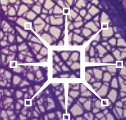# KAREN BELL

WORKING–CLASS ENVIRONMENTALISM

An Agenda for a Just and Fair Transition to Sustainability

Working-Class Environmentalism

Karen Bell

Working-Class Environmentalism

An Agenda for a Just and Fair Transition to Sustainability

palgrave
macmillan

Karen Bell
University of the West England
Bristol, UK

This book is dedicated to the victims and survivors of environmental classism
'Remember the dead, fight for the living' International Workers Memorial Day slogan

Acknowledgements

My colleagues in the University of Bristol and University of West of England, especially those who have inspired me, supported my work or with whom I have discussed the ideas in this book. I am particularly grateful to the support staff, the cleaners, administrators and technical staff, mostly working-class people, without whom my academic work would be impossible.

The people whose interviews appear in this book. They are an inspiration with their honesty, humour, caring and strength. I am really grateful for their time, thoughts and words. I hope their messages will be listened to and acted upon.

I also need to thank the UK Economic and Social Research Council for awarding me a Future Research Leaders grant to investigate fair and equitable transitions to sustainability. This gave me the time and security to embark on this book.

Finally, I really appreciate and thank all the authors referenced in this book, whose work I have built on and whose ideas have inspired me, helped me understand and given me hope.

Contents

ix

1

Introduction: Environmental Classism

As I began to write this book, a fire took hold of Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey tower block containing social housing flats in Kensington, London. For years the residents had complained about health and safety issues and had even predicted the possibility of a fire. But they were ignored. The flats had recently been refurbished with cladding, supposedly to help with insulation and prevent damp, though some suggest its purpose was solely to improve the look of the building for the benefit of those living in the surrounding luxury properties. Whatever the reason, this very cladding proved to be the tinder for the fire so that it spread unusually rapidly. Evidence given to the subsequent, and currently ongoing, Grenfell Tower Inquiry (2018) indicated that cost-cutting on the refurbishment, and failing to install sprinklers and other safety features, was a significant factor underlying the ensuing tragedy. The local fire service had also seen drastic cuts and outsourcing to private companies possibly causing the reported lack of basic firefighting equipment at the scene of the fire (Booth 2018a, b). In response to this evidence, one of the members of the survivors' group, Grenfell United, said, 'loved ones would be alive today if different decisions had been taken and if the people in charge had put safety first' (Ruiz 2018).

I believe there was an important factor underlying all of these mistakes and oversights—'classism'—the majority of the residents of the block were working-class. The casual approach to their safety, the apparent undervaluing of their lives and the dismissal of their concerns could occur because the Grenfell residents did not have social and economic power. Grenfell made classism visible in the horrifying sight of working-class people being burnt alive. It is tragic and should never happen again. But, in terms of working-class lives lost and warnings ignored, it has happened again—and every day since. In the UK and around the world, working-class people are killed and injured through living and working in toxic and dangerous environments every day, largely invisibly, out of public sight and awareness. When they voice their complaints and concerns, they are ignored and sometimes insulted. Because these deaths and injuries in part result from insufficiently valuing working-class lives and concerns, I consider it to be 'classism' and, because it is linked to environmental quality, I call it 'environmental classism'. Though sometimes less visible, direct or immediate than the classism evident at Grenfell, it can be just as lethal and devastating.

Environmental classism, while rarely articulated as a concept, is not a new story. As far back as 1845, Engels described widespread injuries and deaths among the working-class in England due to unsafe factory and housing conditions. He called these 'social murder' (Engels 1845, p. 26), meaning that they were deaths caused by society, rather than by individual intent. Even before then, in 1713, Bernardo Ramazzini wrote *The Diseases of Workers*, the first comprehensive presentation of occupational diseases maiming and killing the working-class in Italy. Ramazzini outlined the health hazards resulting from chemicals, dust and metals faced by workers in more than 50 occupations at that time. Working-class people, themselves, have often been at the forefront of raising awareness about these issues. For example, in 1924, in the US, young women and girls who were working at painting watch dials with a liquid containing radium and mesothorium raised concerns about occupational toxicity. They had been losing their teeth, becoming sick and disfigured and, eventually, dying from bone cancers. Their illnesses were dismissed as being due to a myriad of other causes, including poor dental hygiene, syphilis

and even 'hysteria', until the condition was eventually diagnosed as 'radium jaw' and as resulting from their work. The US Radium Corporation attempted to suppress this information. Eventually, five of the young women workers sued the company. One of them died during the trial but, finally, in 1928, the company were forced to pay compensation and the episode resulted in a change in policy, so that scientists, rather than manufacturers, came to determine the occupational hazards posed by radium dial painting (see Abrams 2001, for this and similar working-class environmental histories).

In all these cases, working-class voices had been ignored with tragic consequences. This book is an attempt to amplify their voices and honour their lives. It describes and illustrates 'environmental classism' in the UK and beyond for the purposes of understanding how to end it. 'Environmental classism' refers to policies or practices that impact less favourably on working-class individuals and groups with respect to the quality of their living, working and leisure environments. The book explains how working-class people tend to carry the environmental burdens for society; how they are sometimes negatively impacted by environmental policy and alienated by traditional forms of environmentalism; and how they have long been, and continue to be, environmentalists, even if they have not been recognised as such.

I came to an acknowledgement and understanding of environmental classism as a result of over 30 years of campaigning as an environmental activist and more than 10 years as an environmental justice researcher. Throughout this time, I have heard many stories about the harm that has been done to working-class people as a consequence of their toxic, unsafe and inadequate environments. When I was conducting the research for this book, I heard even more of these stories, sometimes recounted to me in quite a matter-of-fact way. For example, one of the women I spoke to, who lives in an area of high deprivation and near a number of waste facilities, said:

> I really like it and I have a beautiful garden. I really love the place and I got a very beautiful view. I can see … all the mountains if the sky is clear. But sometimes I think I may want to move because of the pollution in the area … There's

quite a lot of pollution and I heard lots of people are ill with cancer. I am one of them, actually. (Ange)

I am writing this book to provide support and solidarity for those who are aware of these problems and to provoke questions and debate among those who currently are not. The book is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of the topic but rather a personal analysis and an invitation to further consideration.

Is Class Still Relevant?

The meaning and relevance of class is contentious. This book draws upon sociological theories of class which include socio-cultural distinctions, such as status, education, intergenerational advantages, and political and social capital which afford influence in the public sphere (see Chap. 2 for debates and definitions).

It has been alleged that class is no longer relevant because of the combined processes of deindustrialisation in the Western world and the rise of neoliberalism globally. Deindustrialisation led to a shift from traditional manual labour to clerical and service sector work, with an increase in management and professional roles and a widening of participation in higher education. At the same time, the rise of neoliberalism led to an increase in 'flexible' employment, with job insecurity increasingly being the experience of all those in the workforce. As a result of these changes, some analysts went as far as to pronounce 'The Death of Class' (Pakulski and Waters 1996). Others argued that class might still exist but, as a mega-theory, was of less relevance in the new social and economic landscape (e.g. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Baumann 2001). It is also commonly said that class is particularly peculiar to Britain or the UK.

The social distinction that is more often drawn is between 'poor' and 'non-poor' or 'deprived' and 'non-deprived' socio-economic groups. However, though there is a good deal of overlap, being working-class is not always synonymous with having a low income (Savage et al. 2013;

Savage 2015). Some people may be excluded and disadvantaged as a result of social practices and cultural issues and not just material deprivation (see Chap. 2).

Until very recently social class was rarely discussed in relation to environmental issues or mentioned in mainstream environmental or sustainability reports and studies. Similarly, again until recently, working-class organisations, such as trade unions, had been largely ignored by environmental academics; as well as by the mainstream environmental movement and environmental policy makers (Räthzel and Uzzell 2011, 2013). Some social policy analysts have written about environmental issues in relation to poverty (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2011, 2014a, b), but rarely with regard to class. In the academic fields of 'environmental justice', 'climate justice' and 'energy justice' and among associated activists, the focus has mainly been on race and/or low income, though there have been intermittent allegations of 'classism' directed at the mainstream environmental movement (Sandler and Pezzullo 2007).

However, class is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Several authors are now highlighting the extent and impact of inequality in our societies, for example, Danny Dorling (2015), Stephen Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). Some have focused directly on 'classism' as a social injustice (e.g. Jones 2011; McKenzie 2015; Hanley 2016; Isenberg 2016). Classism also became more visible following the UK Brexit vote in 2016 as noted, for example, in *The Independent*, which carried a headline stating: 'Classist innuendo about educated Remain voters and the "white van men" of Leave has revealed something very distasteful about Britain' (Piercy in the Independent, 20th June 2016). As Chap. 2 describes, and the rest of this book illustrates, class is very much still with us. It is not only to be found in the past or solely in England. As a number of sociologists have noted, 'social class, based on ranking, hierarchies and inequalities are found nearly everywhere' (e.g. Silva 2015, p. 373).

It is important to think about how to end environmental classism and embrace working-class environmentalism, firstly, so that working-class people do not have to be killed or injured unnecessarily and, secondly, because it will enable us to achieve sustainability, or a habitable planet for all humans in the long term, as the next sections outline.

Reducing the Health Impacts of Inadequate Environments

Our living and working environments are very influential in determining the extent to which we are healthy or sick and, therefore, the length and quality of our lives. It is often difficult to 'prove' the environmental determinants of health outcomes because of a lack of detailed or appropriate monitoring; long latency times; and the complexity of measuring cumulative, multiple and synergistic exposure to toxins. However, the evidence, taken overall, shows that there is a major link between the environment and health. Environmental factors can degrade health, both directly, by exposing people to harmful agents, or indirectly, by disrupting the ecosystems that sustain life.

The prevalence of many non-communicable diseases is rising globally, with environmental factors being one of the main contributors (WHO 2018a). In the UK, recent research has shown that a century-long rise in life expectancy has stalled since 2010 before the natural human lifetime limit (i.e. biologically, we could live longer and do in some other countries) (Marmot 2017). In another recent study, Hiam et al. (2017) found that UK mortality rates were increasing. Although, in both cases, the authors of the reports speculate that these outcomes are a result of inadequate spending on health and social care under Conservative and Liberal Democrat austerity regimes, an additional explanation may be the environmental assaults on their health that people are increasingly exposed to. The health and social care services mainly step in after we have become unwell or disabled, so we need to think about why we are becoming ill in the first place. For example, though UK cancer survival rates are at a record high, we are much more likely to get cancer. There is currently about a 50% chance of each person getting cancer in their lifetime (Cancer Research UK 2018). Why? We are repeatedly told that the reasons for the national and global increase in this disease are our lifestyles, our genes, our increasingly long lives and more intensive diagnosing, or even bad luck. These reasons may be accurate in some cases but they require further scrutiny. For example, though there is some evidence that cancer rates have increased because people are living longer, it is an

inadequate overall explanation because there has also been an escalation in age-adjusted incidence rates (e.g. Pellegriti et al. 2013; SEER 2013). Increased longevity does not explain the rise in childhood cancers.

There is a strong link between poor environments and cancer, as well as many other non-communicable diseases. The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health (2017) recently estimated that global pollution, alone, kills nine million people prematurely a year and 'threatens the continuing survival of human societies' (p. 465). In the most severely affected countries, pollution is responsible for more than one in four deaths. The study reported that the most health-impacting pollutants were air pollution, linked to heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and other illnesses; and water pollution, associated with 1.8 million deaths per year as a result of gastrointestinal diseases and parasitic infections. Workplace pollution, including exposure to carcinogens, resulted in at least 800,000 deaths. A recent WHO global assessment (2016) similarly highlighted the 'devastating impact of environmental hazards and risks on global health' (p. viii), discussing more than 100 diseases and injuries related to the quality of the environment. Their analysis showed that 23% of global deaths (and 26% of deaths among children under five) are due to environmental factors. Strokes, ischaemic heart disease, diarrhoea and cancers were the main related illnesses. Yet another recent study confirmed these findings again, reporting that there are 71,000 deaths a week globally as a result of outdoor air pollution alone (FIA 2017). Numerous other studies over the last decade have found similar links between poor quality environments and a range of illnesses including heart disease (e.g. Silverman et al. 2010); cancer (e.g. Grant 2009); strokes (e.g. Kettunen et al. 2007); pneumonia (e.g. Knox 2008); respiratory illness (e.g. Knox 2008); adverse birth outcomes (e.g. Shah and Balkhair 2011); breathing problems (Goeminne et al. 2018); impairment of cognitive development (e.g. Ranft et al. 2009); diabetes (e.g. Raaschou-Nielsen et al. 2013); depression and suicide (e.g. Kim et al. 2010); and impeded brain development in children (e.g. Grandjean 2013). Though low-income countries are currently the worst affected, middle-income and high-income countries are also strongly impacted.

Although estimates vary, it is considered that about 50,000 people die in the UK prematurely each year from respiratory, cardiovascular and other illnesses associated with outdoor air pollutants, alone, such as NO_2,

particulate matter (PM) and ozone. Outdoor air pollution kills more people in the UK than second-hand smoking or road traffic accidents (COMEAP 2010), yet, until very recently, it has received scant attention. In the city where I live, Bristol, crowned the Green Capital of Europe in 2015, a recent report estimated that 300 premature deaths occur each year as a result of air pollution—about 8.5% of the annual deaths (Laxen et al. 2017).

Therefore, numerous studies now point to the importance of the environment for our health though, even these, may underestimate the burden of disease and death attributable to environmental causes, as only a fraction of the potential risks have been adequately investigated.

Poor environments undermine the health of all of us but the vast majority of those who die and are injured in this way are poor and marginalised (Lancet Commission 2017, section 3). Because of the link between environmental quality and health outcomes, inequitable environments result in increased health inequalities. The least well-off experience worse health than their wealthier counterparts and these differences manifest themselves from the neighbourhood up to the global level (CSDH 2008). In the UK, those living in the poorest neighbourhoods die, on average, seven years earlier than those in the wealthiest areas and spend seventeen more years coping with illness and disability (Ellaway et al. 2012; Marmot 2010; Buck and Maguire 2015). This denotes a double injustice of a shorter life, and a much longer period of poorer health for people living on low incomes.

Although, until recently, few studies have linked environmental, income and health inequalities, those that have generally endorsed the view that a driver for geographical differences in health is the disparity between health-promoting or health-damaging aspects of the environment. For example, almost 20 years ago, the 1998 Acheson report summarised over 700 studies on health inequalities in the UK related to a range of environmental and social conditions, including housing quality, fuel poverty, transport and food poverty (Acheson et al. 1998). Again, in 2004, the Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN), a former advisor to the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), reported that environmental inequality can affect peoples' health outcomes (Defra 2004). More recently, Pearce

et al. (2010) found that, in the UK 'multiple environmental deprivation increased as the degree of income deprivation rose. Area-level health progressively worsened as the multiple environmental deprivation increased' (p. 522). At the global level, health is undermined because many people still do not have their environmental needs met. For example, approximately 60% of people globally were still without access to safe sanitation systems in 2015 (WHO & UNICEF 2017); 15% lacked access to electricity (World Bank 2017); 30% were without safe drinking water (WHO & UNICEF 2017) and 11% had insufficient food to meet the minimum daily energy requirement (FAO 2015). These studies emphasise the importance of the environment in shaping health and illustrate the "triple jeopardy' of social, health and environmental inequalities' (Pearce et al. 2010, p. 522).

There is international legislation stating that everyone has the right to live in a world free from toxic pollution and environmental degradation (see Boyle 2012), but these rights are not being realised. The poor quality of our environments is disproportionately killing working-class people and, consequently, traumatising their families and friends. But the causes of the resulting disease and death are presented in individualised and fatalistic terms. The role of the environment, until very recently, has often been minimised or ignored. As the Lancet Commission (2017) Executive Summary stated, 'For decades, pollution and its harmful effects on people's health, the environment, and the planet have been neglected both by Governments and the international development agenda' (p. 1). I have witnessed this in academic conferences over the years. For example, in 2012 at a UK social policy conference I attended, a former academic and government health policy advisor claimed the environment influenced only 3% of health outcomes, way below that of the impact of personal behaviour choices. Five years later, the same level of denial prevailed at a conference of 300 researchers, policy makers, business leaders and civil society practitioners gathered to address global sustainability challenges. Most were saying that they did not know how to engage the general public in environmentalism, so I suggested that we need to tell people about the environmental impacts on our health, because people do not seem to be aware that living in toxic environments is behind many illnesses and deaths including the higher incidences of cancer. The Chair of the

meeting immediately responded by insisting that the reasons for the increase in cancer were lifestyle, genes and longer lives. If poor quality environments were accepted as the reason for many of our health problems, public anger could no longer be avoided and the situation would, eventually, have to change.

Achieving Sustainability

Now I will turn to the second reason that it is important to end environmental classism and embrace working-class environmentalism: Because it will enable us to achieve sustainability, or a habitable planet for all humans in the long term. While human deaths are occurring now as a result of environmental destruction, we are also on a trajectory towards even greater global devastation. As a result of the overuse and misuse of resources, we have now either crossed or will soon be about to cross, nine earth system 'planetary boundaries' beyond which impacts will be irreversible and the survival of humanity will be unlikely (Steffen et al. 2015). In just one of these boundaries, climate change, we've already increased the earth's temperature more than 1°C and, this alone, has led to numerous disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, heat-waves, droughts and famines. But, if we continue on the current trajectory, we can expect widespread devastation. The 2018 IPCC report stated that we must reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 to have a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. If we do not now change the trajectory of the rate of greenhouse gas emissions, we may have only 12 years before we irreversibly overstep planetary boundaries (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018). McKibben (2017) and many other analysts now argue that we are unlikely to avoid 2°C, no matter what we do. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (2018) states that we are still in a position to avert the worst scenarios though it will require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.

We should also consider that 'climate change' is just one of the nine planetary boundaries. Another that is in danger of transgression is 'bio-

sphere integrity', including loss of biodiversity. For example, a recently published study of insect life in Germany found a decline of 76–82% in flying insects (Hallmann et al. 2017). This is highly problematic because, as one scientist stated: 'Insects make up about two-thirds of all life on Earth but there has been some kind of horrific decline … We appear to be making vast tracts of land inhospitable to most forms of life, and are currently on course for ecological Armageddon. If we lose the insects then everything is going to collapse' (Goulson 2017, np). We rely upon insects for the pollinating which is necessary for our food supply, so there will be widespread hunger if insect populations collapse. 'Ocean acidification' is another planetary boundary that may soon be overstepped and may lead to the loss of many species of fish and other sea life (Bioacid 2017). Added to this, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has recently warned that, at current rates, 'By 2050, there could be more plastic than fish in our oceans' (2017, np), a trend also seriously impacting on marine life. Whilst being devastating events in themselves, the impact on humans will be tragic. International scientists from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 2018) are now predicting that the unsustainable exploitation of the natural world could severely threaten the food and water security of billions of people. Some have more starkly described the scenario in terms of the near-certainty of 'civilizational collapse' (Erlich 2018).

Therefore, a rapid and effective transition to sustainability is required. This requires more than technical innovation; it also needs structural and institutional change, supported by a transformation in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of individuals. Such a change depends upon there being a broad base of people who are willing and able to advocate for environmental and social justice, as well as to make personal choices that will benefit the environment. This broad base has not developed to the extent that might be desirable or necessary, given the urgency and seriousness of the environmental problems that we now face.

This book argues and evidences that the development of a healthy environment for all and the base for environmental transition has, fundamentally, been constrained by divisions between different social groups,

in particular social class divisions. Although there are other factors driving unsustainability, including the dominant economic system, social mobilisation could challenge these factors. I argue in this book that social mobilisation has been undermined by 'environmental classism' and I encourage environmentalists to better integrate a working-class perspective into their environmentalism. Working-class people bring particular expertise to the debates and actions. In class societies, the wealthier are less likely to be impacted by the environmental crises because they can change their dwelling places, jobs and other aspects of their lives in the face of risks and crises. Without such options, working-class people may be the first to be impacted by these crises so have the most to gain from avoiding them. In addition, those who have no vested interest in the current structures of power can find it easier to see when the system is not working (Krauss 1993) and may, therefore, be more likely to identify what needs to be addressed and changed. A revived and supported working-class environmentalism could, therefore, drive forward a rapid, fair and effective transition to sustainability.

Achieving this will require removing the barriers to working-class environmentalism. This book will identify, explain, and make recommendations on, how to overcome the barriers between working-class groups and the mainstream environmental movement, environmental practitioners and environmental policy makers. In this context, the 'barriers' referred to mean the attitudes, beliefs, policies, practices and cultures that prevent effective cooperation.

The situation seems to be reaching a 'tipping point' where environmental issues are now increasingly being recognised as fundamental to human health and wellbeing; trade unions are beginning to grapple with ecological issues; and new coalitions for social change are emerging between environmentalists and social justice campaigners. This seems a crucial time to look at how bridges can be developed between environmentalists and diverse working-class communities so as to ensure that sustainability strategies are more attuned to social and cultural difference. I am hoping that this book will help build these bridges by discussing how class is experienced in relation to the environment through the everyday realities of life.

What Is 'the Environment?'

Before going further, it is important to ask this fundamental question. As with the notion of 'class', there are also debates and contentions about the concepts of 'environment' and 'environmentalism'. In a classic text, Agyeman (2002) noted the tendency for the mainstream UK environmental movement to use a narrow definition of the term 'environment', one defined by, and of relevance to, White, middle-class people. In the US, academics have contrasted the predominantly middle-class mainstream environmental movement with the more working-class environmental justice movement in terms of implicit assumption about what denotes 'environment' and is the focus of an environmental agenda. For example, Allen et al. (2007) contrasts the middle-class environmentalist, 'engaged in bird watching, recycling, "buying green," hiking', with the working-class environmentalist concerned with 'children playing in the shadow of smokestacks', noting 'what the environment is (fragile ecosystem to be protected versus a place of dangerous threat)' differs dramatically (Allen et al. 2007, p. 124).

The working-class-based 'environmental justice' movement usually focuses on issues that relate to human health, while the mainstream environmental movement has often focused on preserving wilderness and the protection of endangered species (Bullard and Wright 1992; Di Chiro 1996). The environmentalism of environmental justice activists addresses the real and perceived threats to health where we live, work and play. Pulido calls this an 'environmentalism of everyday life' (1998, p. 30). Therefore, when working-class groups approach mainstream organisations for support with their issues, for example the location of incinerators in their communities, the mainstream organisations can deem such issues to be outside the scope of 'environmental'. For example, Di Chiro describes an environmental organisation refusing to support a community in addressing an environmental threat because 'the poisoning of an urban community by an incineration facility was a "community health issue," not an environmental one' (Di Chiro 1996, p. 299). Behind this may have been a fear that concerns for animals and wilderness would be given low priority in a movement which also focused on anthropocentric issues (Allen et al. 2007). However, the capture of the term 'environmentalism'

by middle-class people has meant that working-class people are less likely to relate to or to identify with the movement. Hence, definitions invite inclusion and exclusion and facilitate certain alliances whilst undermining others, so that 'the environmental movement has shot itself in the foot by adopting the definitional frontiers that delegate different issues as either inside or outside the environmental "frame"' (Di Chiro 1996, p. 279).

Synergising these positions, in this book, I use the widest possible understanding of the term 'environmentalism' incorporating the 'live, work and play' as well as the 'wilderness and species' aspects. I believe all are important and need to be integrated to achieve equitable and fair environmental transition.

In some ways, it does not matter if we approach environmentalism from a desire to protect other species or from a more anthropocentric, human-focused, motivation. So long as we are not ignoring or discounting the other approach, since that only divides the movement and increases the risk of developing inadequate and partial solutions. Some have argued that, though there is overlap, attaining objectives in one dimension may be insufficient for another and objectives may even sometimes conflict (e.g. Dobson 2007). There is a lack of empirical research on this question, but it does not seem to me that there should be any inherent contradiction. It would certainly be possible to improve some aspects of human environmental justice at the expense of other species, for example, as with industrial agriculture which may improve short-term agricultural yields, yet disrupt ecosystems and, thereby, habitats for other species. However, I would argue that, whilst alleviating some problems, such practices would, ultimately, also be detrimental to humans who have also evolved within ecosystems. Environmental health seems to be a precondition for human health.

Method, Scope and Structure

The book builds on previous research from the fields of sociology, social policy, environmental studies, geography and politics, as indicated in the references throughout. It particularly draws on the academic literature

relating to environmental justice, climate justice and energy justice. I also use my own experience and personal anecdotes, as consistent with the demands of the environmental justice movement to recognise the importance of storytelling as an epistemology, equal to that of scientific and elite knowledge bases (Krauss 1993). Much of my analysis focuses on the UK, in particular council estates, deprived inner-city areas and pockets of semi-rural poverty. However, the book also makes links internationally and considers global processes and implications, referring to low-, middle- and high-income countries.

Initially, a comprehensive search strategy was developed to locate all the relevant published evidence to date. Subsequently, I looked at my own research on environmental justice over the last ten years (2006–2016), reanalysing some of the qualitative elements from a class perspective including that published in Bell (2008), Bell and Sweeting (2013) and Bell (2014). I also carried out 27 targeted interviews specifically for this book using informant-directed interview techniques. All the interviewees were working-class according to at least one definition (see Chap. 2) and, importantly, all but one were brought up in working-class homes with parents who undertook non-professional work and had had no further education. They have all been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Their main occupational identities are (or were, if retired or currently unemployed): taxi-driver (Ray); gardener (Pete); security guard (Dave); builder (Jim); bus driver (Liam); academic (Mel); housing worker (Sharon); receptionist (Sheila); warehouse workers (Janet, Anne, Joan); technical workers (Paul, Carole); care workers (Cath, Julie); caterer (Ange); shop or other service workers (Stacey, Pat, Cindy); hairdresser (Kelly); foster carer (Amy); maritime worker (Bob); community worker (Anita); nurse (Jo); aircraft engineer (Jack); factory worker (Phil) and administrator (Mick). Very few work in industries that would traditionally be seen to be harmful to the environment and this would be an important area for future research since such workers may have a different perspective. However, their occupations do roughly reflect the current breakdown of the workforce in the UK—that is, with four out of five working in the service sector and few in manufacturing or energy (Resolution Foundation 2019).

The interviewees' ages range from early 20s to late 80s. Seven identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and 20 as White. They live in cities (Bristol, Manchester, Reading), towns (Lowestoft, Aldershot) and rural areas of England and Wales. Most of those interviewed live on council estates or in inner-city areas and almost all the interviewees live in areas which are in the 10% most deprived areas of England and Wales.

I used the following recognised strategies to decide who to include in the research: Those who had particularly relevant knowledge and experience ('purposive sampling', see Mason 2002); those who I could access via networks ('snowball sampling', see Gilbert 2001); those who lived in the maximum diversity of environmental situations; and those who fitted a range of demographic descriptors in terms of age, gender, LGBTQ+, disability, ethnicity and so on (i.e. 'maximum variation sampling' see Miles and Huberman 1994).

The interviews were semi-structured, in that I asked a number of key questions each time, but the additional questions varied enormously between interviews and often took the form of a conversation. The questions included: Would you call yourself working-class? What do you like and dislike about the area that you live in? Would you say it was a healthy place to live or not? Have you ever tried to improve the local environment? Have you ever joined an environmental campaign group or thought about it? Have you met any members of environmental organisations? and so on. Any vague or contentious terms were clarified during the interview, as necessary.

As well as the interview aspect of the research, I included knowledge gained in relation to my environmental justice activism over the same period, which had been recorded in notes, emails, letters, webpages and blogs. This included my activities and involvement in meetings, events and activities related to political parties, local government, community events, campaigns and activist groups. The personal stories that I draw on include, for example, those relating to my experience as an environmental campaigner and of living on council estates throughout my life. During this time, I witnessed many struggles for working-class people to be heard by environmental policy makers and environmental activists.

The identities of individuals interviewed or referred to in the context of the situations described have been anonymised to avoid any unwanted

publicity. Prior to the interview, the interviewees were always fully informed as to the nature of the study and gave their consent to associated anonymised publication. Where I have referred to public events in which it was not possible to gain full informed consent from all those present, I have also anonymised comments. It seems reasonable and ethical to protect the people present from any harm or unwanted attention that could arise from repeating their words outside of the fora where they were originally articulated. The only exception to this is where I occasionally refer to those in public office making public comments in their official capacity.

In relation to the reflections on activities I was personally involved in as an activist, it was not possible to gain informed consent retrospectively. I have, therefore, also anonymised the individuals and situations concerned, so that they are not identifiable. However, in a few cases, I could not anonymise the situation completely without losing important information, for example, in relation to Bristol Green Capital (since Bristol is the only city that has ever been designated a 'Green Capital' in the UK to date) and my involvement with the Green Party (since there is no other primarily environmental party in the UK). In these cases, I have just anonymised the individuals concerned.

My work is rooted in a 'Critical Theory' framework, where research is 'engaged' in that it seeks to have a positive influence on society (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau 2018). As a scholar-activist, it was not possible to be 'value free', 'neutral' or completely 'objective' but rather I aimed to be 'reflexive', that is, aware of my subjective position at all times whilst attempting to see beyond it (Kincheloe and Mclaren 2000). To be engaged and to also meet scholarly standards of credibility, I must acknowledge my own assumptions, values and ideologies. Therefore, a reflexive and engaged approach requires considering 'positionality'—that is, to think about ourselves in the research and how we influence it; and how we can interact meaningfully in the activities related to the research without being exploitative and causing harm. The last section of this chapter refers to my background which should aid understanding of my positionality. Also, I need to state outright that I am a social and environmental justice campaigner, and have alternated between membership and activism within the Green Party and Labour Party since the 1980s. I am now currently in the Labour Party.

I do not see my task as to provide a balanced view of environmentalism in relation to working-class people, but rather to offer insight and understanding about working-class views of environmentalism, whilst at the same time being thoroughly honest so that these insights might be of value. I feel that this is legitimate as there is already so much that has been written about environmentalism from a middle-class perspective. However, to ensure ethicality in the research, I was careful to consider the possibility of other interpretations; to be scrupulously honest about my observations; and to make clear distinctions between observations, interpretations and their intersections. I also carried out thorough documentation of the research process; collected as much data as possible; used a variety of methodologies; integrated the research with the existing literature and checked my interpretations during the interviews and informal conversations, as much as possible.

Even so, I could never claim that this study is a complete reflection of reality. I would need far greater resources and time to achieve this. I have only captured a partial range of viewpoints and experiences, albeit rooted in a lifetime of experience of these issues. However, because of the lack of other literature on this topic, I have no definite way of knowing the prevalence of these experiences and views in the population or how much they reflect reality. I do not claim to present 'the truth' but rather to shed some light on the situation. My ambition, therefore, in the chapters that follow is to translate, explain and analyse environmentalism from a working-class frame of reference in order to offer some possibilities about how to bring about greater sustainability and environmental justice.

When I speak of the 'working-class', I do not mean only the White working-class but all working-class people. It is often argued that class-based analysis fails to sufficiently explore the interconnections between class and other forms of oppression, for example, on the basis of gender, disability, race and LGBTQ+ (e.g. Rubin et al. 2014). In order to take into account the additional or different impacts of other oppressions, we speak of 'intersectionality' which emphasises that class cannot be experienced outside of other identities. It is clear that race, disability, LGBTQ+ identity, age and other intersectional considerations will also shape outcomes for working-class people and these are discussed, when relevant.

One of the BAME working-class women that I spoke to for this research, Mel, was very keen to make this point, stating:

> *Class and race is very intertwined … You know, there's an unrepresentative amount of BAME individuals who are pushed to the lowest class of the society so more and more, we're talking about …a more diverse group than the general population and, I think, whether you're White working-class or Black working-class, your voice just gets marginalised, the things that you care about most will get marginalised.* (Mel)

Intersectional factors, such as disability and BAME status, often compound the environmental injustices that some working-class people experience since, in many instances, they also go hand in hand with poverty and unequal status. Where once class was seen as the primary social division in society, as a result of feminist, anti-colonial and other emancipatory struggles, there are now ongoing debates about the relationship of class to these other potential sources of disadvantage. It is, therefore, important to note that using a framework that focuses solely on any single issue will not be sufficient to capture the form and extent of injustice that most working-class people experience. Though I focus on class in this book, I refer to the other identities where relevant. This does not mean that I consider class to be the most important identity in determining everything in our lives, but rather that I believe it has been relatively overlooked, particularly in relation to the topic of environmentalism.

Chapter 2 explains more on the definitions and nature of class and classism, including sections on intersectionality, microaggressions, discrimination, internalised oppression, the impacts of classism and how classism is justified. Chapter 3 details how working-class people in the UK are more likely to experience environmental deprivation, for example, in terms of air pollution; transport; proximity to landfill sites; flood risk; food poverty; fuel poverty and access to green space. Chapter 4 explains how environmental improvement programmes, environmental transition processes and programmes—locally, nationally and internationally—have often excluded working-class people and low-income groups, sometimes compounding their disadvantage. This theme is explored in relation to some key environmental issues from street cleanli-

ness to energy justice. Chapter 5 discusses how working-class and other disadvantaged groups are often left out of environmental decision-making processes, despite the important knowledge and perspectives they bring. Chapter 6 outlines and analyses the key contributions of working-class people to environmentalism through a discussion of the 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier 2003); the environmental justice movement; and trade union health and safety campaigns. It challenges a prevailing view of environmentalism as a 'post-materialist' struggle (e.g. Inglehart 1990) which suggests that poorer people are too preoccupied with meeting their basic needs for food, warmth and security to be able to think about, or be active on, environmental issues. Chapter 7 discusses the reasons for environmental classism in terms of a number of theories. Chapter 8, which concludes the book, discusses the theoretical, policy and practice implications of this analysis.

The key aim of this book, then, is to amplify working-class voices on environmental classism. I am quite anxious about doing this, as I fear (1) letting down working-class people by not doing it well enough; (2) further stereotyping working-class people and stigmatising their communities; and (3) offending my many middle-class environmentalist friends and colleagues.

Regarding the first, I am very conscious to be fair and honest as outlined above. I have also asked some of the participants in the interviews to read through drafts of this book and/or discussed with them how to represent the issues that they raised.

In relation to the second, while attempting to capture relevant patterns or generalities about working-class lives, I reflect on a comment in the book, 'White Working-class' (Williams 2017). Joan Williams, the middle-class author, recounts the time when, as a young woman, she went to meet the family of her new working-class boyfriend. Upon hearing that his family complained that 'she looked at us like a fucking anthropologist', she admitted, 'I was cut to the quick … because it was so true' (Williams 2017, p. 5). Though, unlike her, I am from a working-class background, I want to avoid doing the same, and I particularly want to avoid unwittingly reinforcing stereotypes. So it is important to emphasise that making generalisations does not imply that all working-class people have the outlooks and experiences described here. There is a rich and

complex variety of lived experience among working-class people and all of it must be respected if we are to end environmental classism. It is important to emphasise that the stories are not necessarily remarkable, but they are ours—mine and those of the other working-class people interviewed. I hope the quotes convey the sense of this book being about real people and not just abstractions. The personal is, indeed, the political, and it is through the everyday actions of ordinary individuals that classism is most obviously felt. I also do not want to further stigmatise council estates and inner-city areas. They are often fantastic places to live because of the wonderful people you find there, and some of these areas have some very positive environmental aspects too, such as there being an abundance of green space on the outer estates. But it is important to be honest about what needs to change.

With regard to the third concern, I just want to reassure my middle-class friends, and other middle-class or owning-class people, that I do not intend to lay the blame for this situation at the door of individuals, even though I believe that as individuals we can do much to improve it. I think we are all guilty of making mistakes on equalities issues, even when we are members of oppressed groups ourselves. It is a product of our socialisation within capitalist, patriarchal, racist, disablist and homophobic societies. In many cases, individuals are prevented from behaving as we would ideally wish by the political and economic system. Our thoughts and behaviours are always, to some extent, constrained by this context. This is not to let anyone off the hook, but it is important to contextualise the problem. All we can do is try to become aware, to learn and to change our thoughts and actions whenever possible and to join together to try to change the context. Chapter 8 outlines the many things that we could do to make the changes needed to reduce, and then eliminate, environmental classism and support the further development of working-class environmentalism.

About Me

In order to illustrate the complexity of working-class life, and to further position myself in the research (i.e. let you know what drives and influences me), I want you to know something about my background. As you