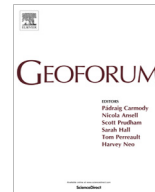




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

Editorial

Globalizing environmental justice?

There is now a long and rich history of practice and theory commonly associated with the concept of environmental justice. Much of it has focused on the global North, and the US in particular, reflecting the origins of movements that carry the label and that have invoked the discourse of environmental justice (Cole and Foster, 2001; Agyeman, 2005; Bullard, 2005). These origins imply a key preoccupation with racial inequality due to the apparently unique history of the US in terms of civil rights struggles and an emphasis on a particular set of environmental problems, such as the location of hazardous waste sites. Nonetheless, environmental justice has increasingly served as a crucial rallying ground for social activism and political resistance beyond the US in parts of Latin America, Asia and South Africa, for example (Agyeman et al., 2003; Agyeman and Ogneva-Himmelberger, 2009; Holifield et al., 2009; Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997; Martinez-Alier, 2002; McDonald, 2002; Carruthers, 2008).

Research on place-specific struggles over natural resources and environmental mobilizations suggest that 'the core issues at the heart of environmental justice struggles are universal' (Schroeder et al., 2008; cf. Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1999; Walker and Bulkeley, 2006). Justice provides local communities and environmental activists with an important vocabulary in their resistance against dispossession from customary land, opposition to polluting industries and struggles for a fair distribution of natural resource revenues. Even where resistance is not couched in justice terms, 'everyday' struggles and mobilizations over environmental degradation and natural resource exploitation are often about the distribution of environmental bads and goods, participation in decision making and recognition of particular group identities and histories, which constitute the classic concerns of environmental justice (Schlosberg, 2004, 2007). Environmental justice thus may provide a powerful lens through which to make sense of struggles over environments and natural resources worldwide, providing a link between Northern literature on environmental justice and research on southern environmentalisms (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997; Guha, 1999), and between the 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier, 2002), liberation ecology (Peet and Watts, 2004) and global political ecology (Peet et al., 2011a).

This special issue starts from the premise that environmental justice concerns may not only be universal(izing), but also increasingly operate at a global scale: creating international political communities and finding expression within 'global' institutions (Newell, 2006; Walker, 2009). Whilst not overlooking the tremendous diversity of meanings and struggles around environmental justice around the world, this claim refers to the growing adoption of discourses and strategies that are associated with, and in many ways derive from, environmental justice movements. Movements around water, food or climate increasingly adopt the language of

justice for example, raising explicitly concerns with historical ecological debts between and within nations, uneven ecological exchange and the social injustices that arise from the poorest being most vulnerable to the effects of problems to which they have contributed very little. Claims of environmental (in)justices are increasingly also deployed within transnational arenas dealing with the issues of trans-border trade and investment, for example, but with consequences for local environmental struggles and political ecologies. Practices of production, trade and regulation at one site increasingly connect with seemingly distant sites elsewhere through extended supply chains, technology diffusion and the internationalization of production. In so doing they transform the dynamics of inequality: reshaping or entrenching existing forms of inequality, and modifying the spaces available for the pursuit of justice (Newell, 2012). Though the significance of such connections is hardly novel and the history of colonialism could certainly be told in those terms, the point of departure here is the confluence of globalizing discourses of justice and corresponding institutional arrangements to which these claims are directed and which seek to address them, and a globalizing phase of contemporary capitalism which has reconfigured the geographies of environmental (in)justice (Fraser, 2009; Walker and Bulkeley, 2006).

In this light, there is a strong case for examining how questions of place-specific environmental justice relate to larger-scale political and economic processes through globalization and the expanding reach of global governance arrangements. It is also insightful to ask how the transnational deployment of claims of environmental (in)justices generates consequences for place-based environmental struggles as well as creating opportunities for occupying and influencing national and global political spaces in novel ways. The connections work in both directions: local issues and struggles are affected by larger-scale processes, but simultaneously influence the latter since the reputation and capital of global institutions is then invested in the success of interventions in particular locales over which they exercise only partial control and whereupon they are vulnerable to resistance and disruption (Newell and Bumpus, 2012). 'Local' and 'global', in this sense, are not given attributes of environmental claims, practices and issues, but rather are constituted through the scalar practices of particular actors and resulting processes (Neumann, 2009). It is only through these practices and processes that 'place-specific policies and practices can have consequences that cross national boundaries, affect multiple scales, and extend across global networks' (Holifield et al., 2009: 595).

This special issue proposes global environmental justice as a lens to make sense of place-specific environmental struggles in their relation to the sorts of broader political economic processes which are often identified as intensifying or accelerating the

production of environmental injustices. It does not pretend to provide a comprehensive account of worldwide mobilizations for environmental justice.¹ Instead, it seeks to show how practices of environmental (in)justice have changed in ways which may require innovative approaches to research and engagement. Though globalizing tendencies are uneven, environmental injustices are often produced and justice claims invoked in relation to the re-scaling of capital accumulation or the extension of political authority over new swathes of natural resources. They are often ultimately grounded in local and national realities and socio-ecological struggles, however. Each contribution to the issue will consequently explore how globalizing practices and processes impact upon specific environmental struggles to develop ways of understanding and explaining the ways in which those struggles are embedded with, and in turn shape, broader global processes.

The point of departure for this themed issue, therefore, is the need to think innovatively and in an interdisciplinary way about how to make sense of environmental justice issues as they relate to and are experienced by people all around the world. The concept of 'global environmental justice' serves as a lens to critically analyze ongoing economic, political and environmental transformations from multiple disciplinary viewpoints. It combines a focus on the globalizing production of environmental justices and injustices and the interest of international political economists in the workings of global networks and institutions with political ecologists' attention to the specificity of place-based socio-environmental struggles. It also engages debates in political philosophy about justice, particularly recent attention to non-western cultures and their implications for thought and practice on development (e.g. Sen, 2009) and the ways in which mobilizations by sub-altern groups, such as indigenous peoples for example, challenge liberal notions of collective action, citizenship and the pursuit of justice (Yashar, 2005).

This introduction develops a substantive framing for the contributions to the themed issue, including the research papers and critical reviews. It seeks to provide a brief justification of the analytical traction to be gained from applying a global environmental justice lens, one that brings together key concerns in environmental justice scholarship, political ecology, and international political economy. It develops the justification in three steps, asking first about the utility of 'justice', then about the specifically 'environmental' component of this, and finally asking what an emphasis on the 'global' adds to our understanding. Taken together, we argue, the three terms provide a powerful heuristic framework for understanding contemporary environmental politics and the political economy of natural resources.

Why 'justice'?

Whether it is 'climate justice', 'food justice' or 'water justice' the language of justice is omnipresent in environmental politics (Bond, 2012; Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010; Boelens et al., 2011). Many contemporary mobilizations over access to resources (such as seeds, forests or water) or objections to uneven exposure to environmental harms (e.g. climate change) employ justice as a discursive frame. The reference provides a useful vehicle for highlighting the justice component of environmental challenges as well as lending legitimacy to particular struggles. Similarly, transnational conventions and norms increasingly refer to justice, such as those dealing with

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+; Okereke and Dooley, 2009; Sikor, 2013a). Most recently, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) approved a new protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing in 2010 as a means to address the lack of access to benefits from biodiversity to date of many poorer stewards of natural resources (Martin et al., 2013).

Opposition to injustices and demands for justice lie at the heart of many place-based struggles around the world. Justice and ideas about justice are a critical element in material and discursive struggles about access to and control over resources (e.g., Berry, 1993; Fortmann, 1995; Peluso, 1996). Poor people's claims are not only about the distribution of environmental goods and bads, Martinez-Alier (2014) argues, but also about whose visions of the environment are recognized, who participates in environmental decision-making and democracy, and what kinds of values come to matter – all of which are central matters of justice. As important as distributive issues are, however, the claims made by actors in place-based struggles are also often about issues of participation and recognition, reflecting Fraser's call to think about justice in ways that extend beyond *distribution* to also include *recognition* and *representation* (Fraser, 1997).

The plurality of conceptions and practices of justice challenges research to critically interrogate assertions of (in)justices in environmental struggles. The specific claims made in concrete struggles are highly diverse, defying any attempt of defining them in uniform terms (cf. Schlosberg, 2004; Walker and Bulkeley, 2006). As social actors bring different notions of justice to bear upon issues of access to natural resources and exposure to environmental risk, the question arises of which types of actors are able to assert what kinds of claims given the historical circumstances they inherit and the contemporary political economy whose terrain they have to navigate. There is a need to critically examine assertions of (in)justice and trace how some assertions find support in public discourse as legitimate demands whereas others do not, or are rejected outright as illegitimate claims (Sen, 2009). The plurality of justice, in other words, directs analytical attention to environmental politics and power relations, as demonstrated by Movik (2014) and Upton (2014). Movik examines competing discursive constructions of water rights in debates surrounding South Africa's Water Allocation reform, while Upton looks at issues of representation and accountability within the global pastoralists' movement. The plurality of justice claims also opens up intriguing connections with normative reasoning in political philosophy as a way to distinguish legitimate notions of justice from mere assertions of self-interest – or to challenge the increasingly commonplace distinction between matters of distribution, participation and recognition, as Martin et al. (2014) point out.

Justice and the ability to provide it remains a constitutive element of the legitimacy of the modern nation state. For example, activists in the US have called on the federal government in support of struggles against unequal exposure to pollution (Williams, 1999). National governments from post-socialist Europe to postcolonial Latin America have recently transferred forest tenure to various excluded groups, justifying the transfer as a means of undoing historical injustices (Sikor et al., 2009; Larson et al., 2010). The South African state meanwhile has emerged as a key arena in struggles about water, as the vesting of allocative authority with the state has turned the state into a key site for competing claims of (in)justice (Movik, 2014). Likewise, Chhotray (2014) shows how the state's denial of legal entitlements to assistance critically shapes the 'relief relationship' between state and citizens in India. The relief relationship is based on moral concerns over the fate of people affected by super-cyclones and other disasters but not responsibilities enshrined in law. Mehta et al. (2014) go a step further by concluding that the Bolivian and Indian states have

¹ For interesting and innovative attempts to map environmental justice in this way see EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade, <http://www.ejolt.org/>) as well as the connected archive of mining conflicts compiled by OCMAL (Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina, <http://www.conflictosmineros.net/>) and Map of Environmental Conflicts in Brazil (<http://www.conflictoambiental.icict.fiocruz.br/>).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5074011>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5074011>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)