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Environmentalism(s)

Joan Martinez-Alier

The three main currents of environmentalism could be named as the Cult of Wilderness, the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency, and the Mantra of Environmental Justice (together with the Environmentalism of the Poor). The religious overtones are justified by the fervor with which the faithful defend their own positions. Those currents are as three big branches of a single tree or three cross-cutting streams of the same river. There are many possibilities of collaboration among them, but there are also substantial cleavages.

If one goes to the World Conservation Congresses that take place every two years, organized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one hears the words "we the world environmental movement" or, synonymously, "we the world nature conservation movement." This is the core of the first current of environmentalism. In terms of the human and economic resources available, this movement is indeed large. Historically, since the nineteenth century, its main concern was to preserve pristine nature by setting aside natural areas from where humans would be excluded, and the active protection of wildlife for its ecological and aesthetic values and not for any economic or human livelihood value. Beautiful landscapes, threatened species, disappearing ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, and tropical rainforests were and still are the main focus of this international movement.

In the United States, this movement has its origin in the work of Scottish-American naturalist John Muir and the creation of Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks. There were similar movements in Europe and other continents. Even in India, where the doctrine of the "environmentalism of the poor" was put forward in the 1980s in opposition to the "cult of wilderness," there are great local traditions of bird watching and other forms of upper- and middle-class nature conservation.

This world conservation movement has been increasingly drawn to an economic language. Although many of its members believe in "deep ecology" (the intrinsic value of nature) and revere nature as sacred, the mainstream movement decided to join with the economists. The reports of the TEEB (Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, a project supported by the World Wildlife Fund [WWF] and indeed the whole IUCN) in 2008–11, published under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s auspices, follows this leitmotiv: to make the loss of biodiversity visible, we need to focus not on single species but on ecosystems, and then on ecosystem services to humans, and finally we must give economic valuations to such services because this is what will attract the attention of politicians and business leaders towards conservation. The world conservation movement is thus now closely allied to the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency. The TEEB, for example, enthusiastically praises mining corporation Rio Tinto's principle of "net positive impact." This principle suggests that nation-states or corporations can engage in open cast mining anywhere provided that the state or business support a natural park there or replant a mangrove forest yonder. John Muir would have been horrified.

This second current of environmentalism, the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency, is perhaps then the most powerful today. Its name recalls key words used in the title of Samuel Hays's 1959 book *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920*, explaining the early efforts in federal

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environmental policy in the United States to reduce waste, and also to conserve forests (or turn them into tree plantations) in contrast both to the reality of plunder and to the mystical proposals of nature activists like John Muir. One main public figure of Eco-Efficiency was Gifford Pinchot, trained in forestry in Europe.

The concept of "sustainability" (*Nachhaltigkeit*) had been introduced in nineteenth-century forest management in Germany, not to denote respect for pristine nature but, on the contrary, to indicate how monetary profits could be made from nature by obtaining optimum sustainable yields from tree plantations. This idea can be seen in today's panoply of recipes on sustainable technologies, environmental economic policies (taxes, tradable fishing quotas, markets in pollution permits), optimal rates of resource extraction, substitution of manufactured capital for lost "natural capital," valuation and payment for environmental services, dematerialization of the economy, habitat and carbon trading, and, in summary, sustainable development. The Gospel of Eco-Efficiency goes together with doctrines of "ecological modernization" and belief in so-called environmental Kuznets curves (EKC) showing that pollution first increases with income but later declines. This is indeed the case for sulfur dioxide, for instance, but not for carbon dioxide or for domestic waste or many other pollutants. Therefore, one cannot generalize the existence of EKC.

The words "sustainable development" became widely known in 1987 with the publication of the Brundtland report (the main author was a Keynesian social democrat politician who believed in economic growth). The first influential use of "sustainable development" came, however, from the 1980 IUCN's World Conservation Strategy trying to avoid, by the use of clever words, the clash between conservation and economic growth. Most governments and the United Nations (including UNEP more than any other institution) align themselves with the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency. Business leaders are divided between those who believe in the eco-efficient approach to the environment and those who despise environmental concerns and even subsidize think tanks denying climate change. The "green" faction suffered a jolt when in 2011, the former president of the Business Council for Sustainable Development, Stephan Schmidheiny, was convicted in a criminal case in Torino, Italy, because of his promotion over many years of the production and use of asbestos.

Meanwhile, the third current of environmentalism—the world Environmental Justice Movement (which is certainly not as well organized as the IUCN)—is an assortment of local resistance movements and of networks. The words "environmental justice" were first used in a sociological sense in the United States in the early 1980s, as an outgrowth of the civil rights movement. It was claimed that the burdens of pollution fell disproportionately on ethnic minorities, prompting the use of the term "environmental racism." From its origin in the United States, the words "environmental justice" spread to the world. There are now networks for climate justice and for water justice, and against the extractive industries. Poor and indigenous people (together, a majority of humankind) suffer disproportionately from pollution (including climate change) and from resource extraction. Many of these people may have never heard of the phrase "environmental justice" or "environmentalism," but they understand clearly that they are suffering from unjust environmental burdens. In the mounting resistance to these injustices, many people around the world are killed defending the environment. Very few come, however, from the ranks of the IUCN or from Eco-Efficiency groups.

There have been attempts to bring the conservation movement closer to the environmentalism of the

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poor and indigenous people who fight against deforestation, agrofuels, mining, tree plantations, and dams. For instance, mangrove forests can be defended against shrimp aquaculture because of the livelihood needs of women and men living there, but also because of their biodiversity and their beauty. Both sides could, for instance, be ready to respect an international convention on the Rights of Nature, following the lead established by the Constitution of Ecuador of 2008. Despite opportunities for bringing together the conservation movement with the environmental justice movement, this is often difficult not only because the first current of environmentalism, the conservation movement, consorts too closely with the second current, the engineers and economists, but also because, to judge from the financial sponsorship of the World Conservation Congresses, the conservation movement has sold its soul to companies like Shell and Rio Tinto. As a result, the alliance between the Cult of Wilderness and the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency is stronger than the possibility for alliance between the Cult of Wilderness and the movement for Environmental Justice and the Environmentalism of the Poor.

The Environmentalism of the Poor combines livelihood, social, economic, and environmental issues with involvement in extraction and pollution conflicts on the side of environmental justice. In many instances this movement draws on a sense of local identity (indigenous rights and values such as the sacredness of the land). It is on the left insofar as it positions itself in opposition to corporate power and to the coercive power of the state. However, the political Left (e.g., presidents Lula and Roussef in Brazil, the Communist Party in West Bengal in India, or presidents Evo Morales in Bolivia or Rafael Correa in Ecuador) does not like the environmentalism of the poor and the indigenous that explicitly opposes dispossession of land, forests, mineral resources, and water by governments or business corporations, fighting against the inroads of the generalized market system and the growth of social metabolism. Such Latin American governments need the money from primary exports to sustain their policies for poverty alleviation. Sometimes they attack the environmentalists very openly, as when Correa calls them "infantile ecologists" or Garcia Linera (the Bolivian vice-president) discovers "environmentalist gringos" behind any complaint by Amazonian indigenous peoples. In West Bengal, after peasant opposition had prevented in 2007 the setting up of SEZs (special economic zones) at Nandigram and Singhur (for the chemical industry and for a Tata car factory), the Communist Party government was defeated in elections. The CP general secretary, Prakash Karat, complained in 2007 against "the modern-day Narodniks who claim to champion the cause of the peasantry" while neglecting the historic task of industrialization. He mentioned "the likes of Medha Patkar," a world-renowned popular environmentalist, among the Narodniks (Karat 2007). Poor people do not always think and behave as environmentalists would wish. To believe that poverty consistently results in responsible environmental behaviors would be blatant nonsense. But that said, the environmentalism of the poor arises from the fact that the world economy is based on fossil fuels and other exhaustible resources; it goes to the ends of the Earth to get them, disrupting and polluting both pristine nature and human livelihoods, and thus exacerbating poverty and leading to inevitable resistance by poor and indigenous peoples, who are often led by women.

Poor and indigenous peoples sometimes appeal for economic compensation (the internalization of externalities in the price system, one of the main platforms in the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency), but more often they appeal to other languages of valuation such as human rights, indigenous territorial rights, human livelihoods, and the sacredness of endangered mountains or rivers.

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Despite the deep cleavages we have noticed between the three main currents of environmentalism, there is hope of a confluence among conservationists concerned with the loss of biodiversity, the many people concerned with the injustices of climate change who push for repayment of ecological debts and promote changes in technology towards solar energy, ecofeminists, and some socialists and trade unionists who are concerned about health at work and who moreover know that one cannot adjourn economic justice through promises of economic growth forever. There is hope of confluence between urban squatters who preach "autonomy" from the market, agro-ecologists, neorurals, the "degrowers," and the partisans of "prosperity without growth" in some rich countries, the large international peasant movements like Via Campesina claiming that "traditional peasant agriculture cools down the Earth," the pessimists (or realists, after Fukushima) on the risks and uncertainties of technical change, the indigenous populations who demand the preservation of the environment at the frontiers of commodity extraction, and the world environmental justice movement.

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Environmental Justice

Giovanna Di Chiro

The quest for environmental justice is a social, political, and moral struggle for human rights, healthy environments, and thriving democracies led by residents of communities most negatively impacted by economic and ecological degradation. The term "environmental justice" emerged from the activism of communities of color in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century and is now used by many to describe a global network of social movements fiercely critical of the disparities and depredations caused by the unchecked expansion and neocolonial logic of fossil fuel–driven modern industrial development. Activists and scholars of environmental justice challenge the disproportionate burden of toxic contamination, waste dumping, and ecological devastation borne by low-income communities, communities of color, and colonized territories. They advocate for social policies that uphold the right to meaningful, democratic participation of frontline communities in environmental decision making, and they have redefined the core meanings of the "environment" and the interrelationships between humans and nature, thereby challenging and transforming environmentalism more broadly. Tackling these bold social-change goals head on, environmental justice advocates work toward building diverse, dynamic, and powerful coalitions to address the world's most pressing social and environmental crises—global poverty and global climate change—by organizing across scales

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