Review

Spaces of environmental justice

Ryan Holifield, Michael Porter and Gordon Walker (Eds.)
Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2010, viii+263pp., ISBN: 978-1444332452

Contemporary Political Theory (2015) **14,** e45–e47. doi:10.1057/cpt.2015.7;
published online 17 February 2015

Until the mid-1990s, 'environmental (in)justice' was conceived largely in terms of the racialized distribution of environmental 'bads,' usually in the United States. Environmental justice (hereafter EJ) research largely consisted of rigorous empirical studies demonstrating that racial minorities in the United States were disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. This research not only led to important debates about the racialization of 'environmentalism', but also to policy action, including President Clinton's 1994 signing of Executive Order 12 898 ('Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations').

The field has evolved considerably since the mid-1990s, as the editors of this collection map out in their introduction. First, scholars and activists outside of the United States have been pushed to consider whether or how EJ might be applied in different national contexts. Second, and perhaps of even greater significance for readers of this journal, those earlier studies' limited theoretical depth and engagement was increasingly seen as a liability. David Schlosberg's seminal work emphasized the need to conceptualize EJ in terms of participation and recognition, as well as distribution, and also that 'doing justice' includes allowing the subjects of (in)justice to define justice for themselves. The limits of traditional policy interventions also may have helped to clarify the ways in which such key concepts as 'space', 'race', 'justice' and 'politics' need to be theorized more carefully. *Spaces of Environmental Justice* thus refers to bringing the concepts of EJ to new geographic locations, and to placing EJ into new theoretical contexts and conversations.

After the editors' introduction, the book is divided into two parts, each with four chapters. In Part 1, 'Frameworks for Critical Environmental Justice Research,' contributors argue for opening up new ways of thinking about and conducting EJ research. Gordon Walker's first chapter provides a nice opening, laying out the connections between critical geography's more complex theorizations of space ('constructed by and through social practices' (p. 25)) and Schlosberg's development of the idea of EJ as 'trivalent, integrating questions of distribution with those of

recognition' (p. 35). Ryan Holifield then contrasts urban political ecology, which has become a significant theoretical framework in EJ research, with more recent attempts to use Actor-Network Theory in an EJ context. Holifield argues provocatively *against* a theoretical synthesis of these two approaches, as each asks different questions and thus illuminates different aspects of EJ. Susan Buckingham and Rakibe Kulcur's chapter focuses on questions of gender. Despite the fact that women have led many EJ movements (p. 73), they argue that gender analysis has been conspicuously absent from EJ research. Part of the case for this is built on an analysis of the gender composition of major European environmental organizations. And while male domination of these organizations may have significant consequences for broader public understandings of 'environmental justice,' this is not to say that grassroots EJ organizations or movements are gendered in the same way. More persuasively, they also point to the relative inattention paid to the scales of the household and the body, where the burdens of responsibility fall disproportionately on women. Hilda Kurtz's chapter draws on theories of the racial state, to argue that even though EJ activists often look to the state for protection against environmental injustice (as in Executive Order 12 898), the state itself plays a significant role in 'shaping racialized patterns of spatial injustice' (p. 97).

Part 2, 'Spaces for Critical Environmental Justice Research', turns to more geographically specific case studies. Petra Tschakert's chapter discusses her work with artisanal gold miners in Ghana, illuminating the complex politics of scale involved in mining in the global south. Both local labour and host states are significantly disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* multinational mining corporations. At the same time, Ghanaian 'artisanal' miners, who comprise a majority of the mining labour force, operate outside of the formal economy, and often without legal protection or recognition. Tschakert's participatory research methods show the importance of focusing on inequities of recognition and participation, but also the ways that highly engaged local research may appear problematic at larger scales: '*galamsey* [artisanal] miners did not envision any radical changes themselves …. The large majority … wished to be employed by one of the large mining companies' (pp. 135, 138). The call for legal (state) recognition of artisanal miners also lies in tension with the understanding of the state developed in Kurtz's chapter. Zoe Meletis and Lisa Campbell innovatively apply an EJ frame to an ecotourism site in Costa Rica. That site's 'isolation' is an important part of its ecotourist appeal: 'with no access by road and no cars in town … [it] seems more "natural" ' (p. 170). At the same time, this 'isolation,' contributes to a significant problem in dealing with solid waste. Recalling that ecotourism sites are in fact 'produced', not 'natural', underlines the power imbalances, and hence EJ issues, at play. Karen Bickerstaff and Julian Agyeman's chapter on a conflict over shipbreaking in northeast England focuses on the politics of shifting scale-frames. Perhaps because the identity politics that is so central to US EJ struggles is less entrenched in England, and perhaps because this particular struggle involved an international NGO involved in a local campaign, there is greater

political room for manoeuvre on both sides. The final chapter, by Julie Sze *et al.*, examines a policy-making process for managing the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in California's Central Valley. Here, too, 'the conflict over scale [is] at the core of the politics' (p. 221). How is 'the Delta' defined and represented? Who is and is not afforded representation in the processes that manage the Delta? In a classic move of EJ analysis, the authors note that 'local interests are constructed as parochial, short sighted, and irrational, whereas advocates for the state are considered to be acting for the abstract good, rather than in the service of capital and large water users (agriculture and urban water districts)' (p. 238).

While each of the individual chapters provides interesting insights, a firmer editorial hand might have helped the book as a whole to initiate a fuller dialogue about the development of the field. Outside of the editors' introduction, there are very few references made by the authors to other chapters in the book, despite obvious opportunities to do so. More generally, the chapters each seek to push EJ research in new, and different, directions. The result is that occasionally terrain that is deplored as conventional and inadequate in one chapter is what is covered in another. A number of contributors comment on the US-centrism of the first wave of EJ research, but chapters discussing US case studies do not critically reflect on their location. Sze *et al.*'s chapter title refers simply to '*the* Delta' (my emphasis). Kurtz's chapter, despite what sometimes appear to be broader claims, is singularly focused on the American (United States) state. This is of course not to suggest that other states are not racialized, but rather that specific histories and geographies have racialized the Canadian, English, Brazilian and so on states in different ways. On the other hand, Kurtz's demand for a more careful theorization of the (racial) state and its role in EJ conflicts is important, and remains underdeveloped or unacknowledged in some other chapters.

In sum, while the collection does not quite provide a map of the new 'spaces of environmental justice,' it does provide signposts that point in a number of useful and provocative directions.

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