
ECOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION CONFLICTS AND LANGUAGES OF VALUATION

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Political ecology

Political Ecology studies ecological distribution conflicts, focusing on local resistance to environmental exploitation and struggles for environmental justice (or, in the South, Environmentalism of the Poor) throughout the world.

Ecological economics

Ecological Economics shows that economic growth requires increasing amounts of energy and materials (there is no absolute "dematerialization"). It recognises the social and ecological limitations of the economy, and addresses the value of things which cannot be given a price, such as livelihood, quality of life, species diversity or the sacredness of indigenous peoples' lands. Both of these approaches are needed for economic, social and environmental policy.

Introduction

- **Environmental preservation and protection have been understood as desires, which could develop only after the material necessities of life were already abundantly covered.**
 - **The movement for Environmental Justice in the U.S.A. and also in South Africa, now also in Brazil, and the wider and more diffuse worldwide movement of the ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE POOR have bankrupted this view, which was prevalent until recently.**
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- The clash between economy and environment does not manifest itself only in the attacks on remaining pristine Nature but also in the increasing demands for raw materials and for sinks for waste in the large parts of the planet inhabited by humans, and in the planet as a whole.
 - The fact that raw materials are cheap and that sinks have a zero price, is not a sign of abundance but a result of a given distribution of property rights, power and income.
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- Since the economy is not “dematerializing” in per capita terms, there are increasing local and global conflicts on the sharing of the burdens of pollution (including the increased greenhouse effect), and on the access to natural resources.
 - Therefore, there are many ecological distribution conflicts. Different languages are used in such conflicts. The notion of an Ecological Debt from North to South summarizes many of these conflicts.
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- Diverse values are deployed in ecological conflicts. Sometimes, there is a claim for monetary compensation. At other times, other languages are used. Sacredness. Livelihood. Indigenous rights. How “to take Nature into account”. *La cultura propia no tiene precio. La vida es un tesoro y vale mas que el oro. Todo necio confunde valor y precio.*
 - We all need the minimum amount of endosomatic energy essential for human livelihood. This does not imply a biological view of human needs, on the contrary, the human species exhibits enormous intra-specific socially caused differences in the use of exosomatic energy (to use Lotka’s term).
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- One may ask why people travel so much, or why so many houses are built with new materials instead of recycling materials, etc.
 - Research by Jackson and Marks (1999) on the trend to use 'satisfactors' that are increasingly intensive in energy and materials to satisfy predominantly non-material needs, has found that the expectations that an economy that has less industry will be less resource intensive, are premature.
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Lifeline and *piso de dignidad*

- In Johannesburg 2002 we marched from Alexandra to Sandton. Privatization of energy and water services and full cost recovery tariffs lead to cuts in services. Movements ask for a free lifeline of 50 litres person day, and 1 kwh household day –questioning the whole energy-mineral exports strategy based on subsidized water and electricity. Similarly in Latin America.
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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Environmental Justice is the movement that fights against the *disproportionate* allocation of environmental burdens to poor people or to racial minorities. It is matter of distribution.
 - Environmental justice can also be a matter of human rights, of human dignity. Existential justice. Nobody must be deprived of the natural resources and clean environment needed for human life.
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Consumption drives the economy

- **Production may become less intensive in terms of energy and materials, but the environmental load of the economy is driven by consumption.**
- **Rich citizens may choose to satisfy their needs or wants by new patterns of consumption that are themselves highly resource-intensive, shrimp imported from tropical countries at the expense of mangrove destruction, or gold.**
- **Gold conflicts in Latin America right now- TamboGrande, Yanacocha, Esquel...**

Ecological distribution conflicts

- Ecological distribution conflicts (i.e. conflicts on the access to natural resources or on the burdens of pollution) will be described.
 - There is considerable activism around the world centred on environmental justice, not yet aware of its own potential strength as a global movement.
 - It is composed of a multitude of individual groups, sometimes linked by issue-oriented international networks.
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Conflicts and resistance movements

- ***Environmental racism*** (USA), the disproportionate burden of pollution in areas inhabited by African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans. *Environmental justice* is the movement against environmental racism. *Environmental blackmail* has been used to describe situations in which either LULU (locally unacceptable land use) is finally accepted, or the local population stays without jobs. One well known source is Bullard, 1993.
 - ***Toxic struggles***. This is the name given in the U.S. to fights against risks from heavy metals, dioxins, etc. Sources are Gibbs, 1981, Hofrichter, 1993.
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- ***Toxic imperialism.*** Greenpeace, 1988, used these words to describe the dumping of toxic waste in poorer countries (theoretically forbidden by the Basel Convention of 1989).
- ***Ecologically unequal exchange.*** Importing products from poor countries or regions, at prices which do not take into account the exhaustion of the resources and the local externalities. *Raubwirtschaft* (Raumoulin, 1984) means plunder economy, it was used by German and French geographers one hundred years ago.
- ***Corporate accountability for international externalities.*** Law suits against Transnational Companies (Texaco, Dow Chemical, Freeport McMoRan...) in their country of origin, claiming damages for externalities caused in poor countries. The Bhopal case.

- ***Ecological Debt.*** Claiming damages from rich countries on account of past excessive emissions (of carbon dioxide for instance – carbon debt) or plundering of natural resources. Attempts are made to establish such *environmental liabilities*. Sources are Robleto and Marcelo, 1992, Borrero, 1993, Azar, 1994 (for the intergenerational context), Parikh, 1995, Martinez-Alier, 1997, Christian Aid, 1999.
- ***Biopiracy.*** The appropriation of genetic resources (“wild” or agricultural) without payment or recognition of peasant or indigenous ownership over them (including the extreme case of the Human Genome project). This word was introduced by Pat Mooney, of RAFI, in 1993.

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- ***Land degradation.*** Soil erosion caused by unequal distribution of land, or by pressure of production for exports. Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) introduced the basic distinction between pressure of population and pressure of production on the sustainable use of land.
 - ***Plantations are not Forests.*** The movements against eucalyptus, pine plantations for wood or paper pulp production (often exported). (Carrere and Lohman, 1996).
 - ***Mangroves vs shrimp.*** The movement to preserve the mangroves for livelihood, against the shrimp export industry, in Thailand, Honduras, Ecuador, India, Bangla Desh, Philippines, Sri Lanka...
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- ***Defence of the rivers and other water conflicts.*** The movements against large dams (such as the Narmada movement in India, the *atingidos por barragens* in Brazil). (Goldsmith and Hyldiard, 1986; McCully, 1996). Also conflicts on the use and pollution of aquifers.
 - ***Mining conflicts.*** Complaints over the siting of mines and smelters because of water and air pollution, and land occupation by open-cast mining and slag. (Also historical conflicts: e.g. Ashio in Japan c. 1900).
 - ***Transboundary pollution.*** Applied mainly to sulfur dioxide crossing borders in Europe, and producing acid rain.
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- ***Transport conflicts.*** The conflicts caused by increased material inputs to the economy, conflicts over oil spills (at sea or on land), traffic by trucks, water ways (e.g. Hidrovía Paraguay-Paraná), expansion of harbours.
 - ***National / local fishing rights.*** Attempts to stop open access depredation by imposing (since the 1940s in Peru, Ecuador, Chile) exclusive fishing areas (200 miles, and beyond as in Canada for straddling stocks). The language is international public law. Another conflict is that of the defence (or introduction) of local common fishing rights against industrial fishing (as in coastal India, or the lower Amazonia).
 - ***Equal rights to carbon sinks and reservoirs.*** The proposal for equal per capita use of oceans, new vegetation, soils and atmosphere as sinks or reservoirs for carbon dioxide (Agarwal and Narain, 1991).
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- ***Environmental space.*** The geographical space really occupied by an economy, taking into account imports of natural resources and disposal of emissions (Friends of the Earth, Netherlands, 1993). ***Ecological footprint*** is a similar notion, i.e. the carrying capacity appropriated by large cities or countries measured in terms of space (Rees and Wackernagel, 1994).
 - ***Ecological trespassers vs. Ecosystem people.*** This is the contrast between people living from their own resources, and (“omnivorous”) people living from the resources of other territories and peoples. The idea comes from Dasman, it has been applied by Gadgil and Guha (1995) internally to India.
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- ***Workers' struggles for occupational health and safety.*** Actions (in the framework of collective bargaining or outside it) to prevent damages to workers in mines, plantations or factories (“red” outside, “green” inside).
 - ***Urban struggles for clean air and water, green spaces, cyclist and pedestrian rights*** (Castells, 1983). Actions, outside the market, to improve environmental conditions of livelihood or to gain access to recreational amenities in urban contexts. (Cyclists in India?).
 - ***Consumers' and citizens' safety.*** Struggles over the definition and the burden of risks from new technologies (nuclear, GMO, etc.) in rich or in poor countries (described in Beck's “risk society”).
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- ***Indigenous environmentalism.*** Use of territorial rights and ethnic resistance against the external use of resources (e.g. Crees against Hydro Quebec, Ogoni and Ijaw against Shell). Good sources are Gedicks, 1993, 2001.
 - ***Social ecofeminism, environmental feminism.*** The environmental activism of women, motivated by their social situation. The idiom of such struggles is not necessarily that of feminism and/or environmentalism. (Bina Agarwal, 1992).
 - ***Environmentalism of the poor.*** Social conflicts with an ecological content, today and in history, of the poor against the relatively rich, not only but mainly in rural conflicts (as explained in Guha's history of Chipko, 1989, rev. edn. 1999, and in Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997).
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- **There is a chronology of such conflicts. When did they start, when were they identified, when will they disappear?**

For instance, claims of an ecological debt on account of CFC emissions are perhaps less valid today than before the Montreal Protocol was signed while claims on account of CO₂ will increase since the Kyoto Protocol does not modify the general situation of injustice in access to carbon sinks and reservoirs. Kyoto gives grandfathered rights. Hence increased Carbon Debt.

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- **There is also a geography of such conflicts. Some are local, and some are global. Many of them are unknown to Northern public opinion.**

One thing is clear, however - there are closer and closer connections between local conflicts and explicit, global environmentalism. One can no longer separate local and global, because of the increased horizontal, south-south networking.

VALUATION AND POWER

- In such conflicts, who has the power to impose one particular language of valuation? For instance, CBA. Who has the power to deny (or impose) the relevance of other non-commensurable languages (such as livelihood needs, or human rights, or indigenous rights, or sacredness)?
 - Examples from Orissa: shrimp farming in Chilika lake /// bauxite mining in Kashipur. How are such conflicts to be decided?
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Internalising externalities?

Standard economic theory points to the need to internalise externalities. It is precisely the limitations in achieving this goal, what pushes the analysis outside the neoclassical sphere, towards incommensurability of values.

Poor people are well advised to express their interests in languages different from that of compensation for externalities, because in the economic sphere, Laurence Summers' principle, "the poor sell cheap", is operative.

SOME POLICY ISSUES - TRADE

Southern *governments* sometimes complain with reason against Northern protectionism (on textiles, for instance) despite the rhetoric of free trade, but they also complain with much less reason against “green protectionism” from the North (as in the tuna-dolphin or shrimp-turtle cases). They are wrong to emphasize “green protectionism” because the overwhelming reality is that of ill-paid energy and material flows from South to North. The isolated cases of “green protectionism” are really red herrings, in comparison to the flow of ecologically unequal trade that benefits the North.

Material flows and trade

- The European Union (Giljum and Eisenberger, 2003) imports four times more tons that it exports.
 - Latin America exports six times more tons that it imports
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CORPORATE LIABILITY:

- **Rules for environmental liability should be developed, based on the experience of specific studies of claims of environmental liabilities in court cases (*pasivos ambientales* in Latin America, Texaco in Ecuador, Repsol in Neuquén, Argentina, 2002), in order to produce recommendations for international or regional legislation.**
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CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

- **Should the Kyoto Protocol be seen from the South as a first step to combat climate change or as a gigantic “grandfathering” of emission rights? Is the AOSIS one main force for more urgent reductions? Are there other potential allies?**
 - **The debate on the “carbon debt” to the South (computed as unpaid abatement costs or as present-valued future damage) should be a debate on the distribution of property rights on carbon sinks and reservoirs (and other forms of “burden sharing”) which might help to bring some Southern governments into a more active role towards a policy of “contraction, convergence and, in the meantime, compensation”.**
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- **A new environmental policy is required based on eco-charges on fossil fuel extraction and exports collected in the exporting countries (or by international bodies) as “natural capital depletion taxes” (or *retenciones ambientales* in Latin America), i.e. a fiscal implementation of a rule of “weak sustainability”.**
 - **Such revenues to be recycled (accepting therefore an environmental-social conditionality) towards poverty reduction/alternative energy technologies in the South (with much room for technology transfer). The main actors here should be the OPEC countries.**
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A NEW AGRARIAN DEAL:

- **New agrarian policies should consider “Farmers’ Rights” a much more ambitious instrument than at present, for a world policy in support of traditional agroecological production, and against genetic erosion of plants and animal races.**
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- **The role of new global pro-peasant movements and networks (Via Campesina, RAFI-ETC) should be supported. They propose an end to agricultural export subsidies, and also protection for small farmers, emphasizing the multifunctionality of agriculture (which is also a EU platform).**
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