

Cleansing public nature: landscapes of homelessness, health, and displacement

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Abstract

This article engages directly with a group of individuals who reside in and among the margins of an urban municipal park, through a 16-month critical ethnography. Facing abject poverty, threats from law enforcement, and trials of living outdoors, these 'Hillside residents' cite the local health department as a primary source of potential displacement from the place they call home. 'Health', in this context, references three interconnected features of contemporary urban homelessness: the material interactions associated with living outdoors, the litter that occasionally accumulates in the area, and human solid waste. Health also has specific discursive constructions on the Hillside, where the individuals living there are presented as unclean, particularly vis-à-vis the 'natural' unbuilt world in which they live. A logic of sanitizing the unclean means that 'cleaning' moves beyond the material imposition of humans on nature, or nature on humans. Instead, cleaning speaks to a societal problem: a need to cleanse society of unwanted social detritus, to create a healthy society. 'Cleanliness' creates an optimum, healthy urban experience to facilitate the transactions of contemporary consumer and financial capitalism, providing a new and central facet of global neoliberal restructuring, having particularly devastating effects for the lowest classes. Political ecology is leveraged to consider the roles of material and discursive cleanliness as an agent of health in the social reproduction of capitalism, creating natures and subjects that further support it.

Key words: urban homelessness, cleanliness, political ecology of health

Résumé

Cet article s'adresse directement à un groupe d'individus qui résident dans et dans les marges d'un parc municipal urbain, à travers une étude ethnographique de 16 mois. Face à la pauvreté abjecte, aux menaces de l'application de la loi et aux procès de vivre à l'extérieur, ces «résidents de Hillside» citent le département de santé de la commune comme l'agence principale chargée de les déplacer de leur domicile dans le parc. Dans ce contexte, la «santé» se présente sous trois aspects interreliés de l'itinérance urbaine contemporaine: les interactions matérielles associées à la vie à l'extérieur, les ordures qui s'accumulent parfois dans la région et les déchets solides humains. La santé est également représentée d'une certaine manière sur la Colline, où les individus qui y vivent sont présentés comme sales, en particulier vis-à-vis du monde «naturel» non construit dans lequel ils vivent. Une logique de désinfection de l'impur signifie que le «nettoyage» se déplace au-delà de l'imposition matérielle des humains sur la nature, ou la nature sur les humains. Au lieu de cela, le nettoyage parle d'un problème sociétal: le besoin de nettoyer la société des débris sociaux indésirables, de créer une société saine. «Propreté» crée une expérience urbaine optimale et saine pour faciliter les transactions du capitalisme contemporain des consommateurs et du capital financier, apportant une nouvelle et centrale facette de la restructuration néolibérale mondiale, ayant des effets dévastateurs pour les classes sociales les plus bas. L'écologie politique est amenée à considérer les rôles de la propreté matérielle et discursive comme un agent de santé dans la reproduction sociale du capitalisme, en créant des natures et des sujets qui le soutiennent davantage.

Mots clés: sans-abri dans la ville, propreté, écologie politique de la santé

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Resumen

Este artículo, producto de 16 meses de crítico trabajo etnográfico, se enfoca a un grupo de individuos que residen en y entre los límites de un parque municipal urbano. Los 'residentes de Hillside' señalan que el departamento local de salud es la principal causa del posible desplazamiento del lugar que consideran su hogar, frente a la abyecta pobreza, la amenaza del cumplimiento de la ley, así como a los problemas de vivir a la intemperie. En este contexto, 'salud' evoca a tres características interconectadas propias de la situación urbana contemporánea: las interacciones materiales asociadas con el vivir a la intemperie, la basura que ocasionalmente se acumula en la zona, y los desechos humanos sólidos. De igual manera, la idea de salud tiene construcciones discursivas específicas, ya que quienes viven en Hillside son presentados como sucios con respecto a la particular relación que tienen con el mundo 'natural' y sin edificar en el que habitan. La lógica de higienizar lo sucio significa que 'limpiar' va más allá de la imposición material de los humanos sobre la naturaleza o de la naturaleza sobre los humanos. Al contrario, la limpieza se refiere a un problema social: una necesidad de librar a la sociedad de un desperdicio, para así, crear una sociedad saludable. La 'limpieza' da pie a una experiencia urbana óptima y saludable que facilita las transacciones del consumidor contemporáneo y del capitalismo financiero, que además provee un nuevo aspecto a la reestructuración global neoliberal que ha tenido efectos devastadores, particularmente para las clases más bajas. La ecología política está inclinada a considerar los roles de limpieza material y discursiva como agente de salud en la reproducción social del capitalismo, al crear naturalezas y sujetos que la respalden.

Palabras clave: Situación de calle, limpieza, ecología política de la salud

1. Political ecologies of health

While political ecology as a discipline gains increasing traction in academic and activist realms, an explicit focus on issues of health is still emerging, even as aspects of health have long been embedded in political ecology literature (Jackson and Neely 2015). Health, in political ecology, is not neatly confined to either human or the nonhuman realms, but is understood as being interconnected and dependent upon both. As political ecology is interested in interconnected nature-society relations, a "political ecology of health assists in explicating the links between social and environmental systems" (King 2010: 50). Political ecology, more broadly, seeks to understand relationships between nature and society through a political economy lens (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). Thus, political ecology considers dimensions such as power, property, nature, and knowledge to explain changes in socionatural relationships in concrete political economic settings. Further, political ecology is concerned with the "geographic processes that produce and reproduce healthy (and unhealthy) bodies, interrogating social reproduction" (Jackson and Neely, 2015: 56). This understanding further positions health as a domain that necessitates a critical nature-society approach. Beyond political ecology's critical political economic engagement with nature-society relations, post-structural political ecology has incorporated nonhuman actors into analyses. Political ecologies of health require a positioning of nonhuman nature as unevenly affecting human bodies and how human agents contribute to healthy and unhealthy components of humans and nonhumans alike. In this way, it is necessary to incorporate the "nonhuman into our geographies of health because understanding health as more-than-human blurs the boundaries between people and their environments" (Jackson and Neely, 2015: 59). Despite this seemingly necessary congruence between critical and poststructural political ecologies and health, "political ecology has yet to fully incorporate questions about the nature of health and unhealthy bodies" (Jackson and Neely, 2015: 50).

Since health, as a construct and as a lived experience, is situated in everyday realities that vary across time, place, and culture, it is appropriate to explore empirical, situated political ecologies of health through the lives of those facing homelessness. In this research, political ecologies of health are examined through the ethnographic representation of narratives and experiences of a group of individuals living in public nature. The Hillside residents, described below, live in the margins and open spaces of an urban public municipal park. The very nature of their homelessness calls into question issues of personal agency and citizenship in an increasingly neoliberalizing social and political order (Amster 2003; Mitchell 2003). Hardt and Negri, in their critical trilogy confronting the capitalist world order, claim that global and local governance now constitutes a "republic of property" (2009: 9). More than intangible constructs such as democracy, liberty, freedom, or

sovereignty, they contend that the material and discursive constructions of property and ownership are what define contemporary social and political relations. Continuing from Marx, property constitutes an *a priori* necessity of capitalist society, where "the legitimation of property is integrated into the transcendental form of legality" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 7). Mitchell 2003 also positions property – or more explicitly, access to private property – as the defining feature of citizenship in capitalist societies. This governing system is "based on the rule of property and the inviolability of the rights of private property, which excludes or subordinates those without property" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 9). The entrenched and unquestioned rule of private property provides for capitalism-driven class relations, while the rule of public property equates to the rule of the state; at no point in these relations are the needs of the property-less considered.

As political ecologies of health also include attention to "subaltern health narratives" (King 2010: 50), placing the Hillside residents, the often marginalized and property-less, at the center of research promotes a justice orientation. These individuals, living at the social, political, and geographical margins, demonstrate the contested assessment and management of health in their individual lives and in the collective existence of those operating at the bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum. These lived conditions of the Hillside residents are best understood through political ecologies of health as problems that are "relationally intertwined, produced over time, inherently political, and always simultaneously material and symbolic" (Jackson and Neely 2015: 48).

2. Ethnography and the Hillside

This research stems from a 16-month critical ethnography with a group of individuals who reside(d)² in and around a public municipal park, an area termed the Hillside. Ethnographic experiences explore aspects of the material world in order to analyze socially meaningful aspects of it. In this way, ethnographies examine place-based processes to address the multiple ways and forms through which power and history come together to create subjective realities of people's lived experiences (Feldman 2011). Subsequently, ethnographic description, interpretation, and analyses often bring lived and experienced first-person accounts in line with participant quotes, narratives, and overall perspectives (Rose 2015). Ethnography has an extensive history of methodological contribution to political ecology understandings (c.f., Berglund 2006; Escobar 2008; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Hudgins and Poole 2014; Moore 2003; West 2012), bringing forward often marginalized voices, narratives, and nonhuman actors, while also providing a nuanced, localized context for larger socioenvironmental processes.

The group of mostly males living on the Hillside meets the criteria that most people use to describe homelessness (i.e., HUD 2016, but since these folks did not emically describe themselves as homeless, I intentionally avoid doing so here. Instead, they are individuals living on the Hillside, and they comfortably referred to themselves as the Hillside residents. Their residences were tents, tarps, caves, and other topographical features of the landscape, and these "homes" often featured kitchen spaces, restroom areas, and specific spaces for sleeping and personal activities (Rose 2013, 2015). Some of the Hillside residents had lived there for years, while others came and went. Many of them knew and cared for each other dearly, yet the residents would not have been surprised to see new faces, and there was enough physical space on the Hillside that one could choose to live without much social interaction with others. The living spaces exist on a series of relatively flat "tiers" that were carved into the slope from a now unused, overgrown, switchback access road leading up the Hillside, providing spaces that are difficult to see from passersby below. The park is geographically situated on the edge of a major urban region, providing the Hillside residents access to various formal and informal employment opportunities, services, and other experiences associated with the urban core, while simultaneously being able to access a considerable amount of open, unbuilt space that allowed for a feeling of "escape" from the material and social environments associated with contemporary urban life in the United States. Directly adjacent to the park is a mostly unused gravel mine, and the boundaries demarcating the quarry's private property on one side, and city- and state-owned open space on the other, remains disputed. With private, local, state, and federal agencies all managing lands in the area, the

² The verb tense for the Hillside residents is intentionally ambiguous, as some of them are still living in these situations, while others are no longer a part of this community.

Hillside is relatively unmanaged from a formal perspective, providing a sense of *terra nullius*, an aspect that contributed to individuals choosing to live there. It is precisely because this space was unoccupied, and "public," that the residents made it their home (c.f., Kaviraj 1997). The Hillside encompasses this ambiguous space, situated in and among the margins of a municipal park, a private quarry, and expanses of city, state, and federal unbuilt open space.

As an ethnographer, my overall research questions and agenda questioned the various roles of public space and nature in the lives of the individuals living in and around the park. Further, it was an explicit goal to use my ethnography to understand and represent the Hillside residents in an appropriately sensitive and humanizing manner, as individuals facing homelessness are regularly dehumanized in their own experiences in life, as well as in other people's perspectives of them (e.g. Gowan 2010; Liebow 1993). As the ethnography developed, I also developed my research to incorporate a social and environmental justice agenda (Rose 2014), moving to a more activist researcher role. In this way, I transitioned to advocacy and political engagement with and on behalf of the Hillside residents. My daily interactions with the Hillside and the Hillside residents ranged from initially very passive observation to ongoing active participation where nearly all of my daily activities mirrored those of the Hillside residents. These ethnographic engagements with the Hillside are necessarily partial and situated, focused on experiences and interpretations of residents' engagement with discursive and institutionalized structures of health.

In this research, I develop my ethnography through the lenses of cleanliness and health to position the Hillside residents as political and rhetorical embodiments of disorder and unhealthiness, bringing ethnographic experiences into larger discourses of global neoliberalism. In particular, I focus on the ways in which those facing extreme poverty contest notions of cleanliness, as well as map a history of constructing a pristine nature as being incompatible with human use and inhabitation. The Hillside residents, facing poverty and a life lived in a setting of this traditional notion of an unbuilt and unpopulated nature, confront these stereotypes in their everyday existences.

3. Producing a clean, healthy community

February 11 was a Friday and, sometime in the frigid, predawn morning, an eviction notice was attached to most of the Hillside residents' tents and shelters, stating that "all trash, debris, and any personal items left on this property" will be removed and disposed. The notices were from the local Health Department, instructing the individuals living on the Hillside that they had until 'Monday' (with no actual date) to leave the premises and take all of their possessions with them. The notices were unsigned, and also included on the notices in large, capitalized, hand written letters was a clear message: "MOVE OUT." The authority of the Health Department was under an ordinance enabling them to "perform routine inspections to insure compliance with rules, standards, and regulations as adopted by the Departments of Health and Environmental Quality" relating specifically to "public health and sanitation." Their adjudication also qualified them to "abate nuisances or eliminate sources of filth and infectious and communicable diseases..." The timing of the eviction notices coincided with the adjacent gravel quarry's planned blasting in the coming days. Generally, the individuals living on the Hillside did not have a problem with the mining and resource extraction processes, per se, but felt that they should be allowed to remain on the Hillside (their home) during the blasting process, since they technically resided in public space, not on the quarry's private property. The Hillside itself, where folks lived, was not a primary access point to the quarry, though its proximity to the quarry and potential blasting sites was substantial.

Keith, like many of the Hillside residents, had lived on the 2nd Tier of the Hillside for years, with everything he owned inside his small camping tent. He was exasperated when he and other Hillside residents found eviction notices attached to their tents, when the Health Department's late night eviction notices had given the residents less than three days to leave the Hillside. We were all still a bit bewildered, as it seemed so implausible that the Health Department could deem the Hillside area as unsanitary. That morning, while a few of us were waiting for water to boil, I asked Keith where his notice was, because I had not seen it dangling from his tent. He said he did not have his notice anymore, and when I pressed him and asked him why, he exclaimed frustratingly, "Because I wiped my ass with it and then threw in the fire." Nobody said anything. I slowly shifted my gaze to the smoldering embers directly in front of me, just a few feet from

Keith's and Max's tents, where I noticed the remaining edges of his burnt Health Department notice. I was probably a bit stunned by his actions but, when I thought about it, Keith's response seemed somehow appropriate. Under the guise of darkness the local Health Department, as an extension of the state, had officially evicted long term residents from the Hillside based upon spurious conclusions of poor health and/or sanitation on the premises.

Later that day, using my most respectable voice, I called the mine owners to ask about the potential activity in the area. I posed as a resident of the wealthy homes above the Hillside, and eventually found out that drilling would begin the following week, with blasting the week after that. Before hanging up, I told him that I knew of a bunch of people who were living nearby the quarry on public land, on the Hillside, and wondered if he was aware of that. He told me that there is "a large homeless population", and he assured me that they would be removed next week. I asked explicitly for clarification on this issue, and he told me that the quarry does not own the entire Hillside, but that they would remove anybody who was living on their property, including the people's belongings. They were not legally able to remove anybody who was not on their property, but they would make it known that trucks and bulldozers and blasting equipment would be coming through the area, and that the mine would contact local officials to have the Hillside residents removed. The project manager was not rude or hateful in his speech, but clear, dispassionate, and matter-of-fact. He concluded, "We're going to clean them out. Any stuff on our property we're going to clean up." The Hillside residents were not on the quarry's property, but a logic of needing to sanitize the unclean remained paramount, giving credence to the idea that a certain (perhaps unjust) stigma of uncleanliness (and unhealthiness) was associated with those living on the Hillside.

Wayne, a resident who had lived in various locations on the Hillside for more than a decade, told me that he did not understand why the mining company wanted them off of what he understood to be the public spaces of the Hillside:

We're not doing anything to disrupt anything. And they can talk to us intelligently. Like that mining operation. We're not going to walk through there. We're not completely daft and stupid. If you're going to blow us up, we're not going to want to be there. We can take a different path. It's a lot longer path, but it's still, it's worth it to stay out here.

Resource extraction has long resulted in "new kinds of displacement and disempowerment, transforming... relationships between people and the environments they inhabit" (Willow and Wylie 2014: 225). In addition to illustrating that the individuals living on the Hillside understand the processes of capitalist extraction and production take obvious precedence over their own well-being and their own daily lived experiences, Wayne also expressed the logic that public space and nature is not available for democratic governance and decision making. Rather, the mine was owned and operated privately, by those with more financial and political resources, and that the individuals living on the Hillside were long distant in the mining company's rationale for how to best use that space. The Hillside residents felt that they were being unnecessarily targeted with the citations and the eviction notices, not because they posed any danger to the mining operation or the mining operation posed any danger to them, but because they were perceived as a nuisance to society, a segment of society that had to be "cleaned up." The residents felt that the notices were a convenient excuse to enforce unnecessarily harsh punishments. As the notices directly addressed issues of trash, debris, and personal property, there was a sense among residents that cleanliness and litter removal was simply a convenient rationale for removing the residents themselves. As Simon described, "They don't care about our stuff really. I mean, we don't have that much stuff to begin with. What they want is for us to be scared off..."

The residents knew that threats of displacement were a requisite part of living on the Hillside. Occasionally, in years past, there had been other "clean ups", to use the residents' terminology, where officials – sometimes police, sometimes the Health Department, sometimes the gravel mining company – removed everything from the Hillside, displacing people by displacing what few possessions they had. Keith recounted one of these experiences, which took place "four or five years ago":

I ain't got an I.D. I had one, but it's long gone now, when they came through last time.... It was in my tent, with everything else, and I left for the day. Got some work. I came home that evening with a pint, and there won't anything left here. It was all gone. I was living over there [the 3rd Tier] at the time, and they took every last piece of shit I had. They cleared out this whole place. My stuff, Louis's stuff, everybody's. I won't let that happen again.... They took my I.D. and my money and all my stuff.

Wayne told a similar story that happened to him. He explained that, without warning, somebody or some group "cleaned" his space while he was at the library. To the Hillside residents, the ambiguity over the designation and management of the spaces adjacent to the quarry meant that the gravel company knew they, themselves could not evict the Hillside residents, but they could call the local Health Department to take care of this liability issue for them. The rhetoric of needing to "clean" the Hillside residents was particularly strong, regardless of the material conditions of their livelihoods.

Reflecting back on the confrontation with the mining company and subsequently the Health Department, for a day, or a week, or even a month, individuals living on the Hillside were even more contested than usual. The mining company felt the need to rid the Hillside of any people. While they used the logic of private property to do so, that logic was curious, as the places they "cleaned up" were not their private property. Using their own authority, complemented by the authority of the Health Department, they displaced individuals from the Hillside, and discarded or stole gear and possessions that belonged to those individuals.

External impressions of needing to produce clean, healthy spaces were also internalized by many of the Hillside residents. I found there to be a pervasive discourse of "cleaning" that operates often with individuals living on the Hillside, as it also does with other individuals facing homelessness. Keith told me that the Hillside residents did not feel that they were not particularly liked, but that "tramps and other homeless folks like ourselves get the brunt of the force when it's time to clean up the place. They don't want people like us being seen in their parks." When Wayne was describing daily life on the Hillside, I asked him to illuminate and describe some of the more unpleasant aspects. I was expecting some answer concerning the cold or the wetness, or maybe Wayne's long walk to the urban core each day. I was expecting him to discuss some kind of material difficulty that he encountered on a daily basis. His sincere, thoughtful response caught me off guard:

Sometimes the feeling of hopelessness if you let it get to you, you know? Like you know that people look at you when you're coming in and out of an area like that. And they assume that you've got no potential in life.

From Wayne's perspective, people seeing him walk into and out of the Hillside indicates that they believe he has not been successful in life, a frustrating feeling with which he actively disagrees. He feels that his living in nature – in public nature – is indicative to others of his unsuccessful relationship with capitalist accumulation and, therefore, personal and social progress in life. Wayne told me of the individuals living on the Hillside: "We don't have money, that's why we're on the Hillside, in the open space of nature." For most, living on the Hillside was a choice *not* to engage with local shelters and social services, a choice to have some sense of control over difficult life circumstances. For them, the very public nature of the Hillside was one of the primary reasons for locating their lives and their homes in this space.

As has long been explored in multiple lines of literature, 'nature' has a long lineage of being associated with purity, cleanliness, and health, particularly in its perceived constructions as being unspoiled and unpeopled. George Perkins Marsh, an environmentalist, conservationist, journalist, teacher, and diplomat, suggested in *Man and Nature* (1864): "Man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords." In the application of nature to cultural histories of the United States, meanings of wilderness, nationalism, whiteness, masculinity, exclusion, displacement, and manifest destiny (Cronon 1996) must be mapped to the materiality of nature as a resource to be exploited, revered, and/or conserved across multiple histories. Scholars have thoroughly troubled notions of an unpeopled, wild

nature as being bound to concepts of wilderness, the primitive, and animality that exist in a dualistic state juxtaposed against culture, civilization, and humanity (Nash 1967; Plumwood 1993). Wilderness as a concept and as a materially produced location is often implicated in colonial violence (Anderson 1997), and seemingly hegemonic notions of an imagined "wild nature" devoid of human presence and influence have supported the forced removal of indigenous people across the globe (Thorpe 2012). Ultimately, nature, as well as our experiences in and among the nonhuman, unbuilt environment, remains a heavily loaded term with many contested meanings (Castree 2014).

The stigma that the individuals living on the Hillside felt living in nature is not just a socially constructed meaning they perceive from others. There is empirical support for their supposition that people tend to see them as 'vermin', needing to be sanitized for the benefit of everybody involved. A local newspaper article indicated the filthy living conditions on the Hillside, insinuating that human feces were everywhere and that anyone walking in the area should "watch your step." The reporter interviewed Keith and, rather than reporting on the actual conditions of the site, chose instead to highlight that other "homeless camps" in and around the city had exposed human feces. The implication was that the Hillside community is a health threat to everyone, even though there was nothing to suggest that anything unhealthy was taking place. There are undoubtedly areas where individuals facing homelessness live near exposed feces, used syringes, and other health hazards, but that was never the case during my ethnographic experience at the Hillside. Fecal disposal, as well as washing hands, washing dishes, and generally keeping a hygienically clean camp was regularly the case. Health departments are frequently the arbiters of homelessness in public space, and health departments are subsequently often the agencies of homeless displacement from parks, alleyways, underpasses, and other fragments – the unoccupied and relatively unbuilt public spaces – in the fabric of the urban environment.

Cleansing public nature

The discourse of 'cleaning' operates on two notably different levels. In one way, there is a necessity of cleaning up the litter of the Hillside and cleaning up any potential health hazards, which usually refers to human feces and intravenous needles, features commonly associated with substandard infrastructures and vulnerable populations. Hillside residents, themselves, also take this literal perspective on keeping their space relatively clean. I asked Max about this level of cleanliness on the Hillside, and he derisively spoke about people in the past that lived there without taking care of litter and human waste. He told me, "All that's doing is shitting where you live basically, the way I see it. Gets them frustrated with those type of people." Here, not only did Max illustrate his frustration with despoiling one's own local environment, but the subsequent political and social ramifications for this behavior, with "them" referring to various structures of institutionalized authority figures. This "shitting where you live" perspective provided the local Health Department's rationale for periodically checking conditions on the Hillside and, occasionally, evicting individuals living there. Surveillance, monitoring, and biopolitical management of this (ostensibly illegal) practice of living in public nature was justified by the Health Department not for the illegality of homeless encampments, but because of the supposed uncleanliness of the material and social environment. From this notion of cleaning, there is a persistent implication that people are necessarily, *a priori*, dirty, filthy, and unhealthy, particularly vis-à-vis the 'natural', unbuilt world around us. The conclusion follows that anybody living in nature could not possibly live without being unsanitary, which was the unfounded conclusion of the local newspaper article about the Hillside. Not only do people need to be cleaned when they spend too much time in nature but, also, the analysis unfolds, nature needs to be cleaned when people spend too much time there. Litter ranges from human feces (which in sufficient quantities poses a biophysical health risk to people) to the actual people themselves. The line between disposed items (litter, rubbish, feces, etc.) and the artifacts of humans living outside (a rudimentary camping tarp, strung between two trees) often seems unclear. But if *any* human material intervention in the nonhuman world is understood as 'littering', then the logic for cleaning any visible human imprint on the world becomes more pervasive. 'Nature', presented as a fixed, objective, and neutral certainty, is leveraged by institutionalized health apparatuses to control people's spatial existence, and in the process, their displacement from places they call home.

However, on a different level, 'cleaning' moves beyond the material imposition of humans on nature, or nature on humans. Instead, cleaning speaks to a societal problem: There is a need cleanse our society of

unwanted social detritus. This perspective has been explored at length in critical literature on homelessness in urban settings (Amster 2003; 2008; Arnold 2004; Feldman 2006; Liebow 1993; Mitchell 2003; Ruddick 1996; Wasserman and Clair 2009; Wright 1997), but remains largely unexplored when the setting is moved beyond the traditional homeless domain of the built urban environment. In many ways issues of homelessness relate to issues of social waste, not meant to be part of society, while simultaneously being excluded from society. "Waste [is] something that is expelled from the social body in order to shore up the boundaries that divide that which belongs from that which does not" (Moore 2012: 792). From a Marxist perspective, the need to sanitize society from unwanted social elements (Zukin 1995 stems from neoliberal imperatives to commodify all aspects of our sociopolitical daily experiences (Giroux 2004. 'Cleanliness', under this logic, creates the optimum urban experience to facilitate the transactions of contemporary consumer and financial capitalism (Aguiar and Herod 2006). Regardless of actual empirical conditions on the ground, homelessness – living in nature – is understood *a priori* as posing a health hazard to the individuals facing homelessness and to the larger non-homeless human community as well. 'Cleaning', in this sense, is a new but central facet of global neoliberal restructuring (Aguiar and Herod 2006), having particularly devastating effects for the lowest classes (Ahmed 2011). The cleanliness aspect aligns with political ecologists who have focused on unraveling how the process of the neoliberalization of nature has triggered the acceleration of the process of exploitation, degradation, and conflict, as well as how neoliberalism has accelerated the entry of new natures and regions into cycles of capitalist accumulation and dispossession (Bakker 2010; McCarthy and Prudham 2004).

Combining the ideas of cleaning nature and cleaning society, Evernden refers to the concept of pollution as entailing "uncleanliness or impurity caused by contamination (physical or moral)" (1992: 4-5), concluding that much of the debate surrounding pollution is not as much focused on the material, physical contamination of nature, but of the moral, or discursive positioning of contaminants against a supposedly clean, coherent, pure backdrop: nature. In this sense, it is our collective and socioculturally infused notions of nature that help determine what a contaminant is, and how we should respond to processes of contamination. The perceived uncleanliness does not just put nature at risk, "but the very idea of environment, the social ideal of proper order" (Evernden 1992: 6). In parks and urban areas, this polluting of the proper order leads to what Kaviraj terms as "a soiled conception of public space" (1997: 104), where human impoverishment is laid bare for the middle class and the wealthy to see, necessitating cleaning. In the local case, the Hillside residents create pollution and are pollution, by the fact of their very existence.

But what, then, can be made of these Hillside residents who simultaneously live and operate in the urban milieu and are also so closely associated with living in the wildland, unbuilt, open spaces nearby? Not only is there a requirement for a clean, sanitized social experience, but there is also necessarily a clean, sanitized environmental experience, but only in terms of the humanity that is visible in nature. The Hillside residents felt that people were unconcerned with the environmental calamities taking place directly adjacent to them on a daily basis – mining, refining oil, daily automobile commuting, etc. – but non-Hillside residents were badly offended when they encountered blankets, tents, tarps, and basic trash, the artifacts of daily living in public spaces. The Hillside residents felt they were stigmatized because of their lifestyles and, more importantly, because of their mere existence, particularly in the legality or illegality of their daily behaviors and lifestyles. Like others living in impoverishment in public spaces, "filth is not just a material thing but a conceptual entity, and the struggles about conservancy are a coded version of conceptual class struggle" (Kaviraj 1997: 108). The Hillside residents did not feel they belong in the urban setting, but, through this pervasive and punitive logic of cleansing, they also did not seem to belong in the very nearby wildland environment, either; underlying exclusions was a logic of class relations.

Political ecologies of living in public nature

Experiences from the Hillside residents illustrate possibilities ways of thinking about the intersections between health and homelessness – constructs that have long been associated – and our material and discursive positionings of public space and nature. From the ethnographic narratives presented here, these constructs remain difficult to disentangle from one another. The collective need for and management of a

clean, sanitized public nature is a primary impetus for the constant threat of displacement of the Hillside residents.

Cleansing public nature requires a social notion of health and an economic notion of health. Removing the human and the nonhuman 'pollution' or 'litter' from the Hillside is consonant with traditional Western narratives of seeking and producing an imagined landscape of pristine, unpeopled wilderness (Cronon 1996; Nash 1967), or Neil Smith's construct of "first nature" (2008). At the same time, extraction industries that are primarily concerned with accumulation and profit point to a notion of economic health that relies upon continual (economic, environmental, and spatial) growth and expansion. Together, social health and economic health contribute to a larger discourse that ultimately has led to the Health Department's seemingly logical assessment and determination of the Hillside residents' capacity for physical wellness while living in public nature (Figure 1). The body is often positioned as a socially produced and reproduced site of accumulation (Jackson and Neely 2015), and it is assumed that Hillside residents' bodies cannot help but be the site of unhealth and disease. This unempirical determination of health is the impetus for state sponsored displacement, which aligns with perspectives of pollution or waste as "a distinct object for state management and means of controlling certain populations through scientific theories of disease and contagion" (Moore 2012: 790).

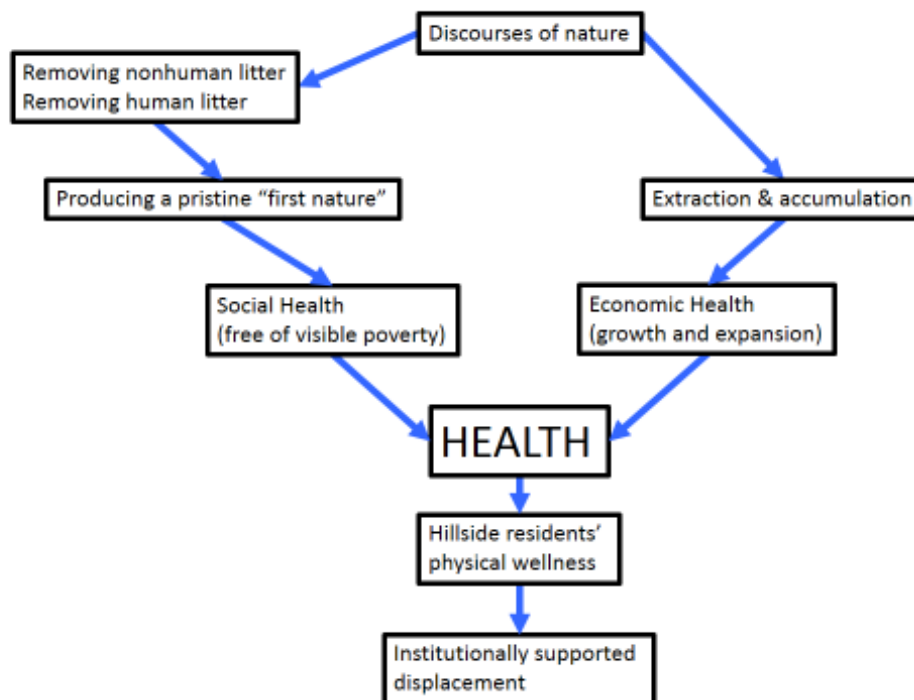


Figure 1: Schematic of social and economic contributions of discourses of health to displacement on the Hillside.

Even though there was no knowledge that the Hillside residents suffered from any sicknesses, nor were there instances of living in and around health hazards (exposed feces, unclean conditions, etc.), the Health Department medicalized Hillside residents' bodies and experiences to legitimize displacement that was more clearly related to notions of interrelated perceptions of social health, economic health, and environmental health. This construct of social health connotes a society where one *cannot* see instances of visible poverty, but also includes a "clean," socially produced "natural" landscape, which is often understood

as a marker of environmental health. Economic health, in this case, focuses on the maintenance of a particular extraction industry, whose larger goal is the maintenance of desirable rates of accumulation and profit margin. But, as Jackson and Neely (2015) have demonstrated, political ecology requires that issues of "social health" and "economic health" as suggested in Figure 1 be understood through particular dominant discourses of nature, whether in terms of positioning the nonhuman world as a pristine landscape to admire or a productive landscape to subdue and consume. Following Lefebvre (1991), Swyngedouw suggests that:

The production of nature (space) transcends merely material conditions and processes, but is related to the production of discourses on nature (mainly by scientists, engineers, and the like), on the one hand, and powerful images and symbols inscribed in this thing called "nature" (virginity, a moral code, originality, "survival of the fittest," wilderness), on the other. (Swyngedouw 1996: 72)

The health of the Hillside residents is informed by social and ecological relations (Mitman 2007), which are informed by discourses about nature, and Hillside residents' health further uncovers the social and environmental factors that contribute to their displacement.

There are complex relationships between nature, capitalism, and the debilitating stigmatizations that are consonant with the Hillside residents' daily living experiences. Cleansing our public natures, by removing litter, human influences, and often human beings themselves, is one of the many efforts toward creating and maintaining a social order of health. Health, in such a sense, refers to the functionality of the human body, as it often does, but also to the health of the social functioning of the population, as well as the ecological interactions that go well beyond the strictly human realm. Further, as seen in this research, health is often invoked to support and further capitalist exploitation of material and human resources as much as it is to maintain human bodies or ecological processes. A political ecology of health not only acknowledges the multifaceted discursive and material relationships, but also critically positions them in reference to an increasingly globalized political economy that must move to new domains for further expansion and growth. In this sense, this research spans the scales from the most localized corporeal experiences of Hillside residents' bodies living viscerally in the unbuilt world, to the most globalized discourses and material ramifications of contemporary variegations and expressions of neoliberal capitalism.

Episodes of already marginalized communities and individuals being displaced from public spaces, generally, and public parks, specifically, has a long history in the United States, often taking place in what are now understood as iconic spaces. For example, vendors and agriculturalists were moved out to make space for the Boston Common (Rawson 2010), free African Americans (described as "stubborn insects") were displaced from Central Park in the 1850s (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992), and many national parks were sites of indigenous displacement and settler colonialism across the western United States and elsewhere (Adams and Hutton 2007; Poirier and Ostergren 2002; Vaccaro, Beltran and Paquet 2013; West, Igoe and Brockington 2006). In this sense, using health as the impetus for displacing unwanted communities from various landscapes is an administrative and environmental management technique with an extensive history; displacement for health purposes has been adjudicated by the state apparatus for centuries.

However, contemporary displacement of individuals facing homelessness from parks, open spaces, and other 'landscapes of nature' takes on specific dimensions when framed through a lens of neoliberal urban and environmental planning and management. Under neoliberal ideology and governance where the state is subservient to the market (Harvey 2005), "water, land, air, community, quality of life, health, wildlife, family relationships, food, and more are reframed such that their utility or fulfillment is defined around the market logic required to extract maximum profit" (Hudgins and Poole 2014: 305). In the politicized, multi-discursive, environmental context of the Hillside, neoliberal imperatives of producing and maintaining a "clean" landscape, one that adheres to a fixed notion of a pure, ecologically stable, unpeopled terrain invokes health as a logic of displacement, and also informs the material physical health of the people and the place. In this way, considering the political ecology of health during our neoliberal moment, particularly through the empirics of the Hillside residents living in public nature, "reveals how uneven global political-economic processes manifest in bodies which are embedded in local social and cultural contexts" (Jackson and Neely

2015: 55). Critical research has sufficiently demonstrated that neoliberal transformations result in numerous health implications, ranging from public policy to the commodification of the human body (Parry 2015), but experiences of the Hillside residents place political ecologies of health within a particular landscape in a particular political economic moment. At the same time, the ethnographic experiences articulated here speak to larger phenomena operating at global scales. Place is "composed of processes that link a multitude of locales around the globe" (Feldman 2011: 376), demonstrating that practices and perceptions of health on the Hillside are consonant with other dominant discourses circulating across our lived experiences around the globe.

Ultimately, health on the Hillside is/was situated, uneven, and historically produced. The Hillside residents, in their lived experiences and their actual existences, disturb and disrupt many sociospatial norms. The Hillside residents, through their engagement with landscape and their representation through landscapes, illustrate an uneven production and reproduction of health and unhealthy people and environments, socially and materially. This research encourages us to (re)consider a perhaps common notion that people understand and interact with nature in very different ways. People living in, among, and within nature reveal existing differences in how people construct, conceive, and know 'nature' and exposes nature-society relationships as constantly in flux.

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