per Productes Químics i Radiacions Ambientals (Association of People Affected by Chemical Products and Environmental Radiation)
CUP	Candidatura d'Unitat (Popular Popular Unity Candidacy)
ICV	Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (Green Catalonia Initiative)

## Bibliography

- Agyeman, Julian (2005). *Sustainable communities and the challenge of environmental justice*. New York: New York University Press.
- Armiero, Marco; D'Alisa, Giacomo (2012). "Rights of Resistance: the Garbage Struggles for Environmental Justice in Campania, Italy". *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 23(4), 52-68.
- Armiero, Marco; Sedrez, Lise (2014). "Introduction". Armiero, Marco; Sedrez, Lise (eds.), *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1-19.
- Barca, Stefania (2012). "Working-class Environmentalism". *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements*, 4(2), 61-80.
- Berg, Bruce L.; Lune, Howard (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Bullard, Robert D. (2008). *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Boulder (CO): Westview Press.
- Bullard, Robert D.; Johnson, Glenn S. (2000). "Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making". *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-78.
- Corburn, Jason (2005). *Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice*. Cambridge (MA): Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Di Chiro, Giovanna. (2016). "Environmental Justice". Adamson, Joni; Gleason, William; Pellow, David (eds.), *Keywords for Environmental Studies*. New York: New York University Press, 100-5.
- Egan, Michael (2002). "Subaltern environmentalism in the United States: A historiographic review". *Environment and History*, 8(1), 21-41.

- Energy Justice Network (s.d.). *Targeting "Cerrell" Communities* [online]. URL <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/cerrell.pdf> (2017-03-28).
- Epstein, David G. (1973). *Brasilia, Plan and Reality: a Study of Planned and Spontaneous Urban Development*. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press.
- Gleeson, Brendan; Low, Nicholas (2002). *Justice, Society and Nature: An Exploration of Political Ecology*. London: Routledge.
- Goodman, James; Salleh, Ariel (2013). "The 'green economy': Class Hegemony and Counter-hegemony". *Globalizations*, 10(3), 411-24.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Eng. Transl. and Ed. by Quintin Hoare, Geoffry Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.
- Gramsci, Antonio (2011). *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2. Eng. Transl. by Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Green, Marcus. (2002). "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern". *Rethinking Marxism*, 14(3), 1-24.
- Guha, Ranajit. (1982). *Subaltern studies I: Writings on South Asian history and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, Ramachandra. (1989). "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Perservation: a Third World Critique". *Environmental Ethics*, 11(1), 71-83.
- Hagan, Frank E. (2006). *Research Methods in Criminal Justice and Criminology*. 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Asland (2001). *Asland, una historia del siglo XX (1901-2001)*. Barcelona: Lafarge Asland.
- Lerner, Steve (2010). *Sacrifice Zones: the Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Martínez Alier, Joan (2003). *The Environmentalism of the Poor: a Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. Cheltenham (UK): Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Martínez Alier, Joan (2016). "Environmentalism(s)". Adamson, Joni; Gleason, William; Pellow, David (eda.), *Keywords for Environmental Studies*. New York: New York University Press, 97-100.
- Nash, Roderick ([1967] 2014). *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press.
- Novotny, Patrick (2000). *Where We Live, Work, and Play: the Environmental Justice Movement and the Struggle for a New Environmentalism*. Westport (CT): Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Pellow, David (2000). "Environmental Inequality Formation: Toward a Theory of Environmental Injustice". *American behavioral scientist*, 43(4), 581-601.
- Pulido, Laura (1996). *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

- Raymond, Grégory (2014). "Fusion Lafarge-Holcim: un poids lourd du CAC40 quitte la France" [online]. *The Huffington Post*. URL [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2014/04/07/fusion-lafarge-holcim-impots-numericable\\_n\\_5103206.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2014/04/07/fusion-lafarge-holcim-impots-numericable_n_5103206.html) (2017-05-23).
- Spivak, Gayatri (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak". Nelson, Cary; Grossberg, Lawrence (eds.), Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 271-313.
- Yin, Robert K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications.

