Reconceiving Environmental Justice: Global Movements And Political Theories

DAVID SCHLOSBERG

While calls for 'environmental justice' have grown recently, very little attention has been paid to exactly what the 'justice' of environmental justice refers to, particularly in the realm of social movement demands. Most understandings of environmental justice refer to the issue of equity, or the distribution of environmental ills and benefits. But defining environmental justice as equity is incomplete, as activists, communities, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) call for much more than just distribution. This essay examines how definitions beyond the distributive in these movements can help us develop conceptions of global environmental justice. The argument is that the justice demanded by global environmental justice is really threefold: equity in the distribution of environmental risk, recognition of the diversity of the participants and experiences in affected communities, and participation in the political processes which create and manage environmental policy. The existence of three different notions of justice in the movement, simultaneously, demonstrates the plausibility of a plural yet unified theory and practice of justice.

The question I want to explore here starts off in a rather straightforward way: how can the demands of global movements for environmental justice, or movements that articulate environmental concerns in their arguments against certain forms of globalisation, help in developing a definition of 'environmental justice' at the global level? Defining environmental justice has been attempted by numerous academics in environmental political theory. But my argument here is that given movement demands, and the theoretical innovations of some social justice theorists, most theories of environmental justice are, to date, inadequate. They are incomplete theoretically, as they

David Schlosberg, Department of Political Science, Northern Arizona University; email: David.Schlosberg@nau.edu.

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remain tied solely to the distributive understanding of justice – under-theorizing the integrally related realms of recognition and political participation. And they are insufficient in practice, as they are not tied to the more thorough and integrated demands and expressions of the important movements for environmental justice globally. The central argument here is that a thorough notion of global environmental justice needs to be locally grounded, theoretically broad, and plural – encompassing issues of recognition, distribution, and participation.

Recognition and Participation as Elements of Justice

One of the key inadequacies of liberal justice theory is its sole focus on fair processes for the distribution of goods and benefits. For Rawls [*1971*], in order to develop a right theory of justice, we are to step behind what he calls a veil of ignorance, to a place where we do not know our own strengths and weaknesses or our own place in the grand social scheme of things. Without knowing your station in life, goes the argument, you would come up with a particularly fair notion of justice that everyone could agree with: everyone would have the same political rights as everyone else, and the distribution of economic and social inequality in a society should benefit everyone, including the least well off. Rawls represents the focal point of liberal justice theory: fair distributions away from any substantive agreement on what we each believe as 'good' – pictures of the good life. Brian Barry's [*1995*] notion of justice is similar, and follows from Rawls: we should agree on the *rules* of distributive justice while remaining impartial to different notions of the good life individuals have.

This focus has been critiqued by other theorists – Iris Young [*1990*] and Nancy Fraser [*1997; 1998; 2000; 2001*] most forcefully, and I find their approaches very helpful in coming to understand what movement groups articulate about environmental justice. Young argues that while theories of distributive justice offer models and procedures by which distribution may be improved, none of them thoroughly examine the social, cultural, symbolic, and institutional conditions *underlying* poor distributions in the first place. Young is critical of the way distributive theories of justice simply take goods as static, rather than due to the outcome of various social and institutional relations. The claim here is straightforward: 'distributional issues are crucial to a satisfactory conclusion of justice, [but] it is a mistake to reduce social justice to distribution' (*Young, 1990: 1*). In moving towards justice issues of distribution are essential, but incomplete.

Young's simple but radical claim is that injustice is not based *solely* on inequitable distribution. Or, more to the point, there are key reasons why some people get more than others. Part of the problem of injustice, and part of

the reason for unjust distribution, is a lack of recognition of group difference. Young begins with the argument that if social differences exist, and are attached to both privilege and oppression, social justice requires an examination of those differences to undermine their effect on distributive injustice. Recognition is key here, as Young contends that a *lack* of recognition, demonstrated by various forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at both the individual and cultural level, inflicts damage to both oppressed communities and the image of those communities in the larger cultural and political realms. The lack of recognition, in this view, is an injustice not only because it constrains people and does them harm, but also because it is the foundation for distributive injustice. Likewise, Nancy Fraser's project has been focused on demonstrating that justice requires attention to *both* distribution and recognition; justice is 'bivalent' in this sense. Fraser argues that culture is a legitimate, even necessary terrain of struggle – a sight of justice in its own right and deeply tied to economic inequality [*2000: 109*]. As with Young, Fraser insists that we have to look at the 'why' of inequity in order both to understand and remedy it. Rawls and other liberal justice theorists focus on ideal schemes and process of justice in liberal societies; Young and Fraser explore what the *real* impediments to such schemes are, and how they can be addressed.[1]

These theorists also note the direct link between a lack of respect and recognition and a decline in a person's membership and participation in the greater community, including the political and institutional order. If you are not recognised, you do not participate. In this respect, justice must focus on the political process as a way to address both the inequitable distribution of social goods and the conditions undermining social recognition. Democratic and participatory decision-making procedures are then both an element of, and a condition for, social justice [*Young, 1990: 23*]; they simultaneously challenge institutionalised exclusion, a social culture of misrecognition, and current distributional patterns.

While many traditional theorists have offered support for the notion of procedural justice (for example, *Miller, 1999*), there has been quite a resistance to the argument for recognition as an element of justice. For reasons I really do not fully understand, some theorists see the discussion of recognition as a direct attack on the intellectual legacy of Rawls. Their response is usually that Rawls thought of it first, and incorporated the question of recognition into his distributive paradigm. So the first objection is that, simply put, recognition is not a *distinct* issue of justice. The claim here is that recognition and/or respect are *inherent preconditions* for distributive justice. Equality of persons, which is at the centre of liberal theories of justice, starts with an assumption of equal *respect* for all citizens. Rawls calls self-respect a primary good [*1971: 440*], even, perhaps 'the main primary

good' [*ibid.:* 544, though that was dropped to the end of a list of five in *Rawls, 1993: 181*]. Rawls [1971: 440] notes many of the same psychological needs attached to recognition as later theorists, such as Taylor and Honneth. He insists that self-respect is both a precondition and a result of his two principles of justice [*1993: 318–20*]. So it is clear that respect is crucial to Rawls and his theory of justice.

Miller [*2003*] also seems quite sympathetic to the arguments for recognition and the respect that comes with it, but he argues, following Rawls, that respect and dignity are *preconditions* for distributive justice. After all, one must be recognised and respected to be included behind the veil of ignorance, and one's station – whatever it may be – is also implicitly recognised in the original position. Miller also claims that recognition is an integral part of procedural justice. So given recognition's inclusion in the definition of ideal types of distribution and/or participation, Miller dismisses the key claim of recognition as a distinct category of justice. Here he represents the position of many liberal theories of justice, where recognition is assumed, and subsumed, within the distributive or procedural spheres of justice.

The upshot here is that some theorists of justice argue that recognition and respect are accounted for in theory. But no *pragmatic* discussion of recognition is offered, and no link between a lack of recognition and existing maldistributions is forthcoming, as is the case in Young and Fraser. It might be argued by distributive justice theorists that if distributional *ideals* were implemented – if, say, all communities were exposed to the same amount of environmental risk no matter what their race, class, or socio-cultural status – then those communities would not be demanding 'recognition', as that recognition would be a precondition of the just distribution. The response to such a claim is that without recognition (and not just self-respect, but social respect), such an ideal distribution *will never occur*. Justice in theory may happen in isolation, neutrality, or behind a veil of ignorance, but that is simply not the case in practice. If the interest is about attaining *justice*, rather than attaining a sound *theory* of justice, recognition is central to the question and the resolution – and is not simply to be assumed. Again, the point here is that a study of justice needs to focus on the reasons and processes behind and determining maldistribution; recognition, or the lack thereof, is key.

Perhaps the animosity to recognition comes from a misunderstanding of its status in a larger theory of justice. Young may have initiated this misunderstanding by calling the first chapter of her 1990 book, 'Displacing the Distributive Paradigm'. Young and Fraser's early argument on the relative importance of distribution versus recognition may have added to the impression that it was to be one or the other, and liberal theorists may have been concerned that Taylor and Honneth both discuss recognition without

substantive reference to distributional aspects of justice. But let me be very clear here: justice demands a focus on recognition, distribution, and participation. They are three interlinking, overlapping circles of concern. Fraser, at least, has been very clear in her arguments that recognition is an element of justice, to be considered alongside distributional and participatory issues – moving from a bivalent to a 'trivalent' conception of justice. Neither Young nor Fraser, nor I, am arguing for moving 'beyond' distribution, rejecting a distributional approach, or subsuming it under recognition. But just as distributional theorists do not want their key concern subsumed in a theory of justice focused on recognition, recognition cannot simply be subsumed, or assumed, in a theory of distribution.

This is a common response of those caught in the distributional paradigm: recognition is just another thing to be distributed. I have two responses to this, focusing on the unique nature of recognition. First, most distributional theorists themselves see recognition as a *precondition* of entry into a distributional system. I have noted that Rawls and Miller assume recognition as an *inherent* trait of just relations. But one cannot argue that recognition is both inherent/presumed in a distributional system *and* something to be distributed by those systems; if it is to be distributed, it cannot be previously assumed. To start with, the status of those distributed to (or not) must be addressed. The key is not to assume recognition, but to address it. I am not arguing that states, for example, cannot distribute recognition in some respects – they can, to some extent (for example, by extending the franchise or implementing affirmative action programmes). But that recognition is not *only* a good; it is also a precondition of membership in the political community. Second, for Young, recognition is just not a 'thing' to be distributed, but a relationship and a social norm. Theories of distributive justice focus on the state as a neutral arbiter, but 'recognition' cannot simply be distributed as, say, education or housing assistance. A state may set an example of recognising a socially demeaned group, but recognition must happen as much in the social, cultural, and symbolic realms as in the institutional. The state may implement affirmative action, but social recognition for communities currently misrecognised and politically excluded is a broader issue. In other words, the concept of justice as recognition moves beyond a focus on the state alone for remedies, and brings justice theory squarely into the political space beyond the state.

The problem with liberal theories of justice, such as those noted above, is that recognition, and its link to distribution and to participation, is undertheorised. In the nearly 35 years since Rawls' opus *A Theory of Justice*, we have seen a micro-industry within political theory dedicated to justice as fairness, impartiality, models of distribution, and the like – but very, very little on what even Rawls admits is key to the distributional

concern: respect and recognition. That recognition is an element of justice should be uncontroversial; that it has been so neglected should be admitted. The claim here is that justice is a balance of three key interlinked elements; unfortunately, the study of justice is not quite so balanced. Thankfully, as I argue below, movements for environmental justice, in particular, have offered a picture of just such a balanced approach.

Movement Definitions of Justice

With this dispute regarding the proper role of justice in the theoretical realm, I turned to movements for environmental justice to examine how movements themselves articulate these issues. An examination of the literature and demands of environmental justice movements, both in the US and globally, reveals that these movements are less enthralled with defining justice as solely distributional than most theorists are. A critique of the distribution of environmental goods and bads is certainly central to environmental justice movements, but unlike liberal theorists, movements tend to offer a more expansive and pragmatic notion of justice. The distributional paradigm is not the only articulation of justice, especially in practice. In the US, for example, the issue of distribution is always present and always key, but is always tied with recognition and political participation [*Schlosberg, 2003*]. The same goes for global movements. It is true that the most often cited, and most obvious, evidence of environmental injustice is in the realm of distribution – specifically the inequitable share of environmental ills that poor communities, indigenous communities, and communities of colour live with. Here, the call for 'environmental justice' focuses on how the distribution of environmental risks mirrors the inequity in socio-economic and cultural status.

But while distributional inequity is crucial to the definition of justice in the environmental justice movement, recognition as an element of justice is also a central concern. The bottom line here is that environmental justice activists often see themselves as outside the cultural mainstream; as such, their identities are devalued. This question of recognition is discussed in the movement both at the personal level and at the level of community; misrecognition is experienced in both realms. Additionally, the construction of inclusive, participatory decision-making institutions is at the centre of environmental justice demands. Environmental justice activists call for policy-making procedures that encourage active community participation, institutionalise public participation, recognise community knowledge, and utilise cross-cultural formats and exchanges to enable the participation of as much diversity as exists in a community. Environmental justice groups consistently demand a 'place at the table' and the right to 'speak for

ourselves'. The demand for this type of authentic, community-based participation comes out of the experience of disenfranchisement, a result of mis- or malrecognition. To challenge a range of cultural, political, and structural obstacles constructed by cultural degradation, political oppression, and lack of political access, communities are coming to demand a voice and authentic participation.

Rather than attempt an analysis of the thousands of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots organisations doing some sort of work identified as environmental justice in the global realm, I want to briefly focus on a few of the most potent issues of the moment and illustrate how justice is addressed in each. Certainly, recent actions against the most visible institutions of the new global economy – the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank – encompass themes of environmental justice. Related to this, movements for food autonomy and security are also articulated with the language of justice for both people and nature. Finally, and again related, numerous movements for indigenous rights in both the North and South are imbued with these issues of justice. These movements encompass notions of *environmental* justice because in each of the individual focuses, part of what is to be distributed are environmental goods and bads, part of what is to be recognised are cultural ways of living with nature, and one aspect of participatory demands relate to environmental decision-making.

Certainly, at the centre of the recent protests against global financial and trade institutions, against the globalisation of the food system, and for indigenous rights, is the issue of equity; economic or distributive injustice is a key and constant rallying cry. The most basic critique is that the currently favoured model of development increases and exacerbates inequity, both between the North and the South and between elites and the impoverished in southern nations – again, not just in economic goods, but in environmental goods and bads as well. Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch [*1999*], one of the major organisers of events related to the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999 and after, makes the point quite directly: 'the WTO has contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich few, increasing poverty for the majority of the world's population'. Questions regarding who benefits and at whose expense, as well as a demand for the accounting of the full costs of trade to communities, workers, and nature, are key. This is also illustrated in Global Exchange's 'Top Ten Reasons to Oppose the IMF' [*Global Exchange, 2000a*]. Here, another of the key leading NGOs of the recent protests argues that the IMF 'caters to wealthy countries and Wall Street' while increasing poverty and hurting workers, women, and the environment.

Likewise, in the movements for democratic food security and indigenous rights, criticism is levelled at systems and processes that deprive people of

their land-based livelihood while enriching others, particularly large corporations based in the North. The central critique of the institutions of this new world economy is that they promote an inherently inequitable distribution of economic goods and related social and environmental bads. Social justice, environmental justice, and ecological justice are tied together in these critiques, as the poor suffer both social and environmental inequity and nature is drained of resources for economic gain. This distributional element of the injustice of economic globalisation is clear enough, and much has been written on the issue.[2]

But it is also key that equity is not the only issue of justice addressed by various groups and movements identifying with the call for environmental justice. Other fundamental critiques include the relationship between social, cultural, and ecological devastation and, obviously, the lack of democratic participation in the construction and ongoing processes of governing institutions.

As for the first, there are many references, in the literature critical of the global economy, to the danger of a growing global monoculture. This is not just a critique of the singular vision of neo-liberal globalisation, but a lament for the present and coming loss of diverse cultures. The call for justice, in this instance, is a call for recognition and preservation of diverse cultures, identities, economies, and ways of knowing. The argument is that a process of homogenisation both contributes to the breakdown of the cultural and social networks in local communities and also destroys the essence and meaning of local cultures. An anti-WTO declaration by the Indian group Peoples Global Action [*1999*] makes this position quite clear:

> This unaccountable and notoriously undemocratic body called the WTO has the potential not only to suck the sweat and blood of the masses of the two-thirds of the world, but also has started destroying our natural habitats, and traditional agricultural and other knowledge systems developed over centuries and our cultural diversity by converting us into objects. . .

Certainly, a lack of recognition of the validity of local cultural identities is a key problem of the WTO specifically and the globalising economy more generally, from the perspective of NGOs such as Peoples Global Action.

The principal point here is that part of the injustice wrought by the WTO is a lack of recognition, and so a destruction, of various cultural identities, including cultures' ties to the land.[3] Vandana Shiva applies this same critique to the related issue of the globalisation of the food production system. Shiva has spent much of the past few years criticising the links between economic globalisation and cultural threats, specifically by examining the development

of the global food supply system and its effects on local communities.[4] Shiva [*1997; 2000*] notes the crucial link between food diversity and cultural diversity; many cultures are defined by their particular local diet – for example, some are rice-based, others cereal-based or millet-based. But globalising the food supply destroys local production and market practices, and local cultural identity suffers. Shiva cites the example of different Indian regions being defined in part by the base cooking oil used (which differs according to the local flora); the ban on the local production of oil and the move to imported soybean oil was, for Shiva, an outright attack on diverse local cultures, practices, and identities. Another important cultural injustice of the globalisation of the food system is the destruction of the current localised culture of farming, to be replaced by a singular, corporate, and highly-engineered process. Local seed banks, for example, are seen as saving not just biodiversity, but cultural diversity as well; but these banks are replaced with monocropping of seeds owned and controlled by multinational seed corporations. The complaint is that it is not just a livelihood that is to be destroyed (and a sustainable one at that), but various regional peoples' and cultures' ways of life. In this view, globalisation creates 'development' and 'growth' by the destruction of the local environment, culture, and sustainable ways of living.

And again, cultural recognition is certainly central to the attainment of social and environmental justice by indigenous movements. For many native American environmental justice activists in the US and other indigenous activists around the world, the defence of community is nothing less than a matter of cultural survival. Winona La Duke, a leading native American activist (and past Green Party Vice Presidential candidate), cites sovereignty issues and cultural survival as key reasons for her participation in the environmental justice movement [*Di Chiro, 1992: 117*]. Native American activists have 'a genocidal analysis rooted in the Native American cultural identification, the experience of colonialism, and the imminent endangerment of their culture' [*Krauss, 1994: 267*]. For activists interviewed in another study of indigenous and Chicana women in the US south-west, threats 'to the environment are interpreted as threats to their families and communities'. They see 'toxic contamination of their communities as systematic genocide' [*Bretting and Prindeville, 1998: 149*]. Peña [*1999: 6*] argues that to 'the extent that we construct our identities *in place*, whenever the biophysical conditions of a place are threatened, undermined, or radically transformed, we also see these changes as attacks on our identity and personal integrity'.

The same argument holds for other indigenous movements worldwide. For example, the U'wa campaign to stop oil drilling on traditional indigenous lands in Colombia links the expected environmental damage to the cultural destruction of the U'wa. Communiqués publicised through the Rainforest

Action Network[5] focus on this very issue. The U'wa rejected the Colombian government's support of Occidental Petroleum, 'whose plan seeks to subdue the U'wa culture by spearheading an oil exploration project on our ancestral territory'. Culture and cultural sovereignty are the primary things to be defended.

A key statement by The Coordinating Body for the Indigenous People's Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) insists that both governments and NGOs 'must recognize the existence of the population' indigenous to the region [quoted in *Conca and Dabelko, 1998: 338*]. Indigenous groups such as COICA work to get both governments and NGOs to understand that nature is not empty and devoid of peoples and culture. A vision of the natural world devoid of the indigenous peoples that populate it simply makes those cultures invisible. COICA's statement is full of demands for cultural recognition and respect, autonomy and respect for indigenous laws and practices. COICA insists that a recognition of the cultures of the region leads to an acceptance of indigenous organisations as legitimate and equal partners [*ibid.: 342*].

In these cases, as articulated by these environmental justice movements, the first step towards justice is recognition. The basic argument is that ways of life are being lost, and they are lost simply because they are not recognised and are devalued as ways of life. That is an issue of recognition, not simply equity.

In all of these cases, however, justice includes a dimension of participation on environmental and other issues – participation by those at the short end of distributional inequity, and participation by those suffering the injustice of the lack of cultural recognition. By far, however, it seems the most often-discussed critique of the WTO, IMF, and World Bank beyond the issue of inequity is that of the lack of meaningful participation offered to the public, various opponents, or even the nations of the South in both the everyday practices of the organisations and their various attempts at meetings and negotiations. A statement signed by over 1,120 organisations from 87 countries, and published by Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch [*1999*] includes not only issues of equity (see above), but also crucial issues of participation. This states that '[WTO] rules and procedures are undemocratic, untransparent and non-accountable and have operated to marginalize the majority of the world's people'. The statement calls for a review of WTO policies and impacts, with the full participation of civil society.

In fact, one of the under-reported events at the 1999 meeting of the WTO was the rebellion of many smaller and southern nations. 'We came here with high expectations from our countries in the Caribbean', said Clement Rohee, Guyana's minister of foreign affairs. 'We are very much disappointed over the fact that coming from small economies we ended up with a situation where we are totally marginalized in a process that has been virtually hijacked by the

more wealthy developed countries.'[6] Global Exchange [*2000b: 2*] argued that 'developing countries have relatively little power within the institution, which through the programs and policies they decide to finance, have tremendous impact throughout local economies and societies'. These nations are suffering not only growing impoverishment through the inequitable policies of these institutions, but also decreasing control over global decisions regarding their own economies, including their environments and natural resources. These criticisms, while marginalized in 1999, were central to the breakdown of negotiations at the WTO meeting in Cancun 2003.

The lack of democratic participation is also a major part of Shiva's critique of the current transition of food production from the local to the global. The injustice is not just that cultures and ways of life are ignored, dismissed, given a lack of respect, and ultimately destroyed; it is also key that local communities have no say in this process. Shiva's conclusion in *Stolen Harvest*, after chapters of critique of the globalisation of farming and the food supply, is a demand – expressed, she argues, by citizens' movements North and South – for democratic control over the food system [*2000: 117*]. Food democracy is 'the new agenda for ecological sustainability and social justice' [*ibid.: 18*].

Beyond simply indicating that demands for social and environmental justice include elements of equity, recognition, and participation, this exploration of articulations of global environmental justice on the part of global and southern NGOs illustrates that these conceptions are thoroughly linked. It is not simply that the justice of environmental justice in political practice includes issues of equity, recognition, and participation; the broader argument here is that the movement represents an *integration* of these various claims into a broad call for justice. In fact, I failed to discuss calls for participation by indigenous groups because I simply could not find such calls distinct from the calls for recognition. For the indigenous movements calling for environmental and social justice, equity, recognition, and participation are intricately woven together.

In the various organisations that make up the global environmental justice movement, such as those I have discussed here, one simply cannot talk of one aspect of justice without it leading to another. Not only are the three different conceptions of justice apparent in the movement, but also the literature and actions of the groups imply that these notions of justice must be interrelated. In both the U'wa and COICA cases noted above, the indigenous organisations insist on not only cultural recognition, but also the democratic and participatory rights that come with that recognition; the two are inseparable elements of justice. Kiefer and Benjamin [*1993*] note that in a meeting of NGOs dedicated to indigenous issues in 1992, a list of critical needs was developed; those included attention to existing indigenous knowledge and

skills in relation to nature, representation at various levels of government, and respect for indigenous self-government. Again, the issue is not just that of equity, but of recognition and participation as well. Indigenous nations in North America argue that there are numerous barriers to participation by indigenous peoples in the governance of environments. 'These obstacles preclude the articulation and acceptance of Indigenous knowledge' [*Borrows, 1997: 426*]. Borrows argues that bringing in indigenous ways of knowing nature would not only expand participation, but also demonstrate the 'socially constructed notions of space' and the cultural contingency of these ways of knowing the land. In other words, broadening participation would bring a recognition of, and validity to, diverse ways of understanding and valuing (in numerous senses) the land. Likewise, in the case of the transition of food production, the affront to culture and the violation of basic democratic processes are linked; there is a direct relationship between the destruction of local cultural practices, the domination of food production systems, and the lack of local participation.

In the WTO/IMF/World Bank case, the critique of these institutions follows the threefold nature of justice I have been discussing. Obviously, the issue of equity is central but, as I have shown, other key critiques include the social and ecological devastation the development model engenders – the destruction of nature, culture, and relationships between the two – and, obviously, the lack of democratic participation in the planning of development. Protesters from Seattle to Cancun were quite clear that they would not be satisfied with minimal participation – a seat at the table or participation in an unempowered working group on one issue or another. The current development model cannot be 'fixed' simply by letting some people speak at WTO meetings, as that would not guarantee full participation, let alone the recognition and validation of other cultures or ways of living or economic equity. Ultimately, there is a direct link between justice as equity, cultural recognition, and democratic participation; focusing on one notion at the expense of others, or while ignoring others, simply cannot satisfy the threefold nature of justice sought by the movement. Justice, as defined by the groups present at the protests, will not be fully reached without addressing justice in each realm.

The point here is that these various forms of injustice are intricately linked, and all must be addressed simultaneously. It may be the case that improved participatory mechanisms can help meliorate both other forms of injustice; but those forms of injustice must be addressed in order to improve participation. Justice, then, requires not just an understanding of unjust distribution and a lack of recognition, but, importantly, the way the two are tied together in political and social processes.[7] These notions and experiences of injustice are not competing notions, nor are they contradictory or antithetical. Inequitable distribution, a lack of recognition, and limited participation all work to

produce injustice, and claims for justice are integrated into a comprehensive political project in the global Environmental Justice movement.

The Inadequacy of Environmental Justice Theory

Given theoretical and movement calls to extend an analysis of justice beyond the distributive realm, and the implication that three dimensions of justice need to be integrated, theories of environmental and ecological justice have been disappointing to date.

David Miller, one of the major figures writing in the liberal tradition, recently explored the environmental implications of justice theory [*Miller, 1999*]. This work examines the possibility of including environmental goods along with other primary goods in calculations of distributive justice. Miller concludes by dividing environmental goods into three categories. There are some environmental goods that can be easily and directly attached to other primary goods. Ill health, caused by pollution, for example, would reduce the value of (not to mention access to) other primary goods. There are other environmental goods about which we can generate, through democratic procedure, enough public agreement that they would not generate issues of distributive justice. And finally, there are a number of environmental goods that are valued differently by different people, and would have to be counted as primary goods only by those who value them as such. In this case, in order to apply some principles of distributive justice, Miller argues that a form of cost-benefit analysis would be a crucial, if difficult, way to measure the desire, the losses, and the willingness of the public to pay for environmental goods. Humphrey [*2003*] takes Miller to task for this last issue; he argues that *irreplaceable* losses should be an important part of any such calculus, thus tipping the scale in favour of preservation.

Still, this whole debate over what sort of environmental goods should be considered, and how, in distributional considerations is limited. Certainly, it is an interesting and crucial debate within the conception of distributional considerations of environmental justice – and it does move beyond the environmental ethicists' insistence on the intrinsic value of nature. But all of this misses broader issues of environmental justice in an era of globalisation: the articulations of those losing traditional relationships with an endangered natural world. Justice, to these movements, is not just simply about categorising environmental goods, or debating whether they should be included in a calculus of distributive justice; rather, at issue is the preservation of a way of life that relates to nature in a particular way. It is self-determination that is most often raised here. And while even distributive justice theorists such as Miller might agree with this principle in a scheme of global justice [*2003: 367*], it is the recognition of various identities and

cultural practices which is crucial to gaining that self-determination and, so, procedural justice.

The closest distributional theorists of justice get to the arguments of environmental justice movements is in the discussion of future generations of humans [for example, *Barry, 1999, de-Shalit, 1995*]. But those arguments do not address the issue raised by movements of the recognition of particular ways of life and ways of relating to nature. Rather, the point of the focus on future generations is to find a way of using liberal theories of distributional justice to justify the protection of the natural world. Environmental philosophers may use the argument that nature has intrinsic value, but liberal justice theorists must avoid such a claim, lest they enter the liberal no-fly zone of individual notions of the good. Rather, the argument is made that we need to leave future generations of humans the same range of opportunities for the good life that we ourselves have. While this is an admirable way of opening a theory in a direction many thought it could not go, it remains squarely limited to the distributive paradigm – and distant from many of the demands and articulations of movement groups.

Unfortunately, the framing of justice in solely distributive terms has also thoroughly captured Andy Dobson's otherwise groundbreaking attempt to find common ground between social justice and environmental sustainability. Dobson begins with the claim that 'all justice is distributive', and argues that issues of respect are simply *not* issues of justice, as they go beyond distribution. As such, he simply does not address key issues of how identity, recognition, and political process play into environmental justice. All environmental injustice, then, is a matter of the maldistribution of environmental goods and bads. Dobson agrees with the Brundtland Report in its claim that 'inequality is the planet's main ''environmental'' problem' [*WCED, 1987: 6; Dobson, 1998: 14*]. He offers a thoroughly comprehensive examination of the relationship between distributive justice and environmental sustainability. He takes apart various elements of the distributive model proposed by a wealth of authors in political and social theory, examining the 'community' of justice (dispensers and recipients), what is distributed, the principles of distribution (utility, need, desert, entitlement, etc.), and whether the theory is partial or impartial, proceduralist or consequentialist, and particular or universal. The central task of the book is a comparison of possible relationships between different pictures of distributive justice and various ideas regarding environmental sustainability, with an eye towards discovering some compatibility; Dobson finds very little common ground.

Dobson's work is much more of an examination than a prescription, as it explores the possible relationships between the varied discourses of distributive justice and environmental sustainability. The comparisons and

match-ups are thorough and exhaustive, and the myriad relationships make for a complex, though illuminating, matrix. Still, by remaining in the distributive paradigm, Dobson misses important related realms of justice, including those examined by theorists such as Young and Fraser, as well as notions articulated under the broad banner of the environmental justice movement – including academics and activists he cites in his text. This needlessly limits the possible convergences between social justice and environmental sustainability. If one's main concern is the lack of discourse between environmentalists and social justice activists, it seems counter-productive to ignore additional theoretical and discursive realms where the two might find something to talk about.

Low and Gleeson [*1998*] offer another thorough and admirable environmental examination of distributive justice. Unfortunately, like Dobson, they are also unable to move beyond the distributive paradigm, and proudly so. 'The distribution of environmental quality is the core of ''environmental justice'' – with the emphasis on *distribution'* [*Low and Gleeson, 1998: 133*]. Through their analysis of notions of justice, Low and Gleeson develop two key principles of environmental justice [*ibid.: 156*], three 'rules of thumb' [*ibid.: 156–7*] and two international environmental institutions along the lines of Held's cosmopolitan democracy [*ibid.: 191*].[8]

But Low and Gleeson also miss the opportunity to move beyond a narrow conception of distributive justice. This is especially frustrating given the fact that their two key principles of environmental justice ('Every natural entity is entitled to enjoy the fullness of its own form of life', and 'all life forms are mutually dependent and dependent on non-life forms') are not focused on distribution. They are really about recognising and respecting (1) the potential of nature and (2) the dependence of humans on the realisation of this potential in nature. While they proudly declare their adherence to a tradition of distributive justice, these central principles demonstrate the centrality of cultural practices and beliefs that lead to the distribution of environmental ills – and the centrality of recognition in addressing those ills. Again, I am not arguing that we replace a concern with distribution with a focus on recognition; but we also cannot simply discuss recognition in distributive terms. There is an intimate connection between recognition and distributive justice; they are overlapping circles of concern, yet we cannot simply collapse one into the other. We may be able to discuss a poor 'distribution' of recognition, but we cannot *address* or *remedy* that lack solely on distributional grounds; such a task lies outside the distributive circle.

As for the third interlocking circle of justice concerns, Low and Gleeson are supportive of political participation as a means towards environmental justice – they clearly make links between participation, inclusive procedures, and public discourse on the road to environmental justice. Yet these

realisations are not incorporated into their ideal principles or practices of ecological justice; the focus is on global, cosmopolitan institutions rather than those at the local, community level.

Finally, Low and Gleeson acknowledge the contextual and cultural bases of the meanings of both of the terms 'environment' and 'justice' [*ibid.: 46, 48, 67*], but cannot bring this notion of cultural difference into their definition of either environmental or ecological justice. Justice is understood as a 'universal moral relationship we share with other humans' but one that 'has to be interpreted through culturally specific institutions which will vary' [*ibid.: 67*]. So they seem to see the importance of acknowledging the variety of cultural contexts from which meaning is derived, and insist that autonomy is a key principle of justice [ibid.: 199]. Yet Low and Gleeson are blinded by their fear of 'postmodernism', which they simply equate with relativism. Acceptance of different notions of justice, to them, means accepting that 'your conceptions of justice are true for you, in your cultural context, but mine are true in my context'; this makes justice 'meaningless' [*ibid.: 197*]. There is no middle ground for Low and Gleeson; there is only universalism or relativism. No matter that this supposed dichotomy has been denied from William James [*1909*] to Richard Bernstein [*1983*] and, most recently, David Miller [*1999; 2003*], specifically on justice. Low and Gleeson, in their focus on justice in the distributive paradigm, fail to see the possibility of *engagement* across notions of justice – something crucial to notions of justice as recognition and political process. As I will argue, there is still the possibility of *unity* on notions of environmental justice, even if there is not *uniformity* of cultural definitions of the term.

Theoretical Plurality and Movement Strategy

This leaves us with two practical questions:

(1) how can we reconcile diverse understandings of environmental justice in the political and theoretical realms? and;
(2) how can such a reconciliation assist environmental justice movements in attempts to actually attain environmental justice?

A critical pluralism, I think, offers us a possible framework for thinking about both global social justice and environmental justice. Most justice theorists call themselves pluralist, in that they accept a variety of notions of the good (and we can see this in relation to different ways of understanding and relating to both human communities and nature). Some are also 'contextualist', meaning that they see different principles of justice applicable in different sorts of situations [*Miller, 2003*]. Miller [*2003: 350*], for example,

argues that principles of justice should be developed depending on the social make-up of those making the claim and on the relationship they have with other parties in a justice dispute.

The principle articulated by movements partly comes out of the claims of particular types of social groups (such as indigenous communities) or their relationship with states or the international community. It also comes out of the lack of recognition from, for example, economic regimes such as the World Bank, WTO, or Occidental Petroleum. So a more broad contextualist approach works – there may be certain principles of justice that apply in different types of situations, or different emphases groups may have in those situations. Such contextualization is more broad than Miller or other pluralists allow.[9]

Interestingly, Peter Wenz used this approach in one of the earliest discussions of environmental justice. For Wenz [*1988*] such pluralistic notions of justice are welcome on a theoretical level. Environmental justice, he argues, is understood in numerous ways, depending on context. Wenz [*1988: 313*] sees value in the fact that we are 'attracted to using one theory in one kind of situation and a different theory in a different kind of situation'. He argues that we need a pluralistic theory of environmental justice 'that enables us to appeal in a consistent manner to principles featured in a variety of theories, even when those principles can not all be reduced to or derived from a single master principle'. In this, Wenz resurrects a classic notion of pluralistic philosophy, best articulated by William James. For James [*1909*], pluralism is not just a validation of difference which comes from various contexts, but a recognition that difference may never come together into a coherent, single, social unity. Connections can be made in the pluralistic universe without recourse to an insistence on uniformity; the result is what James calls a 'multiverse' rather than a universe.[10]

This contextualist and pluralist approach works not just theoretically, but as a movement strategy as well. In practice, various groups and organisations that appeal to notions of environmental justice address differing and multiple, yet integrated, notions of justice. Simply put, priorities change according to context; so to, then, do articulations of grievances and strategies. This may be both a theoretical and a practical reality, but the question then becomes one of strategy. Can such a diverse movement with varied notions of justice, many of which are locally-centred, retain its cohesion as a movement and accomplish its stated aims? There have been limited, though varied, responses to the question, and there seems to be more support for the notion of plurality in the theoretical realm than in the realm of political action.

Like Wenz, though with a focus on the existing practice of the environmental justice movement, David Harvey alludes to the importance of recognising the varied notions of the justice of environmental justice –

though not entirely in a positive light. Harvey [*1996: 388*] moves beyond the purely distributive, and approvingly notes the important refusal on the part of the US environmental justice movement to cast the discussion in monetary terms alone. Equity may be about costs and benefits, but justice is much more broad, and the US movement demonstrates this. The use of identity-based arguments for recognition, including those of various racial and indigenous groups, is apt under the circumstances, argues Harvey.

So while Harvey is one of the rare theorists to bring recognition into an understanding of environmental justice, he sees something amiss in the plurality such an acceptance might bring. Such a plural movement confronts us 'with a plurality of theories of justice, all equally plausible and all equally lacking in one way or another' [*ibid.: 398*]. Harvey sees the initial justification and necessity of local and particular battles with their different readings of justice; but, he argues, they are ultimately contradictory and the movement cannot be successful without pulling together a single universal critique and definition of environmental justice. Harvey [*ibid.: 400*] wants the movement to 'create a more transcendent and universal politics' which has to 'transcend particularity'; he insists on a move from the multiple and particular to the singular and universal. Here, the local must be transcended and replaced.

Harvey's justification for this move is that a notion of, and a movement for, environmental justice must 'confront the realities of global power politics . . . not simply with dispersed, autonomous, localized, and essentially communitarian solutions', but with a 'more complex politics' and a more 'rational ordering of activities' [*ibid.:* 400]. Harvey here does not examine the possibility that such dispersed and localised notions, taken together, could actually take on both the discourse and power of global capital; rather, he simply does not see the possibility of such a decentralised – ideologically and physically – movement having such an effect.[11]

I (and I believe many in environmental justice movements) agree with Harvey that the achievement of environmental justice will come only with 'confronting the fundamental underlying processes (and their associated power structures, social relations, institutional configurations, discourses, and belief systems) that generate environmental and social injustices' [*ibid.:* 401]. But such a crucial confrontation need not come at the expense of the localised, particular places where that power and injustice are experienced, known, and resisted.[12] It may be the lament of traditional socialists, but there is no single megamachine with a single master 'off' switch to be thrown by a singularly unified opposition. If Foucault [*1978; 1980*] taught us anything, it is that power is multiple, and arises everywhere in everyday situations and must be constantly resisted where it is experienced. It is no different with (in)justice.

An environmental justice movement can be unified, but it cannot be uniform. An insistence on uniformity will limit the diversity of stories of

injustice, the multiple forms it takes, and the variety of solutions it calls for. The movement demonstrates the power of what Mary Parker Follett [*1918*] long ago called a 'unity without uniformity' as it illustrates environmental justice on so many dimensions simultaneously. Follett's conception is pretty straightforward, and brings some substance to the idea of 'unity in diversity'. She discussed a form of unity that would have people recognise differences rather than dismiss them by differentiating quite clearly the terms 'unity' and 'uniformity'. 'Unity, not uniformity, must be our aim. We attain unity only through variety. Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, nor absorbed.' Uniformity, she argued, was absorptive, rather than inclusive. Follett's is a salad bowl metaphor, rather than a melting pot; she used 'good words' like compound and harmonise, as opposed to 'bad words' like fuse and melt [*ibid.:* 29]. There is no contradiction, in this form of unity, between unity and differentiation; in fact, heterogeneity is the only way to construct unity, she argued [*ibid.:* 40].

The environmental justice movement demonstrates the power of a unity without uniformity as it illustrates environmental justice on so many dimensions simultaneously. The issues that I have discussed regarding resistance to the global economy, the globalisation of food production, and the continued disregard for indigenous rights illustrate *both* the diverse ways issues such as equity, recognition, and participation are articulated *and* the possibility for unity across this diversity. As demonstrated by these battles, the environmental justice movement has been successful in bringing together such disparate issues and experiences of injustice behind a unified, but not uniform banner. An insistence on uniformity behind that banner, to an identity, critique, or singular programme, is not only counter to the movement itself, but also a violation of justice as based in recognition and democratic process. It is also a denial of the plural and contextualist understanding of justice. It is important that environmental justice organising – US or global – has never been about establishing a major, single NGO based in Washington DC or London or anywhere. Environmental justice organising has always been network-based, and those networks have recognition and democratic process at their core.[13] Nor has environmental justice ever been about one issue, outlook, critique, demand, or strategy. Unity comes with the recognition of both similarities and differences, and an understanding of how different contexts define various groups. The key visual moment here for me was a march during the 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle; side by side were US labour unions, US and global environmental NGOs, and groups representing the interests of developing nations in the South. Such unity had not been seen before, yet there was obviously no uniformity there, in either critique or reconstructive propositions. Recognition of other communities, and their right to participate, was central to such an event.

I believe Wenz, again, can be helpful there. Wenz [*1988: 2*] argues that it is important to understand different peoples' interpretation or principles of justice – this helps us to understand others. The plurality argument is key, but it then necessitates *engagement* across these differences. Getting others to understand your experience and framework, and vice versa, is how pluralistic notions are learned, understood, recognised, and accepted. This is the difference between a pluralism based in simple acceptance and toleration and a critical pluralism based in more thorough recognition and mutual engagement.[14] Such engagement is related to the necessity of combining recognition with participation in achieving environmental justice. Wenz developed what he calls a 'concentric circle' theory of environmental justice, where we give moral priority to those closer to us – family for example – and less priority for those further away – foreigners, or other species. This makes sense because we engage more with those closest to us. The problem with such a theory is that it is difficult to identify with and argue for justice for those away from the centre of our own circles.

But the actions of the global environmental justice movement seem to counter this distance. The point of communicating diverse battles, even those emanating from remote continents, or in the depths of rainforests, is to give those far from, or different from, ourselves a voice and to acknowledge their situation. The explosion of diverse discourses of injustice, the availability of these discourses via the Web, alternative media, or mainstream media, and the attention brought to the diversity of environmental injustices through the actions of international civil society, forges empathy, recognition, and unity – even across great distances. This was one of the key lessons of the WTO protests in Seattle. Diverse people came with different stories of injustice, with varying emphases on equity, recognition, and/or participation. It was common to see those with different experiences of environmental injustice sharing stories; this is often key in the alternative NGO meetings that have been part of trade protests. Through participation and recognition – two key elements of justice itself – those who were distant and many circles away (using Wenz's analogy) became much closer.[15] This engagement is what brought unity to many of the diverse groups in attendance. Insisting on 'transcending' those experiences would surely be one way to destroy the tentative unity without uniformity developed in the recent protests.

Conclusions

The argument here has been that justice itself is a concept with multiple, integrated meanings. A singular focus on justice as distribution, and only distribution, is not only limited in theory, but it cannot encompass the broad and diverse demands for justice made by the global environmental justice

movement. Demands for the recognition of cultural identity and for full participatory democratic rights are integral demands for justice as well, and they cannot be separated from distributional issues. A look at the global environmental justice movement not only illustrates this, but also demonstrates the limits of insistence on a universalism or uniformity in movements. The global environmental justice movement embodies the potential of a comprehensive, integrated movement for justice in multiple, overlapping forms.

But another point of this exercise is that theorists of environmental justice must take a closer look at the justice demanded by those in civil society in order to fully comprehend the diverse and integrated nature of environmental justice in practice. Environmental justice movements have been challenging the discourse of development in the streets, in the media, and in the halls of the institutions of the global economy. But they also challenge our own discourse of justice in academia as well, and we would do well to listen in.

NOTES

1. Importantly, there are different ways of defining the concept of recognition, and it deserves a note here. For both Honneth and Taylor, the concept is based on the psychological necessity of the authentic recognition of others. For Honneth, our own dignity is linked to the recognition we receive from others; for Taylor, recognition is a vital human need. For both, non-recognition, misrecognition, or malrecognition can inflict oppressive psychological harm, and keep individuals from full participation in a community of citizens. Fraser, however, wants to lessen the dependence on the psychological state of individuals and focus rather on the social *status* of various individuals and communities. Recognition needs to be treated as a 'status injury' [*Fraser, 1998: 25*], based in social relations rather than individual psychology. Such a focus leads us to examine whether or not individuals have full membership in the social and political realms. Injustice still comes from misrecognition, but misrecognition due to institutionalized subordination. For thorough (though differing) examinations of recognition as an element of justice see, for example, Fraser *[1997*; *1998*; *2000*; *2001*]; Honneth [*1992; 1995; 2001*]; Lash and Featherstone [*2001*], Taylor [*1994*]; Young [*1990; 2000*].
2. See, for example, Greider [*1996*], or essays in Mander and Goldsmith [*1996*], as well as the websites of the leading NGOs involved in the protests: http://www.globalexchange.org, http://www.citizen.org.trade, and http://www.ourworldisnotforsale.org.
3. Here we come to another key issue needing further theorising by liberal justice theory. Liberal theories were designed to allow *individuals* to pursue their own conceptions of the good; here, though, the claim is *group* conceptions, and ways of life. Kymlicka, among others [*Kymlicka, 1995; 1996; 2001; Shapiro and Kymlicka, 2000*], has addressed this issue of cultural preservation and loss at length, with reference to justice, citizenship, and group rights. The application of these theoretical discussions to community preservation issues in the global environmental justice movement is a necessary project, though this is not the place for an extended discussion. I will just reiterate that the key conceptual issue here is not simply the loss of any particular cultural practices, but the lack of recognition of communities demonstrating sustainable ways of life, as they are defined and dismissed as backwards or primitive and so excluded from participation in distributional schemes. Yet even if the practices were unsustainable, the issue of recognition would remain. Reversing the example here, environmental groups in the US Pacific Northwest eventually moved from disparaging logging communities to recognising their concerns; together, they then came to

recognise each others' dedication to the land and forests and often designed mutually-agreeable transition strategies. Recognition can be granted to a community without agreeing with their communal conception of the good. So aside from the key issue of group/community ways of life, recognition still plays a vital role in bringing participation and, hopefully, distributional justice as well.

4. See, for example, Shiva [*1997*] and Shiva [*2000*], along with various publications available at http://www.vshiva.net.
5. Information on the U'wa/Occidental Petroleum battle is available at http://www.ran.org/ran_campaigns/beyond_oil/oxy/. Occidental announced in May 2002 that it would pull out of its claim on U'wa lands.
6. Quoted in *World Trade Observer*, 3 Dec. 1999, p.1. This daily was published in print and online during the Seattle WTO meetings; it is now archived at http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/Research/academic.htm.
7. There are some significant differences between Fraser and Young on this integration, especially given Young's desire to downplay distribution and Fraser's concern that inequitable distribution is at the heart of much of the oppression Young addresses. See Fraser's discussion of Young in chapter 8 of Fraser [*1997*].
8. Interestingly, Low and Gleeson's pragmatic and incremental solutions for both environmental and ecological justice focus on global political institutions, rather than organization in civil society (where, presumably, the demand for environmental justice originates).
9. An argument for this type of contextualisation in environmental political theory is made by Dryzek and Hunold [*2002*], though their focus is on movement strategies in the context of different types of states.
10. For more on the critical pluralism and its relationship to environmental justice, see Schlosberg [*1998; 1999a*].
11. The ultimate goal of environmental justice, for Harvey, is the reclamation of 'a noncoopted and nonperverted version of the thesis of ecological modernization' [*1996: 401*]. But he seems to have left out the important elements of local 'subpolitics' and 'reflexive modernization' – that Beck [*1992*] includes in such a model.
12. And here, refer to the many works in global environmental politics that focus on the power of civil society and networks, such as Wapner [*1996*] and Keck and Sikkink [*1998*].
13. For more on this point with respect to the US movement, see Schlosberg [*1999a; 1999b*].
14. For more on the issue of toleration versus engagement and recognition in a critical pluralism, see Schlosberg [*1998; 1999a*].
15. It is crucial to note here that identity politics is rarely about identity itself, and especially not about elevating an identity or way of knowing above others (except for supremacist movements, which can be differentiated and critiqued on this very notion). Rather, identity-based movements are about bringing attention to the relationship between identity and various forms of oppression and injustice. Identity politics seeks acknowledgement, recognition, and 'player' status in a world of heterogeneity; they are about communicating with others, bringing others knowledge, and insisting on accountability in the construction of identity, inequality and injustices (see *Dean, 1996: 52* on that last point).

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