



Justice and conservation: The need to incorporate recognition



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ABSTRACT

In light of the Aichi target to manage protected areas equitably by 2020, we ask how the conservation sector should be incorporating concerns for social justice. We focus in particular on 'recognition', because it is the least well understood aspect of environmental justice, and yet highly relevant to conservation because of its concern with respect for local knowledge and cultures. In order to explore the meaning of recognition in the conservation context, we take four main steps. First, we identify four components of recognition to serve as our analytical framework: subjects of justice, the harms that constitute injustice, the mechanisms that produce injustices, and the responses to alleviate these. Secondly, we apply this framework to explore four traditions of thinking about recognition: Hegelian intersubjectivity, critical theory, southern decolonial theory, and the capabilities approach. Thirdly, we provide three case studies of conservation conflicts highlighting how different theoretical perspectives are illustrated in the claims and practices of real world conservation struggles. Fourthly, we finish the paper by drawing out some key differences between traditions of thinking, but also important areas of convergence. The convergences provide a basis for concluding that conservation should look beyond a distributive model of justice to incorporate concerns for social recognition, including careful attention to ways to pursue equality of status for local conservation stakeholders. This will require reflection on working practices and looking at forms of intercultural engagement that, for example, respect alternative ways of relating to nature and biodiversity.

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1. Introduction

Concerns about equity and justice¹ have become prominent in debates about conservation. These concerns include questions about how we distribute costs, benefits, rights and responsibilities, questions about how we give voice to different cultures and beliefs, and questions about how we make trade-offs between current and future people, between individual rights and the greater good, and between humans and non-humans (Brechtin et al., 2002; Norton, 2003; Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina, 2015). Working to improve 'conservation justice' is

considered ethically desirable, but also instrumental to improved conservation effectiveness because it reduces the likelihood of conflict (Martin et al., 2013; Pascual et al., 2014; Suiseeya, 2014) or improves participation (Coolsaet, 2015). But determining what constitutes 'conservation justice' is not easy. It is not enough to consult national or international laws to determine what is just because it is often perfectly legal to subject people to harms arising from pollution, deforestation, climate change, or indeed harms arising from the establishment of protected areas (Smith and Pangsapa, 2008). Thus conservation has to look beyond the judiciary for its moral compass.

This paper contributes to understanding what this moral compass should look like: how should we frame our thinking about conservation justice? In doing so it particularly highlights the need to incorporate the dimension of *recognition*. Contemporary academic framings of environmental justice tend to use a tripartite typology of concerns: distribution, procedure and recognition (Schlosberg, 2004; Sikor, 2013; Walker, 2012). Distribution refers to differences between stakeholders in terms of who enjoys rights to material benefits and who bears costs and responsibilities. Procedure refers to how decisions are made, who participates and on what terms. Recognition is typically concerned

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¹ We use 'equity' with reference to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) because this is the term used in that process. For much of the rest of the paper we prefer to use 'justice' as it better incorporates our focus on 'recognition'. Environmental 'justice' tends to refer to an enlarged set of concerns, including distribution and participation, but also incorporating calls for cultural recognition, a dimension of justice that passes largely unnoticed in equity discussions, and which we think should be brought into the foreground more clearly.

with respecting identities and cultural difference (Fraser and Honneth, 2003); it is about the extent to which different agents, ideas and cultures are respected and valued in interpersonal encounters and in public discourse and practice. We focus on recognition because we think it is highly relevant to conservation conflicts and because it is comparatively poorly understood and neglected.

It is not pragmatic to seek a single definition of justice-as-recognition because this would ignore important differences in understanding, including among political philosophers. Instead we find it a necessary first step to provide a roadmap to the plural ways in which recognition has been understood, both in theory and in practice, and to relate this to contemporary conservation conflicts. Our approach is therefore to describe different traditions of thinking and to illustrate these through case studies. We then proceed to a synthesis discussion in which we explore how elements of common spirit or intent can be drawn together in order to make key aspects of the concept of recognition legible to conservation practice. Prior to this, we briefly review recent attention to justice within conservation practice.

2. Conservation practice, justice and recognition

Biodiversity conservation is linked with recognition injustices for three main reasons. Firstly, protected areas (PAs) are spatially associated with cultural diversity (Gorenflo et al., 2012; Stepp et al., 2004) and with people whose knowledge and environmental governance institutions are vulnerable to being marginalised (Brosius and Hitchner, 2010; Escobar, 1998). Secondly, mainstream conservation management strategies are influenced by culturally specific (and often disputed) ideas about what works and about what counts as evidence of what works. For example conservation approaches have been driven by the assumed superiority of exclusionary models of protected areas in which people are separated from the rest of nature (Lele et al., 2010; West et al., 2006). Thirdly, these dominant blueprints about how conservation should be done become a basis for the misrepresentation and misrecognition of indigenous and local people. For example, the 'Yosemite model' of conservation, in which nature is conceived as wilderness, has led to the representation of local and indigenous lifestyles as harmful to nature conservation (Cronon, 1996; Dowie, 2009; Stevens, 1997). Given the powerful assumption that conservation holds the moral high ground, these lifestyles are also therefore portrayed as morally inferior (Martin et al., 2013; Neumann, 2004). But biodiversity conservation can also work constructively with local communities, especially if it embraces the concept of recognition. Where innovative, non-exclusionary models are developed, indigenous people have sometimes embraced protected areas as a way to positively promote both their territories and traditions (Stevens, 1997).

The language of equity and rights has been in global conservation discourse since at least the early 1970s (UNEP, 1972). In the 1980s, ideas of inter- and intra-generational equity were foundational to popular narratives of sustainable development (WCED, 1987) that fed into the first 'Earth Summit' in 1992. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was one of the outcomes of this summit and builds on three objectives: 'the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources' (Art. 1). The 2010 Nagoya Protocol develops the third objective of access and benefit sharing (ABS) whilst 'taking into account the important role of traditional knowledge' (Secretariat of the CBD 2010, preamble). The inclusion of equitable ABS is something that was pushed for by developing country stakeholders who feared a highly preservationist CBD and expected financial returns from the exploitation of their genetic resources and traditional knowledge (Broggiato et al., 2015). However, it is worth noting that both the process and implementation of the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol have led to controversies over recognition. One charge is that the CBD and Nagoya are culturally dominating, requiring prospective beneficiaries to assimilate imposed ideas of what is fair and equitable as a condition

of benefiting (De Jonge, 2011; Suiseeya, 2014; Whiteman, 2009). For example, the San people are expected to conform to norms of fair procedure rooted in western principles of representative democracy in order to negotiate an ABS agreement related to the Hoodia plant (Vermeylen and Walker, 2011).

With regard to its first two objectives, the CBD pays attention to cultural diversity and the identity of indigenous peoples in the much-quoted Articles 8j and 10c which respectively demand that Parties to the Convention protect indigenous and local communities' knowledge, practices and lifestyles relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Nevertheless, Parties to the Convention have time and again adopted policies that conflict with traditional ethics of stewardship of nature, notably with regard to the so-called "marketisation" of nature. An outstanding example is Decision 30 on "Incentive Measures" taken at COP-11 of the CBD which strongly encourages Parties to include the economic valuation of nature in their national conservation programmes. Such approaches are regularly resisted by indigenous peoples' representatives but gain more and more traction with governments.

One of the overriding criticisms of existing global attempts to formalise aspects of conservation equity would seem to be the lack of recognition of other cultures and other ways of thinking about justice in relation to the environment. Without attention to the equal status of others' ways of seeing the world, attempts to define conservation justice are likely to reproduce dominant (western) conceptions about what constitutes equitable distribution, procedure and recognition. Such a concern is not confined to state representatives at global forums. At Nagoya, conservation NGOs were seen to align with the interests of states, pressing to bypass discussion of foundational questions about how conservation justice is to be defined (Suiseeya, 2014). In conservation planning and practice, recognition has not featured centrally either. Biodiversity conservation programmes have largely been informed by scientific principles, and have thus targeted nationally representative ecosystems, taking account of species rarity and diversity, recreational value, and level of threat (Margules et al., 2002). Conservation has historically been characterized by territorial and natural resource management conflicts, where distinct values and interests collide. For example, the move towards people-centred conservation since the 1980s has rendered mixed results and made evident how difficult it can be to reconcile the ideas and aspirations of conservation practitioners with those of local people and other actors (Adams et al., 2004; Wells et al., 1992). As of today, conservation is still marked by a lack of willingness to engage fully with different and changing beliefs about nature, or to explore diverse, culturally-suited implementation approaches instead of relying on blueprints (Reyers et al., 2010).

3. Thinking about recognition in conservation justice

Whilst we are arguing for more concerted consideration for recognition within conservation practice, we also acknowledge that its application remains difficult, not least because of contested meanings and approaches. The main contribution of this paper is therefore to shed light on these differences and to reveal common, core concerns that can serve as a basis for progress. In doing so we draw on four contributory schools of thinking: Hegel's theory of recognition, critical theory, decolonial theory and the capabilities approach (all defined below). There is considerable theoretical overlap between the first three of these, but we separate them analytically because they are distinct in terms of the scholars using them, their geographical focus, and the kind of responses they call for. We employ a simple conceptual framework that decomposes these approaches to defining recognition into four components: subjects, harms, mechanisms and responses.

Subjects of justice refer to the stakeholders or users who are entitled to moral consideration: those who hold rights and deserve recognition (Sikor et al., 2014). One debate is about the spatial and temporal

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