

Praxis in resource geography

Tensions between engagement and critique in the (un)making of ecosystem services

*Elizabeth Shapiro-Garza, Vijay Kolinjivadi,
Gert Van Hecken, Catherine Windey, and Jennifer J. Casolo*

Introduction

The phrase “engaged critical scholarship” can seem an oxymoron. Some critical scholars claim that the role of the critic is only to challenge the normative assumptions underlying practice. They claim that to engage with the “subjects” of research in ways meant to support social change is to serve as “handmaidens” to pragmatic needs (Brenner 2009, 201), too focused on the immediate to take on more profound, structural challenges (Mohan 2006). On the other hand, practitioners often challenge purely critical scholars for what they portray as undue abstraction and “expert” elitism, divorced from the perspectives and needs of the communities and movements with whom they claim solidarity (Refstie 2018), leading to what McNay (2014, 4) has called “social weightlessness.” These tensions between critique and engagement are acute in resource geography, where the material and social inevitably intermix, leading to struggles over how nature is defined, valued, and controlled, as well as to disempowerment and dispossession. This chapter explores these tensions through the lens of four cases drawn from our differing experiences as critical scholars but holding in common direct engagement with marginalized communities and a focus on a particular conceptualization and approach to natural resource management: payments for ecosystem services (PES).

Some critical scholarship has itself been critiqued for taking an overly deductive, “strong theory” approach. Detractors claim that by presupposing an “essentialist, usually structural vision of what is” (Gibson–Graham 2008, 618), these scholars can fail to recognize alternative theories or practices, thereby reinforcing the hegemony of the very structures they critique. Feminist and postcolonial/decolonial epistemologies offer the basis for a counter approach: critical engaged scholarship that is inductive, grounded, contextualized, and collaborative. A key aspect of this type of scholarship is the concept of *praxis*, a combination of “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire 1970, 126). It assumes that everyone is able to apply critical perspectives to assess existing practice, pushing professional scholars to therefore engage with “the excluded and oppressed,” to generate grounded theory through collective observation and reflection (see also Fabricant, Chapter 26 this volume). Following Dussel, praxis generates

critique from a position outside of hegemonic structures and discourses, beyond even the Eurocentrism that informs much critical scholarship, in order to create new narratives of what was, is, and “can be” that “demand explanation” (2011, 21). Praxis therefore provides a conceptual framework and approach for engaged critical scholars to align themselves with those who are socially, economically, and/or politically marginalized and to amplify their critical discursivity if it emerges in order to challenge hegemonic assumptions and discourses.

However, there is risk that this approach can further oppress those it purports to serve if it perpetuates a “White Saviour Complex” among researchers (e.g., Straubhaar 2015) or if it ignores power inequities in access to material resources and information (Harney and Moten 2013). Scholars must also contend with and be explicit about their own limitations, acknowledging the ways in which their agency is embedded in structural and historical power relations and hierarchical and colonial forms of academic knowledge creation that influence actionable outcomes from engaged research. Acknowledging these hazards, Harney and Moten (2013) call for engaged critical scholars to be reflexive and explicit about these constraints and, if desiring to build upon theory to enact transformative change, be willing to contest and defy the obligations of their institutional affiliations, academic expectations, and their sense of professional accomplishment within a Western educational model.

In this chapter, we collectively reflect on engagements within one area of critical scholarship in resource geography: PES policies and initiatives. The PES approach provides financial incentives to landowners, through market or “market-like” transactions, to manage ecosystems in ways thought to increase the production of specific “services,” such as greenhouse gas sequestration, biodiversity conservation, or cleaner or greater quantities of water for downstream communities (Shapiro-Garza et al. 2020). Starting in the late 1980s, ecologists and economists joined forces in developing the concept of ecosystem services and in promoting PES as a mechanism to ensure their provision. The former were interested in making explicit the value of “nature” to humans, while the latter hoped to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental interventions by making the economic value of healthy ecosystems both legible within the economy and recognized by capitalist markets.

PES has since been put into practice on a global scale, with over 500 existing programs and an estimated US\$30–50 billion in annual transactional value (Salzman et al. 2018). As a relatively recent attempt to conceptualize and promote the conditions under which an entirely new natural resource is created and recognized by capitalist economies (Huber 2018), it is possible to observe the process of creation and the varied outcomes of these attempts, offering insights into many of the central questions in critical resource geography. Because PES initiatives are often implemented within communities rich in natural resources but marginalized from capitalist economies and political power, they are also key sites for engagement by critical scholars.

In this chapter, we explore the tensions inherent in engaged critical scholarship through reflections on our own research focused on PES but based in a wide variety of geographies and contexts: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nicaragua, Canada, and Mexico. In presenting these reflections, we understand the tensions we identify as complex and ever-evolving, requiring constant, reflexive vigilance to address, noting that we continue to navigate these tensions wherever we are on our paths as engaged critical scholars: from advanced doctoral student to researchers with over twenty-five years of experience. In order to practice the reflexivity we advocate, we start from the position that all knowledge is “situated” in the norms, conditions, and prevalent ontologies of particular times and geographies, and we recognize that our own positionalities are influenced by the dynamics, concerns raised, and outcomes of each case.

Green carbon economy as modernity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—reflections by Catherine Windey

Trained as an anthropologist, I am finishing a PhD in Development Studies based on a poststructuralist, decolonial, and feminist understanding of knowledge formation and plural epistemological approaches. I have conducted extensive field research in the DRC on the implementation of the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) framework through which (sub)national actors in developing countries are paid from multinational funds to reduce deforestation. I analyze REDD+ rationale in DRC as a capitalist eco-modernization project in which the framing of carbon as a scarce economic resource allows the reproduction of market logics and the expansion of economistic rationality while erasing other values of forests (Gómez-Baggethun and Ruiz-Pérez 2011). For me, as a scholar committed to highlighting a “pluriverse” of ecologies and ways of knowing and being with forests, engagement means thinking about economic alternatives together with Congolese civil society organizations (CSOs), researchers, and farmers in the communities targeted by REDD+. Since 2018, I have participated in a collaborative action-research project that aims to better integrate the voices and needs of communities near Kisangani, an isolated and economically marginalized region of the DRC, into REDD+ forest policies. When I initiated my research, I assumed that local voices would be critical of the modernist market focus of REDD+. As I explore here, however, engagement often requires revisiting our assumptions.

The framing of the DRC’s REDD+ strategy positions “local communities” as homogeneous “poor shifting cultivators” who are unproductive in terms of both economic growth and forest conservation, obscuring the full complexity of social identities and of people’s lives. Justified by this narrative, the policy reorganizes trees and forests into “integrated landscapes” of privately held zones of capitalist productivity: areas for extractive timber and mineral production, intensive agricultural plantations, and conserved carbon sinks that can supposedly yield profit for these “local forest farmer communities” through the sale of carbon credits or as plantation laborers or petty commodity producers (Windey and Van Hecken 2019; Windey 2020). The local, predominantly male farmers, Congolese environmental CSOs and local scholars from this region with whom I engage rarely appear to resist this utilitarian and seemingly disempowering framing. At times, they even reproduce it. The postcolonial and post-conflict context of this region of Kisangani is characterized by the (quasi-)absence of industries and infrastructures (accelerated since the 1980s), a lack of investments that have isolated the region, and high political instability, with a constant reshuffling of ministries that has led to very low levels of institutional trust. In such a context, nostalgic references to “colonial modernity”—associated with stability and prosperity and with the ability to transform trees or “soil into something that becomes money,” as one local Banjwade farmer said—were common. For many of the forest farmers in the REDD+ intervention zones of this region, carbon, despite being perceived as an invisible and uncertain resource, appeared to be an opportunity to improve material conditions and achieve a productive transformation. While recognizing the hardships of labor conditions under Western domination, these farmers also often voiced their regret for the disappearance of international agribusiness companies and the paid labor opportunities they provided and saw their potential return as a pathway to development. While forests have symbolic, social, and spiritual values for these forest farmers, they also viewed the conversion of forests into “productive lands” for agriculture or carbon as a pathway to modernization and social and environmental justice for the DRC.

How should I respond when I encounter the seeming reproduction of a monocultural perspective instead of the alternatives and resistance to REDD+ discourses I expected? As a white

Belgian scholar, how should I engage with the aspirations of local collaborators which reproduce ideas of Western economic and ecological modernization while also striving to coproduce alternative ways of thinking and being, thus attempting to undo entrenched relationships of violent colonial appropriation of land and life? The narratives I encountered expressed a real sense of exclusion from the promised modernity, perceived as an ideal to attain, and an appeal to membership in global society (see also Ferguson 2006). They represented material, emotional, and bodily experiences and needs with consequences on resource creation and use, even if they contradicted postcolonial critiques of (eco)modernization and alternative worlds. In encountering these views, “engagement” meant needing to embrace the “disconcertment” (Law and Lin 2010) I felt as my critical assumptions were shaken and to adopt a “hyper self-reflexive practice” regarding my personal and institutional positioning, that is, the social construction of my own critical discourses (Kapoor 2004). My encounters and collaborations in DRC have pushed me to reflect on how socioeconomic privilege might work to permit and enable a “strong” critique of (eco)modernization, as well as on my own complicity within a system I critique (see also Kapoor 2004). Engaging through praxis with divergent or even contradictory understandings, rather than sticking to the tidiness of one theoretical frame, requires what Mignolo (2009) refers to as “epistemic disobedience.” In my research, this has entailed engaging with thick description in order to avoid essentializing the struggles of our action-research participants and colleagues and providing a better account of how such struggles are articulated in terms of distribution and inclusion in the system, not only in terms of alternatives or resistance to it. Being disconcerted through this process of reflexive engagement is, I believe, a first step to avoid treating the places where we conduct (action-)research as repositories of critical thinking, moving instead toward (co)producing knowledge and transforming unequal relationships.

Playing games for engagement in Nicaragua—reflections by Gert Van Hecken

I am currently an assistant professor in Development Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. I have lived and worked almost half of my adult life in Nicaragua as a researcher and later as a representative for a Belgian rural development nongovernmental organization (NGO). In this long-term engagement with processes of social and environmental change in rural Nicaragua, I have worked closely with *campesino* and environmental movements as well as with research and governmental organizations. These experiences, especially those in which I was involved as an action-researcher, have taught me that reflecting critically, while crucial for transforming structural injustices, is a necessary, but not sufficient, approach to bring about material changes in people’s everyday lives. This realization has struck me most clearly when sharing my critiques regarding PES as neoliberal conservation tools with partner organizations in the field. Although they most often welcome these discussions, they also ask what practical changes these critical framings and insights suggest for actors on the ground or in generating workable alternatives.

I have collaborated for many years with a small-scale environmental NGO in southeastern Nicaragua, close to the Indio Maíz Biological Reserve. In 2013, I engaged in a collaborative action-research process with several researchers and practitioners in which we jointly reflected on the implementation of the different strategies that the NGO had applied over two decades. The reflections this process generated revealed the difficulties of creating consensus-based, practical ways to collaborate with *campesino* men and women to arrest the deforestation and social disruption associated with an expanding agricultural frontier. The group concluded that the more “conventional” participatory methods initially employed (e.g., workshops, interviews, focus groups) could not sufficiently capture the many social-economic as well as livelihood

struggles that *campesinos* faced in their daily lives that greatly influenced their decision-making processes around land use change and deforestation. Nor could they adequately reveal how decision-making and practices are embedded in and shaped by local, power-laden institutional arrangements. We also felt that these methods were insufficient to produce the types of “knowledge encounters” necessary for stimulating open debate in which all involved actors (not only *campesinos*, but also researchers and NGO staff) engage in a questioning and deconstruction of their own worldviews and (implicit) assumptions, while recognizing alternative ways of knowing and doing, with the intent of offering a platform to collaboratively construct and discuss alternative social-environmental perceptions and practices.

In response, the NGO staff and I jointly experimented with the development of new tools for meaningful engagement through the cocreation of shared “actionable knowledge.” One such tool was a simulation board game intended to enable users/players to co-construct deeper understandings of how local historical, sociocultural, and economic dynamics shape farmers’ decision-making, fostering cooperation in the creation, testing, and discussing of new (or hitherto marginalized) alternative practices. The game, in which participants take up the roles of *campesino/campesina* households, mimics historical processes of agrarian change and social differentiation, simulates a range of potential alternative practices, and creates space for participants to collectively reflect on the often hidden motivational and sociopolitical dynamics triggered by policy tools such as PES. Multiple iterations and applications of the simulation game demonstrated its potential. We found that the game created a collective learning platform where different perspectives from different actors (including ourselves) could be compared, where links to real-life situations could be made, and where alternative views could be openly discussed and jointly interpreted (Merlet, Van Hecken, and Rodríguez-Fabílana 2018). First, when NGO practitioners and researchers played the game, they could observe firsthand and in real time how *campesinos*’ production decisions are constrained by broader structural-historical processes in which they are embedded but which are often overlooked or disregarded from an “outsider” perspective. Playing the game with local groups not only encouraged the NGO and researchers to be more humble in comparing their (theoretical/policy-informed) knowledge to *campesinos*’ and *campesinas*’ deeply ingrained knowledge of human-nature relations but also encouraged all of us to pay more attention to the importance of mutual relations based on empathy, which in the postgame feedback sessions often emerged as a crucial condition for creating meaningful and respectful collaborations with *campesinos* and *campesinas*. It also offered new entry points for discussion of sensitive issues related to power differences in local communities, such as land grabbing by richer *campesinos*. Ultimately, the game not only provided a platform and an impetus for discussions amongst the NGO and *campesinos* about why unequal power relations are so persistent and difficult to challenge but also stimulated reflections on possible alternative strategies to transform them. (For more details, see Merlet, Van Hecken, and Rodríguez-Fabílana 2018.)

Reflecting on this case highlights a number of tensions in engaged critical scholarship. Meaningful engagement with local actors requires recognition and transparency about uneven power relations in efforts toward co-constructing a common “humanity” that is not differentiated into expert academics and “research subjects” but rather generates epistemic plurality by ensuring that everyone is responsible for the production of knowledge and for transitioning toward alternative lifeways. In the same way, a situated approach, which allows for greater nuance in the interpretation of human-nature relations and takes into account differentiated conditions and contexts, can safeguard against theoretical interpretations of PES schemes divorced from the lived experience of those directly involved (Van Hecken et al. 2018). But there are additional questions that these experiences evoke. To what extent are we, as “engaged” researchers, willing and able to commit to supporting transformations for justice with “Others” (Dussel 2011)?

What would that commitment entail in relation to the collective critical agreements reached for transforming existing hegemonic structures or relations that commodify nature and devalue life? Critical scholars must grapple with how we can invest energy and (emotional) labor for the long run in critical processes and practices that give priority to building consensus—going beyond what is conventionally expected from an academic and relinquishing the all-too-common institutional and colonial research practice of simply entering and exiting into people’s lives at will to “get the academic job done.” Based on this and other collaborative experiences, I strongly believe that engaged critical scholarship in resource geography requires taking responsibility for collectively fomenting and strengthening ways that push beyond traditional academic practice to build relationships of empathy, care, and commitment to a common struggle, working away from reproducing exploitative and extractivist forms of knowledge production.

Relational accountabilities in a disciplined capitalist landscape of Canada—reflections by Vijay Kolinjivadi

As part of my postdoctoral research within an academic department at a Canadian university, I gathered stories from indebted farmers on Prince Edward Island (PEI) who receive payments from the Canadian government to plant trees, widen buffer zones between their fields and waterways, and retire production from sloping land in order to prevent soil erosion. The program is described as PES, in which services of “nature” to “humans” (seen as outside of it) in the form of conservation of soils to maintain intensive agricultural production are increasingly being valued over more “multifunctional” landscapes (Kolinjivadi, Zaga-Mendez, and Dupras 2019). The research project’s explicit goal was to evaluate and improve the PES program on PEI.

PEI is a small island province with a major agricultural industry—potato production and processing—to which the provincial government is closely aligned. Many farmers on PEI have transitioned from small-scale diverse production systems to increasingly specialized agriculture, especially in potatoes. The majority belong to families that have farmed the same piece of land for several generations. The farmers I spoke to on PEI were largely ambivalent about the government payment scheme that would require them to implement certain land-use practices (e.g., grassed waterways, retiring production on sloped land, installing livestock fences), mostly because their contracts with the monopolistic potato-processing industry on PEI do not recognize or promote soil rehabilitation and biodiversity considerations. From the industry’s perspective, until consumers (e.g., food retailers and fast-food chains) begin placing value on “environmental sustainability,” no premium can be made to ensure that soil protection is prioritized in contracts with farmers. However, it is unlikely that consumers of PEI French fries in Latin America and Asia will be willing to pay more for a better protected environment in an island already broadcasted to the world as being idyllic and in a country (mistakenly) acclaimed for being peaceful, tolerant, and orderly (Howell 2005). By framing alternative agricultural practices as “delivering ecosystem services,” market-based environmental governance strategies often sustain and enhance processes of translocal capitalist accumulation to respond to new challenges. Identifying novel and potentially lucrative strategies to internalize environmental externalities to maintain production is one such example. The consequence is that other, nonproduction-oriented relationships that intimately characterize farmers’ connections to the land become neutralized and instantly rebranded as new resources that might ideally fetch a premium along the supply chain.

For the farming families of PEI, surviving in the induced scarcity of capital relations has necessarily meant collective action and cooperation among neighbors, including sharing equipment to defray costs, comparing contracts, collectively generating knowledge around best practices of soil retention, and reasserting agency in solidarity to establish their own agro-environmental

groups that do not involve the provincial government's intervention. Thus, what actually gets articulated is the autonomous emergence of socio-ecological relations required to survive in an otherwise cutthroat market environment. Farmers do not frame these relations as "ecosystem services" that will further enhance value on their property but as a continuous desire, perhaps unconsciously, to reestablish the conditions that give meaning to their vocation, both symbolically and biophysically.

Assuming responsibility as a researcher for the relations in which I am entangled in this project has been and continues to be a challenge. Two directions seem possible: one reflects collective accountabilities with research partners, as Van Hecken noted from his experiences in Nicaragua, and another the more structural contradictions of an academic "producing" publications by examining how the concealed labor of farmers and the extra-human natures, framed as ecosystem services, are perceived as "resources" for continued production. On an island as small as PEI, the fact that everyone knows each other provides a significant deterrent for farmers to voice their opinions in public. Despite being an outsider, the interest I showed in understanding their difficulties in farming offered space to "vent," as one producer confided to me during an interview that went on longer than planned.

While no easy shortcuts exist to understanding my complicity as an academic researcher in further patterning resource logics and state strategies, I have attempted to translate farmers' experiences, perceptions, and activities to illustrate how relations of care and attachment to fellow neighbors and nonhuman others do not necessarily fall within the ambit of "delivering ecosystem services." In doing so, I have to draw attention to the resistance of both people (in this case farmers who refuse to be disciplined by the state and the market as "machine operators") and non-people (who can never be straightjacketed into ecosystem services for humans), even in the most disciplined capitalist landscapes.

The translation of farmers' experiences and their everyday forms of resistance has been a priority in the published research papers and presentations that have resulted from my research. However, fostering self-reflection is becoming a greater priority for me beyond making resistance "visible" through academic products, as Harney and Moten (2013) have advised against. In solidarity with resistance against turning people and non-people into resources for production, this intention has meant directly interrogating how knowledge is produced and packaged within the neoliberal academy. It has entailed initiating interdepartmental discussions with colleagues about the ways in which we (academics) seek to identify the uneven social and ecological impacts of resource production "out there" while simultaneously replicating such uneven impacts in the logics of worker precarity, adherence to the pressure to produce faster, in greater quantity, and through ever-tighter evaluation metrics to compete with others and justify our positions within the university itself. With no pretense of falsely equating farmer struggles on PEI (or worse still, threats of land dispossession of the rural peasantry by neoliberal logics more broadly) with the precarity of academia, my aim is to foster self-reflexivity on the part of academics over a common root to collective struggles. In doing so, greater potential emerges to brainstorm ways to structurally alter how knowledge coproduction takes place in order to build upon connected, though highly differentiated, struggles.

Engaging with carbon offsetting in Mexico—reflections by Elizabeth Shapiro-Garza

I am a critical human geographer and have served on the faculty of a multidisciplinary school of the environment at a private university in the United States for the last ten years. I spent the first eight years of my career in Latin America working in and with rural communities on natural

resources issues, and my scholarship has been greatly informed by these early, highly engaged experiences.

I have collaborated with an NGO, the Integrator of Campesino and Indigenous Communities of Oaxaca (ICICO), since 2005, when I began fieldwork for my dissertation on PES in Mexico. Governed by an elected committee of representatives from 15 indigenous communities, ICICO's mission is to attain recognition for and benefit from the "ecosystem services" provided through traditional stewardship of their territories. These communities, while holding relatively strong communal land tenure and maintaining the vitality of their traditional governance systems and cultural practices, have also been hard hit by neoliberal reforms in Mexico that undermined rural economies and spurred significant out-migration.

My dissertation research on the then newly formed federal PES programs in Mexico built upon a body of critique in resource geography that posits that the commodification of ES, folding previously unrecognized resources into capitalistic markets, will result in processes of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2004). My early experiences with ICICO and many other communities enrolled in the national programs seemed to support this critique. In meetings to discuss the concept of PES, community members openly worried that selling something that was continuously produced and tied to their land (e.g., carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, etc.) would give the buyers of these "services" rights to their territory. The lack in these early years of any connection to actual markets for ES also supported the critique that those marginalized from capitalist economies will never be able to negotiate on equitable terms.

And yet... as time went by and other communities with whom I had partnered had long given up on the possibility of "selling" their ES, ICICO persisted and, in the process, did much to "decolonize" both the concept and the practice of PES. Framing the concept of PES as a means to "revalue the rural," ICICO represented potential payments as a recognition of the value of the stewardship of these communities for their land by urban areas and the global North. In 2008, in partnership with a Mexican environmental NGO, ICICO created a national-level, voluntary market for carbon offsets. In doing so, ICICO was able to establish the "rules of the game" through which carbon sequestration would be produced (through management practices, such as agroforestry systems, that would produce additional local economic and environmental benefits), measured (through protocols that best suited their forests and their capacities), and sold (by setting a high fixed price per ton). ICICO insisted on replicating this approach when they partnered with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to develop the Mexican protocol for monitoring and verification of forest-based carbon offsets for that state's newly created voluntary market. The ICICO communities have since largely invested the significant funds from carbon offsetting into community infrastructure and services, cultural activities, and the generation of educational and employment opportunities to counter the flow of out-migration.

In 2018 and again in 2019, I worked to link my university's Office of Sustainability to ICICO to purchase carbon offsets as part of a broader plan to become "carbon neutral" by 2024. Was my "engagement" as a broker within the very system I had critiqued a betrayal of my principles as a critical scholar? This question, and this dilemma, represents for me a complex set of responsibilities that often come into contradiction, if not conflict, with each other, generating questions with which I continue to struggle. While I still view the underlying rationale of PES as inevitably linked to an overtly neoliberal political project and the expansion of capitalist rationalities and systems of accumulation, I also feel a strong responsibility to report on and support the ways in which these indigenous communities, operating within their particular context and with incredible persistence and acumen, have been able to *aprovechar* (take advantage of), and even to some extent decolonize, the rationalities and practices of PES to support the reproduction of their own cultural practices and to strengthen territorial claims.

However, in attempting to honor my relationship with ICICO and the communities it serves by linking them to carbon funding, was I serving as a “handmaiden” to pragmatic, immediate needs instead of taking on a more daunting, but profound, praxis by working with them to explicate and contest the problematic structural issues at the root of this approach (Mohan 2006; Brenner 2009) as demonstrated by Van Hecken’s engagement with collective knowledge production in Nicaragua? Similar to Kolinjivadi, I did make some attempts to challenge the reproduction of capitalistic logics and potentially dispossessing practices of market-based approaches to climate-change mitigation within my own academic institution: teaching a course and organizing an international workshop at my university that brought together scholars and practitioners, including ICICO members, to explore critical theorizations, contestations, and alternative practices in PES. In an attempt to ensure that ICICO’s “success” was understood within a broader structural context, I coauthored a peer-reviewed article that explored the factors that allowed these communities in Oaxaca to benefit from forest-based carbon offsetting while so many others did not (Osborne and Shapiro-Garza 2018). Were these the morally defensible responses to the dilemmas facing me? Was my “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009) within my own institution sufficient to counter my direct participation in systems and structures I critique? My answer, perhaps unsatisfactory, is that I understand my responsibility as an engaged critical scholar to be willing to live in, as noted by Windey, a state of “disconcertment” (Law and Lin 2010), continuously and iteratively grappling with these and other tensions between engagement and critique.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we explored how the relationship between critique and engagement can be fraught. However, the dynamics and tensions we describe also provide insight into the ways in which both critical theory and grounded practice can inform and transform, and in turn be informed and be transformed by, engaged scholarship in resource geography.

Our reflections present the tensions of engaged critical scholarship in resource geography as ever-evolving, complex, and above all requiring continuous reflexivity related to roles and relational accountabilities of multiple types and scales: individual, collective, and institutional (see also Delgado, Chapter 25 this volume). In Windey’s narrative, this struggle is manifest in her attempts to understand and represent the complexity of local conceptualizations and reactions to PES projects in the DRC, including those embraced for the perceived benefits of capitalist eco-modernization that defied her critical assumptions of grounded resistance. She argues that one of the first steps to critical engagement should be hyper self-reflexivity related to our own positionality in “the world order” and refraining from projecting oneself and our critical assumptions onto the “Others” with whom we engage (Dussel 2011). Van Hecken’s reflections on the inability of critical framings alone to generate concrete alternatives for the community-based organization implementing PES in Nicaragua led him to collaboratively design games intended to enact “knowledge encounters.” In doing so, he and his collaborators cocreated conditions through which all actors could better access each other’s perspectives and challenge their own assumptions. Further, it advanced a move from individual self-reflexivity to collective reflexivity with the possibility of enabling alternatives in resource management. Kolinjivadi delves into the role of the academy in bringing the concept of “ecosystem services” as a novel resource into being in the context of a PES program with potato farmers in Canada. He demonstrates not only how the meaning and value of the work of both the potato farmer and the academic is valued, structured, and measured in terms of the market but also the ways in which this commonality can foster unexpected affinities of resistance

and solidarity, generating the conditions for coproduced knowledge. Finally, Shapiro-Garza explores the moral and epistemological dilemmas generated through her role as a broker in a PES exchange between her academic institution and indigenous communities in Mexico with whom she collaborates, namely, when her understanding of structural inequities is in conflict with her sense of responsibility to walk with and support those with whom she engages on the pathways they have chosen.

All four reflections also reveal that the praxis embodied in engaging with (multiple) meanings and experiences with marginalized communities requires moving beyond the hegemonic subjectivity of the critical but normative expert and its authority. Moreover, they shatter the myth of scholars being fully consistent in their work and unable to allow empirical context and engaged relationships to influence the evolution of how learning takes place (Law and Lin 2010). We find that, instead of trying to resolve and rationalize discrepancies according to one's own paradigms and subjectivities, critical resource scholarship must embrace conflicting ideas, countercurrents, tensions, and contradictions in order to ensure that insights that emerge from the relationships between scholars and their partners are attentive to the messy ways in which resources are created, defined, and valued (Harney and Moten 2013).

As we continually (re)learn, being accountable to these uneven processes of resource formation requires constant, careful attention and a willingness to embrace, or at least accept, some level of ambiguity and dissonance. At times, the messiness itself is disguised or unclear, pushing us to disassemble those assumptions at the foundation of recognized intellectual traditions, promoting deeper critique (Windey). It may mean recognizing and understanding that the relations potato producers have with the land and/or academics with the process of doing research can never quite be translated into the production of an ES resource or a published knowledge product, respectively, but rather can have multiple coexisting and/or disputed definitions and values (Kolinjivadi). Even in the pursuit of approaches and processes of action research that might uncover the undisciplined nature of resource creation, we can be confronted with the unevenness of knowledge valuation, which in turn pushes us to even deeper accountability (Van Hecken). This reflexive attentiveness to the messy ways of engaged scholarship also may mean throwing our critical lot in with the collective decisions and processes of the communities with whom we collaborate, such as the sale of carbon offsets from the indigenous and *campesino* communities in Oaxaca, Mexico, to simultaneously support and make legible the accomplishments of this one group while continuing to critique the system as a whole (Shapiro-Garza).

The brightest, strongest thread woven through all four narratives is that engaged critical scholarship in resource geography demands reflexivity and a commitment to co-constructing life-enhancing materialities with those with whom we engage while continuously and iteratively struggling with the inherent contradictions and messiness that those processes generate. The responsibility of engagement involves reconstituting new relations of coproduced action and knowledge between researchers and their interlocutors as well as within their own institutions, similar to what Derrida (1994, 31) termed "originary performative" acts, contesting state and market attempts at classification and enrollment into the logics of dispossession and accumulation (Bastian 2012). Based on the concept of praxis, such engagement is rooted in a commitment to relationship building, above and beyond academically professionalized discursive reproduction, whether as critique or support (Freire 1970). Relational accountability in resource geography therefore serves as the foundation undergirding engaged scholars' attempts to walk the line between serving as "handmaidens" to pragmatic needs or "socially weightless" critique in the professional academy, all the while remaining skeptical of the modern conceit of human-nature relations as fixed and unchangeable "resources" to be sustained or enhanced (Brenner 2009; McNay 2014).

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