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Politics Is Hard: An Interview with Professor Jenny Pickerill

MITCH ROSE & JENNY PICKERILL

ABSTRACT

This is an edited transcript of an interview conducted by Mitch Rose with Professor Jenny Pickerill at the Gregynog Theory School at Gregynog Hall, Newtown Wales on June 7, 2023. The conversation revolves around a number of Professor Pickerill's research themes including: anarchism; eco-housing; Indigenous politics; and the complexity of political activism.

CRYNODEB

Dyma drawsgrifiad wedi'i olygu o gyfweliad gyda'r Athro Jenny Pickerill a gafodd ei gynnal gan Mitch Rose yn Ysgol Theori Gregynog yn Neuadd Gregynog, Y Drenewydd, Cymru ar 7 Mehefin 2023. Mae'r drafodaeth yn cwmpasu nifer o themâu ymchwil yr Athro Pickerill gan gynnwys anarchaeth, eco-dai, gwleidyddiaeth frodorol a chymhlethdod ymgyrchu gwleidyddol.

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INTRODUCTION

Mitch Rose [MR]: I am really happy to present this interview with Professor Jenny Pickerill [JP] that took place at the Gregynog Theory School on 7th June 2023.[1] There are a number of aspects of the interview that I find interesting, and I think will be of interest to anyone grappling with questions of political mobilisation in an era of decolonisation and climate change. Two points in particular are worth noting. First, Jenny makes some very interesting observations about the difference between solidarity driven democratic politics and the more amoebic flexible nature of anarchical politics. The interview brings into relief that anarchism is an approach rather than a solution. If the central problem of democratic politics is trying to get divergent interests to align under a single banner, the central challenge of anarchist politics is the problem of various political actors working at cross purposes. While democratic politics certainly offers more opportunity for large and sustained impact (as only large coalitions can), it also (and necessarily) elides difference. Anarchist politics, on the other hand, provides much more room for difference and communication. Yet, in doing so it must embrace a wider definition of impact as well as accept discoordination (and even contradiction) as the norm.

The second point that comes through is the distinction between politics on paper and politics in practice. Indeed, Jenny articulates a mild frustration with the academic tendency to breezily preach esoteric conceptions of political action that are very difficult to actualise. Too often political statements in Geography tend towards the performative or idealised imaginations of politics; writings which potentially provide an escape hatch for actually engaging with the overlapping contradictory power dynamics that accompany both research and activism. One thing Jenny repeats throughout the interview is that politics is hard. And while creating new conceptual openings are important, they are only part of the solution. And we should be cautious of taking an outsider's perspective which too easily critiques those at the coal face of experimentation and difference making.

INTERVIEW PROCEEDINGS

Mitch Rose [MR]: Hi Jenny. It is great to have you here at the Gregynog Theory School and to have this opportunity to ask you questions about your work and your interests. I thought I would open with a discussion about anarchism. It quickly becomes apparent that anarchism is a strong theme in your work. I thought it would be a good opener to ask what you mean by anarchism as a political movement, and I am also interested in what draws you to it personally as a modality of politics?

Jenny Pickerill [JP]: Thank you. I am quite honoured to have someone read my work and ask questions about it so thank you. I came to anarchism through activism. At the beginning of my PhD, I got involved in direct environmental activism. And it was a time of anti-roads and anti-capitalist protests, and the group that I was involved with in Newcastle [Australia] was very anarchist, so I was educated by activists and then went on and did some reading and thought, 'Wow, this really fits what I want to do'. I feel like anarchism has driven my activism and that activism has really driven my politics and that politics, of course, feeds into my work.

And what is it that I love about it? For me, the most important thing that anarchism offers is its prefigurative nature, that you act now as you want the world to be. What I have always enjoyed about that is you are not waiting

for anything. You are not waiting for a revolution, you are not waiting for representative democracy, and it is multi-scalar so it also says, 'While it would be really good to overthrow the government, actually that is unlikely to happen,' so let's be realistic. There are lots of other things you can do in the meantime that will have a different level of impact. Some will be almost minuscule, but they might improve your community. They might improve the way you choose to live life, they might have environmental benefits. I really like the possibilities this approach opens up. For me, particularly in academia, it has enabled me to have moments of being quite activist and involved and other moments where I cannot do that, but I can make changes on a different scale. So, it enables me to hold on to some politics as you progress through different life stages. I found that really helpful.

The other thing I really like is it's non-hierarchical approach. Obviously, this contrasts quite sharply with academia. I have ended up a head of a department which in itself is very hierarchical, so there is always a tension there. But to me the non-hierarchical is about never stopping someone from taking action: never saying, 'You cannot do that yet. You have got to wait until you are in a position of power'. For me, that enables change to start happening as people are ready to do it. It also means that you do not spend a lot of time in endless meetings. Sometimes you might be seeking consensus, but if you cannot see consensus, you just make the group smaller and then you go and take an action. It prevents others stopping you from doing something. In my opinion, it enables people to take the action that they want to do.

MR: That is an interesting distinction you are making. Would you say that the inclination towards consensus is more indicative of democratic politics?

JP: No, I think that the ideal of anarchism is that you reach consensus within whatever group you happen to be working in. But in practice, when that consensus is not met, it does not stop other people going and doing what they wanted to do regardless. So, the consensus is, 'Is there a commonality where we can decide what change we are going to do, what action we are going to have?' But if there is not, then some people can go and do it anyway. It is that multiscale element which I really enjoy. It also means that if some people wanted to go (and this was in the 1990s) and perform a highly arrestable offence because they felt it was worth it, but I did not, I was still part of the group. It was just that I did not know about that bit, but they have gone off and done it and I could still be part of other actions. It prevents some things becoming quite divisive in my opinion.

MR: Would you say that there is a sharp division between anarchism and democratic politics in that sense?

JP: I think that anarchism (well … politics in general) always requires relationships and allegiances and compromises and I think there are clear similarities there. And of course, power runs through it. Although anarchism is trying to tackle power and trying not to empower certain people to become leaders, there are obvious power dynamics, particularly around gender and race that run through most real-life anarchist projects that I have been involved in. I do not think that you could say, 'Well, here's a perfect example [of anarchist politics] and it is completely different [from democratic politics]'. I think there are obvious overlaps. But I think that in the anarchist approach it is not necessary to take everyone with you.

MR: I often think about democratic politics in terms of compromise. One thing people often will not recognise (or they struggle to recognise) is that

democratic politics always involves some level of submission. You have to submit to a form of rule (and the political positions therein) that you often do not love or do not want. For example, there is a lot about the current UCU [University and College Union] strike action [in British universities] that I am not happy with. But I submit and I say, 'Well, I am going to go along with this, even though I am only on board for a bit of it', and that is a requirement of solidarity oriented democratic politics. But what is interesting about anarchism, at least in the way that you frame it, is that you are saying, 'Well, you do not have to submit. You can go and do your own thing and that is okay. And you can still be part of a larger political project'.

JP: That is how I understand it and that is how the groups that I have been working with understand it. Obviously, there are multiple versions of anarchism and it is practised in different ways. Most of the groups that I have worked with have been British anarchists and very much coming out of the radical direct-action movements of the 1990s. This leads to the final thing I love about anarchism, which is that it is about deeds, not words. It is about getting on with action. You are not waiting till you have the perfect ideology. You are not waiting until you have got a great manifesto. You are not waiting until we all agree. We are just going to start enacting some resistance and enacting some creativity and getting on with trying to change the world - if that does not sound too grand.

MR: It reminds me of a point that Gibson-Graham (1996) consistently raises in her critique of Marxist politics, namely, 'What counts as success? What, within a Marxist framework, does success look like?' If our only option is radical revolutionary change, then how can these small initiatives count? And therefore, how we can take any pleasure or any joy in the small changes that you might be making around you? That is a really powerful critique and I am beginning to understand the hopefulness that is embedded in a lot of your research.

JP: That is why I am interested in and hopeful about what might seem like quite niche small-scale projects because the question I often get, especially in Geography, is, 'That is nice, but how is it going to scale up?' And I will try and answer it in quite an anarchist way, which is 'It is not about scaling up; it is about horizontal replication. And it has to be emerging out of particular places, and it will look different'. But that does not satisfy those who are very interested in large-scale change. I do understand that, and it is actually something that I am still working on. I will come back with a better answer one day. But to me, it is about being able to go and build a house differently and live in that house. You change not just your life, but you start to change the community you are in. You change those you interact with. You end up inspiring others to do that. It is incredibly slow. And it might be quite niche and partial. But it is something and I like to hold on to those examples of something going in the right direction, especially in the current context.

MR: It also acknowledges complexity which I think is important and I think it is also another powerful theme in your work – the kind of complexity you see in trying to create effective political contributions and changes.

I thought I would move on to some of your work on eco housing. When I first started looking at the titles of your work in this area, I was a bit surprised because when I think about anarchism, I think about the Occupy movement or urban farming in Detroit, and those examples have a very strong anarchic message. But eco housing? My first thought is that it is a lifestyle thing or a 'back to land' ethic. While you do not identify the eco housing co-operative

initiatives that you are researching as anarchist, you do see them as sites of radical experimentation with different ways of being and existing. So why housing? Why the emphasis on how we organise shelter, particularly given that these are very personal, very intimate, very small spaces. Why have these become for you important sites of experimentation and political activism?

JP: As is often the case with my work, because I am very empirical, it started from a very empirical question, which was all the anarchists I have been working with through the radical environmentalism of the 1990s needed somewhere to live. What was available to them was constraining in lots of ways in terms of the possibilities of basically living the change they wanted to live. But at the same time, we have programs like Grand Designs on TV advocating for amazing, eco housing designs at horrendous prices. So I was very interested in what an affordable eco home looks like. Colin Ward (1976), the anarchist, did a great deal of work on what an anarchist house would look like. And that also led me into a lot of feminist work which said, 'Well, what is a house and a home if we take a different lens to look at it?' You have rightly said it is potentially a very intimate space, but it is also a space that is quite constraining and not just in social relationships. Dolores Hayden (1981) has written some great work on what would happen if we took the kitchen out of a house. Do kitchens become particularly stereotyped as a women's place? And what if houses had no kitchens and we had one communal kitchen? How would we live differently? All of this comes together to me in asking, 'Why do we look so critically at food, water and energy, but have a lack of interest in how our housing could be radically different?' To me, that felt like a space we could delve into and ask really big questions.

To me, housing, especially in Britain, is full of assumptions about how we want to live, what rooms we need, who is living in there and how we own it. At the same time, these anarchists I would been working with were like, 'Oh, we are going to go and build houses now and we are going to do it illegally because we have got no money. And, we are going to build it out of straw'. So radical, inventive, and self-taught self-provisioning. Obviously, we all need shelter. So there is a real possibility here for looking at how we do shelter differently and politically and what does it mean to redesign it and who gets to design those spaces? But also, what happens when we live in those spaces and those huge material differences? What happens if you live in a straw bale house? What does that change about what you can and cannot do? And to me, that is just fascinating.

An example is the straw-bale houses built by a housing association in Waddington, Lincolnshire. It was all open plan because that is what works best ecologically. But when they tried to get the council tenants[2] in and they had to explain that you cannot attach certain things to a straw-bale wall (there is real limits, you cannot attach a TV, there is only certain ways in which you can live in a straw-bale house) and people are like, 'What do you mean? Why is it open plan? I do not want all the noise of the kids here the whole time'. So, there is an interesting tension between an eco-house design and what the residents wanted. To me the whole thing opens a lot of questions about what spaces do we actually want and need, and who gets to design those spaces, and how can houses also be a political statement or push against established norms.

MR: I recently bought a house, and I wanted to put in a heat pump. But the people that I hired to do the heating and plumbing were strongly waving me away from that. They literally said, 'It will be a disaster'. So, there was a lot

of resistance. And what do I know? Afterwards I read a little bit more about heat pumps, and it sounds like it is a different way of heating one's house and it is something to get used to. So even when we want change, we are pushing against well-established positions. And because of that it feels risky. You do not know what is going to happen. And that can create a lot of insecurity in a space – one's home – that is all about security.

JP: I think that is what fascinates me – the risks involved in pushing against the conventional. And of course, failure is built into that. I have seen a lot of structures that have really failed as a house. And some of them, you could have foreseen it. There [are] a particularly radical set of housing [experiments] in Crestone (a subdistrict of Colorado) where there were not any planning zones. So, someone decided to build a house with a paper-based roof. And as this person was showing me around, he said, 'You knew that was never going to work. Why waste your time?' But this person wanted to experiment with it. There are those people who are willing and want to try it out, but most people need to know something's going to work before they try it. I am also interested in how the knowledge of what works gets circulated in helpful ways. So, you do not just keep failing, but actually you go, 'Oh, there is a great example there, how does that transfer somewhere else?'

MR: They really play a critical role in providing some new paths. It is interesting that there are these people at the coalface trying to illuminate for us other ways of potentially living.

JP: But they also need some help in situating in some of those places. A group of Brits moved to southern Spain and took with them the idea of straw-bale housing because it works very well here. But it is too hot in southern Spain. Although it is breathable, it is very insulating. If there are not enough windows and doors for ventilation, then actually you have just created a nice little sauna. So, there is space for academics to say, 'That is great, but you need to look at the place and the climate you are in because that is going to matter'. The eco homes in rural Thailand that I visited are open. There are not any walls because that is what works for that climate. There is a space here to match that experimentation with all the other knowledge of architects and engineers and builders about why some materials are being used in certain places and not in others.

MR: Should we talk a little bit about Indigenous politics? Obviously, the theme of our Theory School takes a very prominent position in your work. And what I like about your interest in Indigeneity is how you use it to illuminate the complexity of political change, particularly when working at different scales and with different communities. A theme that I have noticed in your writing is how Indigenous politics and anarchist politics do not slide into an easy solidarity, even as they would seemingly be on the same side of many specific issues. Would you say that your interest in Indigenous politics is primarily about illustrating how the various political movements we are invested in are already colonised, already working with settler colonialism mindsets? Or is it really about the nuts and bolts of how to get things done with different groups who usually have different priorities? Both seem to be themes in your work.

JP: What you help clarify in asking that question is that I started with the nuts and bolts – I was really interested in how we find commonality across difference – and it just happened to be that that was building on work in Australia between Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmentalists. What that created, however, was a quite mechanistic list where you do this and this and this and then you will be able to work together. And that really misses

the nuances and the complexity of politics and place, and it ended up being another way that some of those NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] could co-opt Indigenous politics: 'we might or might not believe that we are properly trusting each other, but we are going to act like we are in order to get the goal that we want'.

I have become much more interested in how Australian settler environmentalists (who tend to be White) recognise their own colonising beliefs and practices and how they then work to undo that in the everyday (seePickerill, 2024). What does it mean for them to realise that they need to transform their own politics? And what does a decolonial politics look like when you are a settler environmentalist? In Australia, because you might have been there for 200 years, you are not necessarily willing to accept that you are a settler. So how do you remove the colonial thinking from your practice and how can you do that without asking Indigenous people to do all the work for you? It is that internal work that you need to undo when coming to the table with Indigenous activists and working with them in a way that supports them, and that is anti-racist, and does not just embroil them in your campaign and your project. That is more interesting and of course more difficult to do. So, it is not just about an inclusive politics (because then you are still kind of co-opting); it is, 'How do you shift what it means to be an environmentalist in Australia to support Indigenous agendas on their terms?' And that is very hard to do

MR: … Particularly when their terms seem to go against your own environmentalist ambitions.

JP: Exactly. And that is where the tension comes.

MR: I am so tempted to ask: 'How do they do that?' But that is unanswerable.

JP: It is answerable. I did study one campaign in Kimberley in Northwest Australia, and basically some of them gave up the goal that they started with (which was to save a part of an area just north of Broome) and switched into a much more social justice focus. Now on paper, it is interesting, because journal article reviewers said, 'Well, this is obvious, of course we should have social justice before environmental campaigns'. I think in academia it is very easy to say, 'Of course social justice is central'. But I am interested in what that means in practice. It is hard to say, 'I want to save the whales, but now I am involved in supporting an economics project for Indigenous people'. That is a completely different form of activism. How do you reconcile or travel between these political goals in a way that makes sense? Simple to write, very hard to do.

MR: I often feel that the abstracted notion of 'the political' that often gets published is somewhat idealised or perhaps too conceptually arcane to be useful. Sometimes I feel like saying, 'Have you actually ever worked in trying to actually make a change?' Because it is very difficult.

JP And how do you? I do put myself in my work because I also think, 'Well, … I love trees and I want to stop them being cut down'. But how do I reconcile that with knowing that I do not own those trees. If they belonged to an Indigenous group and they decided to cut down those trees, what do I do? This is what most activists in Australia are dealing with.

MR: I think this is a good moment to ask our audience if they have any questions for Jenny based upon anything we have talked about so far.

Audience question: I wonder if you have ever seen anarchism be politically effective. Can you give some examples?

JP: I do not have handy examples and that is something that I am tempted to go and look for. But also, I am not doing that because I want to see what is happening now. What I do see is that there are tenets of activist practice that have been integrated into some key movements that have led to broader change. So, for example, I would say that in the 1990s anti-capitalist movements were very strongly anarchist. You had the Black Bloc, [3] but you also had a strong critique of capitalism within there. We are not in an anti-capitalist moment now, but we are at a moment where there are myriad different non-capitalist approaches like degrowth, or the circular economy, or doughnut economies that are gaining traction. There were some hopeful bursts in Barcelona[4] and then they fell apart again recently. It is getting more accepted that capitalism is not to the benefit of all and to the environment and that is no longer seen as radical in my mind.

In other ways, I think anarchism can create space for more moderate voices to be heard. For example, Colin Ward's (Ward, 1976) [4] experiments in anarchist housing in Lewisham were deeply radical and challenging. This created a space for other more recent projects like LILAC in Leeds.[5] LILAC is not an assertively anarchist project, but in many ways what they are doing is anarchist. They have built quite normal looking straw-bale houses on previously council land, and they have secured council and government funding to help them. Their project was made possible because of earlier anarchist housing experiments. I do not think that would have been possible if some of the more radical things had not already happened and tested out some of that material. I do not think there are straight lines of connection, but I do see little elements of hope that you could connect if you wanted to.

Audience question: I remember watching an interview with Noam Chomsky about the definition of anarchy. And I remember that Chomsky defined anarchy as an attitude that can help you question and challenge a system and the way a system operates. I was wondering if you agree with this idea of anarchism as an 'attitude'.

JP: I do. I think that it is an approach to how you live your daily life and how you engage or not in the different elements of more conventional capitalist society. And I think that attitude allows you to make decisions strategically when you feel you must compromise. So, I still vote because I exist in a system that represents that type of democracy, but I am not expecting that to be a good outcome. My attitude is that I am going to do what I can, but there is not a kind of 'pure' anarchist way of being. This is one of the things I really like about it. That is not to say other people do not criticise me and my approach and I have had plenty of arguments with people who say I am not anarchist enough. But I think, to me, it gives the possibility of using elements where you might see something strategically important.

Audience question: I was wondering if you could say a bit more about how power dynamics work in anarchist groups.

JP: I think the power dynamics in anarchism are fascinating because some of the groups I have worked with start from the assumption that because they are non-hierarchical that means they have sorted out all power dynamics. That is a big danger area because that means they have not. The groups that have done better start from quite a deep reflection on what power they might or might not have in their basic characteristics, through their education, in their language, in their self-confidence, and how they might come to

dominate some of those meetings. One of the things that those groups have worked hard on is adopting different ways of communicating that prevent some of those power dynamics taking over. I do like the use of hand signals in meetings because I think as an academic, I love to talk and me saying I agree with you is like a ten-minute session about, 'Yeah, you are right', when actually all I needed to do is this [waving both hands towards the group as a sign of agreement]. I think that those sorts of things challenge some of those patterns, but it is ongoing and it has to be a constant process of checking in with each other in a group.

There are also scale issues there about what people are feeling about how others are treating them or not. Groups that introduce a 'feeling circle' at the beginning of every meeting often work well – it works because they can say, for example, 'Why did you do that? You have made me feel like you are trying to critique why I have not watered those plants properly?' It is amazing because we are very sensitive and as humans, we are deeply irrational, and that is okay, but I think that means we have a lot of communication problems. I have seen a lot of groups recently put a lot of effort into Non-Violent Communication (NVC) training and that has been helpful, but also a challenge for a lot of people to understand what that means and to listen properly. I feel like in academia I am being trained not to listen. This idea of deep listening is quite hard. I still want to jump in with an answer before I have heard the rest of the question. There is a lot of tactics that recognise that power will always be unequal and uneven and that we will all experience the world differently, even if we look like we are the same – and that matters. One of the groups I am working with now is around building tiny homes, and they are a woman-only group, and they want to just build the home without men commenting on how they are or are not doing it properly. It is not that they do not trust that men know how to build a tiny home, but they want to enjoy doing it and messing up and failing and then succeeding on their own. So, it is also sometimes about creating a separate space where you do not get judged.

Audience question: It is really fascinating what you were saying about the design of a house – taking risks and pushing against conventional housing. But you also have a disposable income to test things out and take these risks. As academics go in, look at what works and assess what is best, what is the best way for them to take that knowledge and make it applicable so that other people can access those resources who do not have the disposable income to risk and simply cannot afford to fail?

JP: A lot of my work in affordable housing is driven by this question because my concern is exactly that, 'How is this relevant if it is just another Grand Designs lovely eco house for one or two people?' There are two things that are crucial there. The first is that most of the projects I work on are collective and in that collectivity the risk is reduced and the ability to secure funding is increased. And there are some interesting funding models and some really interesting community minded banks in Britain that will fund collective projects where they do not have the capital initially. But like you say, even when they are eco communities and they are living off the land and they are living off very low incomes and self-provisioning, most of the time, at some point, someone had some kind of money, even if it was £25,000, which to be honest, most people do not have. There are ongoing projects trying to support the setup of eco-communities where they have crowdfunded that initial money. That was going quite well until COVID, but now we are seeing that financial support dry-up, especially with the cost of living increasing. I still think there is a big sticky problem around that capital. Even

groups like Lammas[6] have secured (ironically) government funding to build their common house. Even though a lot of them say they are anarchists, and they have got nothing to do with the government and they are just going to live off the land, it is being supported by the government. One of the things I try and do is remove the myths about how you get to do this or not. This means working with some groups to explore what alternative financial models look like. There are a lot of different examples. There is a great one in Portland, Oregon USA, where they have got an eco-community, and it is rental.[7] So, you get to rent the space and try it out. But again, it is because someone bought the whole building! In LILAC in Leeds, they all pay a third of their income so they can work part time in an apple orchard and get to live there. But it still required two or three families to be quite professional, GP's and academics, and they are in effect subsidising the rest of the community. They do not mind. That is their political choice. But you couldn't have the whole community working in the orchard. How these projects require internal cross-subsidising does not get talked about enough.

Audience question: I have a question about Indigenous people. We often see Indigenous people characterised as 'guardians of the environment,' 'of the planet' and they are often at the forefront of the fight against climate change. But I wonder if Indigenous practices are always environmentally friendly because I remember, for example, attending events hosted by an Indigenous community that is part of this organisation I studied for my PhD and there are these practices that are 2,000 years old but are now not very environmentally friendly. So, I am wondering if there is a possibility that this kind of representation of Indigenous peoples as always 'friends of the environment' or as 'custodians of the planet' is also a Western representation?

JP: Absolutely. And I think that we will get to some of this when we talk about Indigenous ontologies because there are two different factors going on there. One is the homogenisation of what it means to be Indigenous and attaching a very patronising stereotypical sense of being in tune with the earth and therefore they are always going to do the right thing by the earth. And that cannot be true because Indigeneity is multifaceted and place-based, and that representation locks them into that colonial past. The second point is that representation (and I have seen this in Australia) limits their future opportunities. So, say for example, there is a big case in Queensland where an Indigenous community wanted to carry on hunting Dugong and the Government said, 'You can, but only if you use spears'. And they are like, 'Are you kidding? We have got really good guns now, why would we use a spear?' So, this representation was locking them into this past: 'Well, you are eco, you can do it, but only in the old style ways'.

MR: The racism is so obvious.

JP: it is deeply, deeply racist and colonial.

JP: A third point is that we as settlers – so I call myself part of the settler colonial group – have gone to Australia, messed up the climate, and then expect Indigenous people to fix it. While there are lots of ongoing Indigenous practices around fire management and weed management (traditional methods of land management using fire and working with invasive plant species), they cannot use their traditional practices to fix climate change or to fix the messes that colonial practice has introduced. We are asking them to fix our mess and to do that in an impossible way because these are new environmental problems! I think we are both constraining them to a particular imagination of the past and also saying, 'Well, why does your land management not work now?' 'Well, because you have messed up

everything that we were managing!' I think there is a double bind of locking them into being in tune with nature, always environmental, and then blaming them when they take on a patch of land that they want to manage in a different way than they might have done historically.

There are some great examples of this. There is an environmental Indigenous group just west of Melbourne and they bought an old cattle ranch, and they invited the environmental groups to come and have a look at it and said, 'Are you going to help us? We want to rewild it. We want to rejuvenate it'. And the environmental groups said, 'But this is just an old cattle ranch. There is nothing wild here that is worth saving'. And of course, the Indigenous community said, 'What? This is our land. This is where our Dreamings come from. This is hugely important to us. And you are just saying, "It is got no value"'. Classic mismatch. What the Indigenous community then did was install a load of wind turbines on the land in order to generate money. And then the environmental groups said, 'What are you doing? You just told us it was special?' And the Indigenous groups responded, 'It is special. We have not put the wind turbines where the Dreaming stories emerge from. They are strategically placed on the land as we understand it'. Again, [they are] constraining Indigenous communities to be one type or to live in the past. But the Indigenous communities say, 'No, no, we can look after this land and live off it'.

Ethics and consent

Not applicable

Author's Contributions

Interview conducted and transcribed by Mitch Rose and written with Professor Jenny Pickerill

Competing Interests

Mitch Rose is a Managing Editor of Agoriad.

NOTES

[1] The Gregynog Theory School is Supported by the Welsh Graduate School of Social Science.

[2] Council tenants are recipients of public housing in the UK.

[3] The Black Bloc refers to protestors who wear black clothing, ski masks and other protective clothing to hide their identity from the police (and other political organisations) and to protect themselves from anti-riot police tactics such as tear gas, pepper spray and stun-grenades. They are often associated with anarchist politics but by no means exclusively.

[4] Jenny is referencing an eight-year experiment in radical governance in Barcelona. This was spearheaded by Ada Colau, Barcelona's first female mayor who gained power in 2015. She led a group of city councillors who formed Barcelona en Comú, Catalan for "Barcelona in Common." They have achieved significant change, but also encountered limits and the movement has not successfully extended to broader Catalonia.

[5] Low Income Living Affordable Community (LILAC) is a co-housing project in Leeds established in 2006.

[6] Lammas is an ecovillage in North Pembrokeshire specialising in low impact living. They run various educational programmes on sustainable housing, off-grid settlements and resource management as well as contribute to policy research on low impact development.

[7] Kailash Ecovillage: https://www.kailashecovillage.org

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