**Mario Blaser - “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”**

1. Describe the **environmental conflict** between indigenous peoples and state and corporatist actors. What is the problem with framing indigenous approaches and knowledge as culture and/ or beliefs? How is respect and tolerance of other cultures denying ontological difference?

The term environmental conflict runs the risk of presenting the problem as concerned with the distribution of ecologic zones. This notion pre-assumes that the stakes are about access to, governance of, and extraction of natural resources. They might as well be about the differing values of the environment, which are in conflict. The indigenous habitants of the contested landscapes stand up for their nonhuman kin, which are cohabitants of these lands.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Therefore, different understandings of the environment are confronted in a kind of cultural conflict. This conception bears the threat of comparing different knowledges from a rational perspective, which derives from universal science and might be misused for disadvantaging indigenous people. The problem here is that the categorization of the different claims inside rational politics as nature/culture and left/right, like it is done by governments and companies dismisses the indigenous positions as unreasonable and therefore inferior to rational politics based on universal science.[[2]](#footnote-2) This division of scientific and cultural knowledge introduces a hierarchy inside a rational discourse, which discredits indigenous people’s claims, even if they make use of entitled indigenous rights. Governmental rights are crafted within the borders of reasonability. Arguments are checked how well they fit into universal scientific reality. Presenting some participating groups in the conflict as more cultural than others.[[3]](#footnote-3) Tolerance in such political debates means to suspend rational conceptions of the world for honouring those with inferior cultural knowledge. Irrationality is used to deny the existence of ontological differences as part of this conflict.[[4]](#footnote-4)

3. What does it mean to **address environmental conflict as political ontology**? How does this **facilitate a pluriverse** (a world of many worlds) rather than a universe?

To engage environmental conflicts as political ontology means to search for practises of worlding (the generation of different realities) and to take the political construction of agents (as humans and non-humans) and asymmetrical distribution of agency in account.[[5]](#footnote-5)

To be attentive about not carelessly assuming what the conflicts are about. They might be about the environment for some but also have varying implications for others. Paying attention about the stakes of the conflict may help us to understand, which worlds are colliding in the conflict and how the perspective on the conflict may differ or how our observations can affect it.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Blaser emphasises to keep in mind that not all indigenous conflict is ontological. To differ between those, we have to search for performative evidence for a ontological conflict, instead of ascribing it to whole groups. There might be conflicts, which are actually concerned with culture or resource distribution.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Further, we want to reveal different perspectives on the conflict to generate possibilities for the comprehension of a pluriverse, which might be created through different understandings of the world and practices of caring for the environment (kinship with non-humans). Through analysing indigenous relation to nonhuman worlds with a social scientific lens, we generate a reality, which might deny and distort the indigenous pluriverse.

Political ontology emphasises a political sensibility towards a plurality of beings, which are interconnected with each other, with no absolute boundaries.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. Cf. Mario Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, *Contested Ecologies. Dialogues in the South on Nature and Knowledge*, ed. Lesley Green, South Africa: HSRC 2013, pp. 13-27, p. 14f. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, pp. 15-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 18f. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Blaser, “Notes towards a political ontology of ‘environmental’ conflicts”, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)