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Harm to knowledge: Criminalising environmental movements speaking up against megaprojects
Anna Di Ronco and Xenia Chiaramonte

1. Introduction

As Forsyth and colleagues (2021) eloquently put it, for a process of restorative justice to be initiated at all, someone has to *acknowledge* and *take responsibility* for the caused harms. We know that this has occurred in a few instances, even beyond the context of restorative justice conferences. For example, the mining company Rio Tinto recently took responsibility for the destruction of a sacred Indigenous site in the expansion of an iron ore mine in West Australia. Although the company was obviously not able to bring back to life the 46,000-year-old rock shelters at Juukan Gorge, which it destroyed, it replaced its leadership with a new executive team that seeks to rebuild the relationship with and trust of traditional owners also by actively promoting the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage (Wahlquist, 2021). Although this may sound like a ‘too little, too late’ and a mere ‘window-dressing’ effort of the mining company – which was pressured by investors into acknowledging the caused disaster (Butler et al., 2020) – what matters from a restorative justice perspective is that Rio Tinto eventually acknowledged that it had wronged Indigenous peoples with its unilateral and non-transparent decisions. The recognition of the harmful consequences of one’s actions is, indeed, a necessary first step towards repairing and healing harms. Such a step is, however, also necessarily followed by a meaningful relational and dialogic engagement with the harmed subjectivities (Forsyth et al., 2021).

Usually, harms are not acknowledged by relevant corporations and by the state until it is too late, that is, when often irreparable harms have already been caused on humans, non-human animals and plants, entire ecosystems and biospheres (Hamilton, 2021). Harms, however, are often denounced by environmental activists and affected populations *in their making* and frequently even *before they are produced*, for example when corporate projects are made public or when legislative changes – which are deemed detrimental to the environment – are announced by governments. These grievances are often ignored or downplayed by multinationals, states and mainstream media alike, with environmental movements often being misrepresented as ‘eco-terrorist’ and ideological enemies impeding economic progress (Hasler et al., 2020) – and ultimately being criminalised.

This chapter focuses on two highly silenced and criminalised environmental movements in Italy: the No Tav and No Tap movements, which are currently fighting against the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway (TAV) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) respectively. As we illustrate in this chapter, these two environmental movements have produced practical, technical, localised and situated knowledge on the harms caused by the two megaprojects;

however, despite the ability of such knowledge to avoid or mitigate harms, it has yet to be properly considered by relevant state and corporate actors. In the chapter we discuss how this dismissed knowledge – and the criminalisation of the producers of such knowledge – constitutes a proper form of harm, what we call ‘harm to knowledge’. The latter is especially insidious as it dismisses the counter-knowledge produced from below ultimately frustrating its transformative potential.

This chapter is structured as follows. It starts with reviewing the concept of environmental harm from a green criminological perspective, and the recent green criminological literature that – often using innovative methodologies – captured environmental harms as perceived, experienced, represented and expressed by the affected individuals and communities. After providing background information on the two megaprojects and the struggles against them, the chapter briefly discusses the authors’ previous studies which inform this piece. In its central part, it explores some forms of environmental harms connected to the two megaprojects as emerging from activists’ voices – voices which we collected through interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and social media research. Through on-the-ground and virtual ethnographies we were also able to collect activists’ artistic expressions such as songs, vignettes, videos, and street art pieces, which we also included in our analysis. We conclude this chapter by analysing environmental harms through the concept of ‘harm to knowledge’ and by arguing for the need to expand the scope of environmental restorative justice to include the resolution of present and future conflicts.

2. Environmental harm in green criminology

A burgeoning perspective since the 1990s, green criminology focuses its attention on the study of crimes and harms affecting the environment, the planet, as well as human and non-human species inhabiting them, and environmental (in)justice. It is seen as an evolving ‘perspective’ (South, 1998) grounded in critical criminology (Ugwudike, 2015), open to multi- and interdisciplinary approaches (Ruggiero and South, 2013) as well as to various theoretical orientations (see e.g., White, 2013) – with the latter also including cultural criminology (Brisman and South, 2013, 2014) and the social harm perspective or zemiology (Beirne and South, 2013; Brisman and South, 2018).

Proponents of this perspective oppose environmental degradation, destruction, harms and injustices and expose the negative impacts of such practices on humans, non-humans, and the planet as a whole (Ugwudike, 2015). They often do so in an effort to build what Goyes (2016,

p. 508) called ‘green criminological activism’, which is a “stance where [...] criminological knowledge and activity is placed at the service of those victimised on the basis of class, species, gender, sex, race, ethnicity or age”; in practice, this stance involves making “a purposeful attempt to try to prevent such victimisation by making an impact in the social, political or cultural realms via research, teaching or service”.

Central to the perspective of green criminology is the concept of *harm*, which includes but also transcends criminal harm – or any harmful action or inaction that is punished by the criminal law. The idea is that all harms – including those that are *not* protected by the criminal law and are perhaps caused by entirely *legal* activities – deserve criminological attention for generating human and non-human suffering. The extension of the focus of green criminology to non-criminalised harms also matched developments within the field of green victimology (Hall, 2014), which in recent years has approached as victims not only individuals but also non-human species and environments affected by non-criminal harms (White, 2018) – all victims that have also been recognised a seat at the table of environmental restorative justice conferences (Forsyth et al., 2021; Varona, 2021). This is also in line with the recent socio-legal studies literature, which recognised the limitation of the human rights perspective to account for the complexity of environmental harms and victims (not only human, but also non-human) (Altopiedi, 2020). To address this concern, in the Latin American tradition – in Ecuador and Bolivia, in particular – legal recognition has been given to the harms affecting non-human entities through the so-called rights of nature (Acosta and Martínez, 2011).

To study environmental harms, green criminological studies have been informed by at least one idea of justice that contributes to what White (2008) called an ‘eco-justice approach’: environmental justice (which addresses specifically the negative impacts of environmental harms on humans at the intersection of race, gender, class and other systems of oppression), ecological justice and species justice (where the focus is on protecting the environment and animals, respectively) (White, 2013).

From the perspective of environmental justice, there has recently been a number of green criminological studies that have focused on capturing environmental *harms as perceived, experienced and articulated* by the affected individuals and communities. Such studies have also experimented with innovative methodologies, which included itinerant soliloquies (Natali and de Nardin Budó, 2019), interviews with photo elicitation (Natali, 2016, 2019), involvement of ‘peer’ researchers from the Indigenous researched communities in the data collection (Goyes et al., 2021), and computational social science methods applied to social media material (Di Ronco et al., 2019; Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). In many such studies, harms have

emerged through interviews and participatory (mobile) methodologies, as well as through art – including memorials in natural landscapes (Varona, 2020) – and social media messages (Di Ronco et al., 2019; Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). This chapter contributes to this emerging scholarship by examining how environmental harms have been articulated and represented by No Tav and No Tap activists in formal and informal interviews with us, and in activists’ artistic expressions (such as songs, vignettes, videos, and street art pieces), which we collected both during ethnographic fieldwork and (only in the research on the No Tap movement) social media research. In the last sections of this chapter, we demonstrate how these articulations often constitute proper (counter-)knowledge on environmental harms produced from below, and use the concept of ‘harm to knowledge’ to analyse relevant authorities’ systematic dismissal and silencing of this knowledge.

3. Study background: The cases of No Tav and No Tap

Megaprojects have an inevitable impact on the territories where they are implemented and therefore need a careful analysis of their associated risks. Although there is an obvious need for information and evaluation of high-impact projects, the international history of megaprojects has often turned out to be a mix of underestimated environmental impacts and overestimated economic revenues (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). Frequently, projects as such – their scope and concrete execution modalities – are not properly communicated to the public (Calafati, 2006) and by simply resorting to the general need for development and progress, these infrastructures are often defined as necessary and “strategic”.¹ The lack of adequate information and meaningful public participation in the phases that lead to the approval and execution of the project often motivate local populations to study the projects on their own and organise counter-investigations, which can then lead to more or less lasting mobilisations. This opposition may – or may not – be accepted by the state and its law enforcement agencies, which can also rely on criminalisation to intimidate activists and ultimately suppress dissent. This path is shared by the No Tav and the No Tap movements, on whose histories we ground the following sub-sections.

3.1. No Tav

¹ Usually, this definition has a practical consequence: it increases penalties for those who illegally access the construction site, which is defined as an “area of national strategic interest”. In the No Tav case, penalties were increased through the 2012 *Legge di Stabilità* (art. 19).

The Turin-Lyon high-speed railway project (TAV) dates back to 1989. Grassroots resistance to the megaproject began at the same time. Today, the project is run by TELT (Tunnel Euralpin Lyon Turin) – a French company owned 50% by the French State and 50% by the state-owned company managing the Italian railways; it is also co-financed by the European Union. In the late 1980s, the local population had received no information about TAV. The first attempts to probe the ground, however, attracted the attention of some inhabitants of the Susa Valley (or *valligiani*) who saw self-styled technicians operating without any authorisation on their land. In 1991 a “tiny group” of *valligiani* called the first demonstration against the project (Dosio, 2006, p. 10).

Officially, the No Tav movement was born in December 1991, by a decision of *Habitat*, a committee of 60 inhabitants, university professors, and local administrators from the Susa Valley. Residents, academics and administrators have constituted the backbone of the committee and, later, of what became known as the No Tav movement. Through the production of technical counter-knowledge on the megaproject, activists have created and disseminated an expertise that has greatly contributed to the social struggle against the TAV project.

Essentially, No Tav activists have opposed the project for three main reasons. Firstly, they consider the project useless on the ground that existing infrastructures have not yet reached a level of saturation and that neither traffic by road or rail has increased. Secondly, the project is believed to have excessive costs: the 2004 Paris agreement between France and Italy on TAV imposes most of the economic burden on Italy requiring it to contribute to 2/3 of the overall TAV costs, in spite of the fact that only 1/3 of the route would cross Italian soil. Thirdly, the project is challenged for the harmfulness of substances contained in the mountains to be excavated – uranium, radon, and asbestos (Giunti et al., 2012).

To oppose the megaproject, No Tav activists have relied on a vast repertoire of protest practices, such as symbolic cuts of the construction site’s protection fences, street art, marches, sit-ins and festivals involving artistic performances and expressions. In 2005, No Tav activists succeeded in blocking the installation of the construction site, after having suffered acts of violence by the police (Chiaramonte, 2019a). As a sort of reward, the government set up an Observatory whose publicly stated goal was to negotiate and find an agreement between the residents and the company. However, those who made the most radical proposal, namely that of not building the megaproject at all, were expelled, their position being considered as incompatible with that of the Observatory.

In January 2010 one of the most famous anti-terrorism and anti-mafia Italian district's attorney office instituted a specific pool to investigate the No Tav movement. Eventually, in 2011 the TAV construction site was installed and put under 24-hour police surveillance.

Soon after, criminalisation began and has not yet stopped: in fact, it has now gone on for more than 10 years involving over 1,500 people (as both suspects and defendants), about 150 criminal proceedings, the use of pre-trial precautionary and preventive measures, and extremely serious criminal charges including that of terrorism (Chiaramonte, 2019a). Especially in the last decade, the movement has received solidarity, participation, and attention from a large number of social movements at the national and international level. In recent years, it has also become the catalyst for an ecological proposal shared with the youngest and most global movements against climate breakdown, namely Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future (see Chiaramonte, 2020).²

3.2. *No Tap*

The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) has a more recent history than TAV. TAP is a state-authorised project that brings natural gas from Azerbaijan to Italy – and through it to Europe – through Turkey, Greece and Albania. It is part of the Southern Gas Corridor – an EU project that is partly funded by the European Investment Bank (EIB). Its landing point in Italy has been identified in the Salento province of the southern-east Puglia region and, more specifically, in a part of the municipality of Melendugno called San Foca, which is famous for its marine (bathing beach) of San Basilio, its protected natural habitats, and its nature reserve of Torre Guaceto with century-old olive trees.

Opposition to the pipeline started in Melendugno and surrounding villages even before it was approved by the Italian Parliament in 2013: it dates back to 2010 and 2011, when the location of pipeline's landing point started being discussed in the region (*NoTap*, n.d.). Since then, various No Tap groups and organisations have been established by residents and activists. Ever since the company received its state authorisation to start building the Pipeline Receiving Terminal in Melendugno in 2014 – which did not involve any consultation with residents – these groups have challenged the pipeline for being 'illegal', 'useless' and 'harmful' (Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). Since then, No Tap activists have also gathered, produced and

²At the No Tav summer festival, called Alta Felicità ("High Happiness" – instead of "high speed"), a round table on political ecology has been started in the last four years. Its aim is to reformulate the movement's political struggle in collaboration with the most recent global protests against the climate crisis.

disseminated knowledge and information about the pipeline through local and international events and their use of social media.

The No Tap protest succeeded in reaching a wide public participation at protests especially during the spring and summer 2017, when TAP uprooted and removed olive trees from the first construction site (*NoTap*, n.d.). The removal of olive trees sparked outrage in the local population, who spontaneously gathered around the construction site to express dissent. The images of those days of protesting show hundreds of people – including families with children and old people – peacefully protesting against the removal of olive trees (see Di Ronco et al., 2019). Following these protests, activists reported a substantial increase in police presence in the area, which involved its militarisation by the police, and also a fiercer criminalisation of activists (*NoTap*, n.d.; Papadia, 2018) – a criminalisation that is still ongoing and on which we will focus in the findings section.

4. Methodology

In this section we review the methods for data collection that we utilised in this study to capture how No Tav and No Tap activists expressed and articulated the harms caused by the TAV and TAP megaprojects respectively. In both case studies, these methods relied on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, and – in the case of the research on the No Tap movement – also on social media research. Given the different resulting datasets, we analysed these two case studies separately. The thematic analysis of the collected material (which was carried out individually for each case study, see below under 5.1 and 5.2) allowed us to identify how No Tav and No Tap activists perceived, experienced and articulated environmental harms.

4.1. No Tav

To illustrate the way No Tav activists expressed TAV-related environmental harms, we relied on data collected by the second author during: i) a two-year observant participation in the Susa Valley (2013-15), which was followed by in-depth interviews with 17 Tav activists (in 2015); and ii) a two-year judicial ethnography at the bunker courtroom in the Turin's prison (2013-15) (see Chiaramonte, 2019a). This material served to illuminate the harms identified by activists in their narrations: in particular, these are the harms to human and non-human health. The data was also used to illuminate the main criminalisation techniques that have harmed the No Tav movement and its resources, which have however not discouraged No Tav activists from fighting the project; as an activist expressed it in an interview, the movement's

criminalisation is “a medal of honour” (Magno, 15 October 2015) – i.e., an important recognition of its political relevance.

4.2. *No Tap*

To illuminate the environmental harms as described by No Tap activists, this chapter relied on visual social media and semi-structured and informal interviews with No Tap activists. Visual social media (images, pictures and videos, in particular) were extracted from two of the first author’s previous studies of #NOTAP activism on Twitter (Di Ronco et al., 2019; Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). In these two studies, Twitter posts were computationally collected through a ‘Listener’ tool which utilised a Twitter streaming API and collected tweets in real time 24 hours a day during two different time-frames: from early June until the end of August 2017, in the first study (Di Ronco et al., 2019), and from October 2018 until June 2019, in the second (Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). Formal and informal interviews with activists were conducted by the same author during on-the-ground ethnographic fieldwork in the municipality of Melendugno and surrounding areas in 2019 (see Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020). This data is also complemented with a more recent virtual ethnography of activists’ posting of visual material on Facebook and Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the thematic analysis of visual social media material and of (formal and informal) on-the ground interviews, different harms emerged. For the purposes of this chapter, we only focused on the two most prominent harms emerging from activists’ narratives and representations: harms to the land and olive trees, and harms of repression.

5. Speaking up about environmental harms

In the following subsections, we focus on the main forms of environmental harms as emerging from our analyses. They include harm to human and non-human health (in the case of No Tav), harm to the land and olive trees (in the case of No Tap), and harms of criminalisation/repression (in both cases).

5.1. *No Tav*

5.1.1. *Harms to human health and the healthy environment*

No Tav activists contend that TAV is harmful to people’s health and a healthy environment. As Magno – a local No Tav activists who is also affected by cancer – expressively said, “I am obliged to believe in it in my eyes” (15 October 2015; see Chiaramonte, 2019a, pp. 78-81).

What Magno meant was that the TAV-related harms suffered by the population come from their direct, bodily experience. As demonstrated by Fazio and Minnelli (2020), the megaproject significantly raises the already high carcinogenic level in the area, in particular in light of the presence of asbestos and uranium in the excavated mountains.³ Of course, this also negatively affects the people who work for TAV; as Angela (12 October 2015), a local resident and activist, put it:

“There are, I was told, 11 workers who take turns entering [the construction site]. They work amid asbestos and uranium so such a work kills and devastates” (Chiaramonte 2019a, p. 346).

Health is conceived by activists not only as a human right or need, but also as a duty to respect the environment and all its inhabitants (including not only humans but also animals and plants). For example, activists noted that the Susa Valley is a geographical area on which many other “developmental” infrastructures have already been built; they include: two highways, a power line, factories, industries, tracking terminals, among others. Hence, the imposed high-speed railway project is considered by activists as yet another infrastructure that will harm this territory, and therefore also its non-human and human entities (Chiaramonte, 2019a).

No Tav activists together with experts such as qualified scientists, university professors and engineers, have produced in-depth information and scientific research on the harms caused to human health and the ‘healthy environment’ by the TAV project. These included cost-benefit analyses that demonstrated the uselessness of the project (Mattone, 2014) and even counter-proposals,⁴ which were however discredited and bypassed: in 2001 the Italian Parliament with the Law No 443 (*Legge Obiettivo*) simplified the procedures for the so-called ‘strategic infrastructures’, excluding citizens’ democratic participation. To disseminate this rich knowledge, activists have also resorted to the so-called “paper barricades”, which included: municipal resolutions against the megaproject, petitions related to the health risks connected to its realisation,⁵ tireless collections of signatures, and appeals to EU institutions.

Despite this heroic if not tragic struggle for law these activist practices have largely been ineffective and TAV has been approved through a typical “infernal alternative” (Stengers and

³ In particular, as Fazio and Minnelli (2020, p. 479) put it, “In early 2000s, pleural and peritoneal malignancies were found in excess in some municipalities of Upper Susa Valley (Piedmont Region, Northern Italy), where tremolite asbestos in rocks surfaced by natural ground erosion or originating from construction activities”.

⁴ For example, No Tav activists proposed the modernisation of the existing line. In particular, the transit of large freight trains would be allowed there simply by lowering the track level in the cross-border tunnel; with specific technological innovations, this would help increase the efficiency and existing traffic capacity at a much lower cost than that of building a new railway (Mattone, 2014).

⁵ See https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/peti/cm/791/791817/791817it.pdf.

Pignarre, 2011) – health or work? – according to which otherwise jobs would be lost, the area would be left “underdeveloped”, and, in any case, penalties to pay for breach of contract would be too high.

5.1.2. Harms of criminalisation

There have been two main trials against No Tav activists. The first one involved charges for terrorism and resulted in the acquittal of all activists from this accusation, who however had been subject to a year of preventive detention. The second and most important trial is the so-called *maxi-trial*: it started in 2012 and involved 53 defendants, who were accused of resistance to and violence against the police during a two-day protest held between June and July 2011. Given the difficulty of proving who actually resisted the police, the public prosecutor decided to accuse all those who were present during the two-day protest of complicity in the crime (*concorso*). The first-instance judges supported this thesis and clarified that demonstrators who see a protest turning violent should leave it, otherwise they would become accomplices in the violent crimes committed by others. In other words, the individual nature of criminal liability was denied as well as the right to assembly (Chiaramonte, 2019b). Only in April 2021 these violations by the Court of First Instance were recognised by the Turin Court of Appeal, which overturned the decision.⁶

No Tav activists opposed the charges in multiple ways. For example, their protest repertoire involved the courtroom, where hundreds of activists followed the hearings for years; it also involved organising protests in the areas outside the Turin’s prison to support those activists who have preventively been detained in prison while awaiting trial. The harms of criminalisation, however, did not only involve the restriction of people’s freedom. Some activists lost their jobs (Giordano, 2017), while others were convicted in non-related criminal trials on the basis of their participation in the No Tav movement (Chiaramonte, 2019a). Activists and their legal team also denounced police violence and especially the impunity guaranteed to law enforcers (no trials were initiated to investigate their behaviour) through a documentary called *Archiviato*, which means “dismissed”.⁷

The media had also a central role in the criminalisation process. They provided news coverage that systematically stressed only the violent aspects of the No Tav protests as if they were structural elements of their protesting (Gitlin, 1980; Chiaramonte and Senaldi, 2015,

⁶ Judgment No 470 of 21.01.2021.

⁷ The documentary is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ev7Sa-cuz5w>.

2017). Furthermore, a *diversionary reframing* (Freudenburg and Gramling, 1994; Gilbertson and Watterson, 2007) depicted the protest as unreasonable, rebellious and therefore against “progress” (Freudenburg et al., 1998), paving the way for the judicial criminalisation that followed. With respect to the stages of the criminal trials, the media offered only an account of the “official” documents, provided by “authorised” sources, such as the police, prosecutors and judges (Cohen and Young, 1973; Hall et al., 1978; McLeod and Hertog, 1988, 1992; McLeod, 2007). As a consequence, the grievances of the No Tav movement have been sternly silenced.

As a way to oppose this authoritarian treatment, the movement – in addition to not giving up, albeit with resources that have substantially been reduced by the high costs of various trials – has adopted many strategies, and has sought visibility also through artistic expressions. An example is provided by the mural below (Figure 1). It depicts the image of a tree that is threatened by excavators alternating with police batons.

Figure 1: Mural in Chiomonte, Photo@ Luca Perino.

The physical harm to people caused by the police – represented here only through the baton – is profoundly intertwined with the harm that excavators do to the land. But interestingly enough there are no people portrayed. Centrality is given here to a large tree with the mountains behind it, the Alpine mountain range. Yet, the two harms – the one to the criminalised population and the other to the territory – seem entangled as shown by the fact that the bulldozer arm becomes a baton.

5.2. *No Tap*

5.2.1. *Harms to the land and olive trees*

Both in visual social media and interviews, No Tap activists focused on the harms caused by TAP on the land and olive trees. These harms are visually rendered in various ways by activists on social media. For example, numerous are the pictures posted by activists on Twitter of beautiful natural landscapes tainted by uprooted or chopped olive trees, or by the presence of militarised construction sites defacing the territory. One of these photos, for instance, shows uprooted olive trees laid down on the ground carrying the caption “assassins” on top of it. The message encoded in this image is reiterated in many other textual and visual materials posted by activists on Twitter, where they accuse TAP of committing “violence”, “rape” and a “massacre” against their land and olive trees in particular (see Di Ronco et al., 2019).

Also on Twitter, various artistic expressions have been posted that speak about the harms caused by the pipeline to the land, olive trees, and non-human animals. In addition to vignettes depicting olive trees coiled around and strangled by pipes, which have also been used as event flyers and protest banners (see e.g., *La Repubblica Bari*, 2019), the collected sample of visual social media material also included pictures of No Tap-inspired street art. While one of these photos portrays the TAP pipeline as leaking in the sea, a second street art piece represents the pipeline as an evil-looking octopus killing fishes and destroying the marine ecosystem. A third example of street art represents the pipeline as a python coiling around its human prey and squeezing them. In a Facebook post, Nemo – the author of this last piece – says:

“The TAP problem is very complex. I do not know if it’s a right thing or a wrong one, but I know that these works are destroying this beautiful land and its nature. This piece was born listening to the inhabitants of these lands”.⁸

Both in visual social media and informal interviews, activists constructed the land as “home-space”. For example, this is evidenced by the many protest banners featuring the mantra “defend your home”, whose pictures were posted on Twitter, and by songs where nature was regarded as people’s home. An example is the song titled “Salento doesn’t want TAP” (Treble Lu Professore, 2014), where the lyrics say: “you [TAP company] want *our home* and pretend that who inhabits it doesn’t ever rebel” (emphasis added). Nature is described as “home” to be protected also in a song authored by Terroni Uniti (2017) – a group of singers that supported the protest of Sioux indigenous people against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which passes through their sacred land in North Dakota (US). The song expresses solidarity not only to the NODAPL protest (“Dakota are not alone / here we are all Sioux”) but also to other protests happening in Italy, including No Tav and No Tap, arguing that “we are all in the same boat”. The mantra “one earth one fight” is recurrent also in the many images of protest banners posted on Twitter across time – including in an online “flash mob” which No Tap activists organised on Facebook and Instagram to express solidarity to No Tav activists after an episode of police violence against them. Among the solidarity messages that No TAP activists posted on social media through selfies of themselves holding posters, there were the following: “On the side of those who defend their land” and “Proud to defend our land”.

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<https://m.facebook.com/whoisnemos/photos/a.499960873372868.102273.494746737227615/1472231202812492/?type=3>.

In addition to conceptualising the land as their “home”, activists *humanised* olive trees, which were described in informal interviews as “our history” and specifically as “our family”, e.g.: “they are like our mother, our brother... they are part of our family”.⁹

Harms to the land and olive trees – in addition to other environmental harms – have been pinpointed by the movement through an expert commission, which has been established in 2013 by the municipality of Melendugno and has involved engineers, university professors and lawyers, among others. The commission produced many important documents, including the project’s counter-evaluations, which also assessed the legality of the TAP project against relevant legislation. In particular, the commission established that TAP failed to assess the *cumulative impacts* of the various tunnels¹⁰ envisaged in the project on the conservation of natural habitats, which are protected by EU law.¹¹ Currently, TAP is facing multiple charges in court (Colluto, 2020; Gerebizza and Taglieri, 2020) – charges that are also based on evidence that the commission has actively contributed to gather. It is noteworthy here that ever since the beginning of the constructions by TAP, activists have also closely monitored the company in its construction sites. Through their daily monitoring, which also involved crowdsourced counter-surveillance through social media and apps (see Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020), activists photographed and recorded TAP removing olive trees from the area of the first construction site without the necessary authorisations. This evidence helped the prosecutor’s office build a case against TAP, which is currently being trialled also for this specific misconduct.¹²

5.2.2. *Harms of repression*

Harms of repression have visually been represented on social media not only through images and videos capturing episodes of police violence (see Di Ronco et al., 2019), but also through

⁹ Olive trees were humanised also by a famous Italian pop band, Negramaro, who in 2017 posted on social media images of olive trees with captions indicating human names, such as ‘Gianfranco’. They also added the message “The only possible way to treat nature is the absolute human one. They are trees with a name, [...] with a life, land with a large, infinite soul”. See Di Ronco et al. (2019).

¹⁰ The company allegedly only assessed the impacts on the environment of the micro-tunnel that enters the coast and lands at the Pipeline Receiving Terminal in Melendugno – *not* the additional impacts caused by the other connecting tunnels, which bring natural gas from Melendugno to Mesagne, a town 65 km north of Melendugno, where gas flows into the Italian natural gas grid. If confirmed, this accusation (which recently translated into a pressed charge, see e.g. Colluto, 2020) would invalidate the environmental authorisation TAP received back in 2014, which allowed it to start working on the pipeline’s landing point.

¹¹ See EU Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

¹² At the time of writing, the trial against TAP has not yet started. So far, it has been postponed twice because of the need of complying with COVID-19 regulations (the first time) and of replacing the judge who took unpaid leave (the second).

creative artistic expressions, such as vignettes depicting old people defending olive trees from the police, and various songs, including the iconic No Tap song titled “And it rains” (Treble, Rocky and The Dangerroots, 2018). This song speaks about rain as water that “thirsts those who resist and won’t give up” their fight for justice, despite police use of “shields and batons” against activists.

According to the formal and informal interviews with No Tap activists, police brutality and violence are, however, not the only tools used by the police to intimidate them and ultimately discourage their protesting and mobilising. Activists have also been issued onerous fines (up to EUR 4,000), which proved difficult to pay by some of them and their families – with some families having to pay for more than one fine issued against two or more family members. Activists – specifically those who participated in non-authorised protests or publicly spoke at them – have also been cautioned by the police and banned from entering the town of Melendugno and, at times, also the city of Lecce – which is the region’s capital city hosting many economic activities and hospitals, among others. As three activists put it in a recent online video, these bans have not only limited their mobility but also determined their dismissal from jobs they had in Melendugno’s bathing beaches (*GoFundMe*, 2021). Other activists also reported feeling “constrained” when travelling around Italy as they would systematically be stopped and harassed by the police (i.e. activists would keep waiting for a long time without explanation and be asked many questions including why a No Tap activist went to that particular area of Italy). As one activist said during fieldwork:

“I will have to go soon to Verona for work but I will only go there by flight or train. I will never again travel by car otherwise the police will stop me and it will be the same old story”.

Three activists – including a No Tap lawyer and a technical consultant of the municipality – also reported feeling constantly monitored by the police and “afraid” for their safety when going back home at night or being home alone.

Finally, activists have also been charged with offences that – according to them – have been invented at best, and ill-substantiated (e.g. notified on a wrong date) or unnecessarily exaggerated at worst (see Papadia, 2018). For example, activists who threw flowers and paint-filled eggs in the direction of the police, or showed the sign of the horns (usually signifying cuckoldry) at one of their helicopters, have been charged with insulting and resisting the police. They have also been charged with trespass for having crossed land that was not marked as private by signs or fences. This notwithstanding, recently a judge confirmed most charges

against activists, who were also sentenced to detention from 6 months to over 3 years (V.Val, 2021). In some instances, the judge even increased the penalties requested by the public prosecutor – something that is not unusual in trials against “public enemies” in Italy (Prison Break Project, 2017).

6. Discussion: understanding environmental harms through the concept of ‘harm to knowledge’

Our analysis of data collected through formal and informal interviews, and visual and artistic expressions emerging both from ethnographic fieldwork and social media research (the latter only in the case of the No Tap research), revealed various articulations of environmental harms as expressed and represented by No Tav and No Tap activists. Our aim was to contribute to the emerging green criminological literature that – also through innovative methodologies – examined how affected individuals and communities perceive, represent, express and articulate environmental harms (see e.g. Natali, 2016, 2019; Di Ronco et al., 2019; Natali and de Nardin Budó, 2019; Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2020; Varona, 2020; Goyes et al., 2021).

As we highlighted in the chapter, environmental harms have mostly been associated by activists with harms to human health and the healthy environment (in the case of No Tav) and with harms to the land and olive trees (in the case of No Tap). Such harms, however, have also been described as having entangling negative repercussions on humans, non-human animals, plants and entire ecosystems. This was represented well in a series of street art pieces, which showed, for example, pipelines strangling humans and olive trees (for No Tap), and excavators (with hands holding batons) menacingly approaching a tree (for No Tav). The interconnection between humans and non-humans is especially well rendered in the case of the No Tap protest, where the land has been described by activists as “home-space” to be protected, and olive trees have been humanised and considered as family members.

All these harms have so far not been acknowledged by the relevant companies (TAV and TAP, respectively) nor – not until now at least – by the state, despite the many channels and tools used by activists to convey knowledge on them. Indeed, these two environmental movements have produced rich knowledge on the harms of these megaprojects – a knowledge that is practical, technical, localised and situated. As Stengers (2015) underlines, the practical knowledge that spreads and might create “citizens’ juries”¹³ is *local*; it is also the only possible

¹³ In general, by citizens’ juries we mean the groups or assemblies that allow people to participate in shaping public decisions and to access the process of building scientific knowledge with respect to many topics, including

source of knowledge that can dismantle the “official” scientific knowledge that systematically bends to authority and the market. For example, No Tav activists provided evidence – and therefore generated knowledge – on the dangerous materials present in the mountains to be excavated by TAV. No Tap activists, on their part, have generated knowledge through their daily monitoring of the TAP company – a knowledge that has helped the public prosecutor’s office to build a case against TAP that is currently ongoing (see Colluto, 2020; Gerebizza and Taglieri, 2020). In both the No Tav and No Tap cases, moreover, knowledge has been generated by qualified scientists, university professors, engineers and other experts, who produced in-depth information on the megaprojects, including cost-benefit analyses and (in the case of No Tav) counter-proposals.

Overall, this precious localised and technical knowledge has so far largely been ignored by relevant authorities, which have excluded activists from the decision-making process and also silenced them through the movements’ systematic criminalisation, configuring what we called ‘harm to knowledge’. In other words, needed and important counter-knowledge produced from below has been ‘harmed’ through its dismissal by relevant authorities and the criminalisation of its producers. As we illustrated above, the repression of No Tav and No Tap activists included enhanced police surveillance, cautions, place bans, administrative fines, charges for more or less serious offences (with the most serious indictment being that of terrorism for No Tav activists), and pre-trial detention. All these measures have had serious negative effects on the lives of many activists, who had their freedom restricted, have lost their jobs, and have had troubles paying the onerous fines they (and often their family members) have been issued. Criminalisation, however, has not only had negative effects on the lives of individual activists; it also had adverse consequences for these movements, which have mostly been considered ‘troublemakers’ rather than credible knowledge-producers and counterparts in decision-making processes concerning the approval and execution of these megaprojects. Unfortunately, relevant authorities may never recognise the value and transformative potential of the knowledge produced by these movements, and may continue to criminalise their members and exclude them for decision-making circles.¹⁴

climate change. In recent decades, scholars have also used the term Citizen Science to refer to these innovative experiments based on the joint participation of citizens and scientists (see e.g. Bonney et al., 2009).

¹⁴ For the No Tav movement, an acknowledgement came from a decision of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT), which in November 2015 recognised the “systematic violation of the fundamental right of a community to be an indispensable and priority subject in the decision-making processes regarding its context and its present and future living conditions” (PPT, 2015). As it is known, however, this is only a tribunal of opinion whose decisions are not binding.

7. Conclusion: for a *proactive* environmental restorative justice

As we argued in the introduction of this chapter, for a process of restorative justice to be initiated at all, someone has to *acknowledge* the caused harms (Forsyth et al., 2021). Without this acknowledgment, environmental restorative justice conferences may never occur – and the transformative potential of restorative justice may never be realised. This is the case of TAV and TAP in Italy, which are two state-authorised and ‘strategic’ projects whose harms have not been acknowledged by the state and the two corporations – and unlikely will be in the future. As discussed in this chapter, No Tav and No Tap activists have, however, produced rich localised, practical and situated knowledge on the harms caused by these megaprojects on humans, non-human animals, plants, and ecosystems.

To valorise and not to waste the knowledge that activists and affected communities have produced on the harms of megaprojects, we conclude this chapter by arguing for the need to expand the scope of environmental restorative justice. In line with what Wilson (2016) called ‘proactive restorative justice’, which was applied by Hamilton (2021) to the context of environmental restorative justice, we make the case for a *proactive environmental restorative justice* that not only looks back at past offending, but also resolves present and prevents future conflicts and harms. As Hamilton (2021) put it, to become ‘proactive’, environmental restorative justice should seek to (among others) build a constructive dialogue and share knowledge with local communities in the various phases of a major project, including its assessment, approval and implementation. An environmental restorative justice of this sort may not stop a (mega)project from happening; yet, increased people’s participation in all the preparatory and execution phases of these projects may help scale down the level of conflict and reduce (or at least not excessively aggravate) the harms caused on humans and non-humans.

This obviously raises the question of how to ensure that dialogue and people’s participation actually take place in the various project’s phases? There may be many ways, but these also include avoiding simplified procedures for the so-called ‘strategic infrastructures’, which *de facto* exclude the democratic participation of citizens – a practice that so often has occurred in Italy, as the cases of No Tav and No Tap in this chapter demonstrated. Until this gets fixed, restorative justice scholars and practitioners could certainly be of help. For example, they could *proactively* use their skills and techniques to facilitate dialogue between activists and those in power positions (the state, corporations) during the various project’s phases, in this way contributing to mitigating harms before they are actually generated. This may involve

the setting up of environmental restorative justice conferences in the natural places that are – or soon will be – affected by megaprojects, offering structured and safe spaces for people to share their stories and knowledge, and where they can listen to and meaningfully engage with others in a constructive dialogue (Forsyth et al., 2021; Hamilton, 2021). The work of ‘activist’ green criminologists (Goyes, 2016) seems to us also paramount: through traditional as well as innovative methodologies, green criminologists should keep focusing on silenced and criminalised environmental movements and their perceptions and knowledge of environmental harms, also with a view to enhancing their visibility and exposure through sound analysis and dissemination. This is – we hope – also what this chapter contributes to doing.

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