

2 Globalising and framing environmental justice

The notion that environmental justice can be understood as a ‘frame’ was introduced in the previous chapter. Framing is a notion that recognises that the world is not just ‘out there’ waiting to be unproblematically discovered, but has to be given meaning, interpreted through ideas, propositions and assertions about how things are and how they ought to be. In this light, to talk of environmental justice is to suggest a particular way of making sense of the world, specifically of interpreting and evaluating the intertwining of environment and social difference (if we follow the very broad definition provided in the last chapter). In this chapter we will examine in some detail the characteristic elements that have been involved in environmental justice framing, in order to analyse how the use of an environmental justice frame has evolved, diffused and travelled around the world. The focus is on political activity, particularly by environmental justice advocates, activists and campaigning groups, but also encompassing the frames used by government bodies and state agencies. As already argued, the use of justice arguments in relation to socio-environmental concerns is not restricted either to activity that takes place under an ‘environmental justice’ label or only to actors operating overtly within political and public arenas. In this chapter, however, the remit is on environmental justice (those two words explicitly) as a political label, how this first materialised, the ideas and meanings it has conveyed and how these have evolved.

A narrative running through this chapter is the globalising of environmental justice. There are numerous excellent accounts of the origins, development, problems and successes of the environmental justice movement in the US (Bullard 1999; Faber 2008; Pellow and Brulle 2005; Schlosberg 1999; Shrader-Frechette 2002). It is not my intention to duplicate these accounts, beyond what is necessary to provide a good outline and a foundation for later comparative analysis. What is interesting beyond the core US experience, though, is how a range of alternative versions of the environmental justice frame have emerged in other parts of the world and how these have increasingly engaged with issues that cross national borders. This, as we shall see, has implications for how we understand environmental justice and also the dynamic, grounded geography of framing processes.

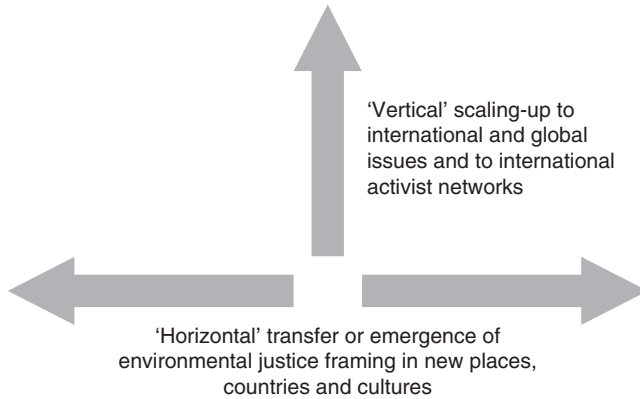


Figure 2.1 The globalising of environmental justice in two dimensions.

This chapter uses a simple categorisation for analysing the globalisation of environmental justice in two related dimensions (see Figure 2.1). The first dimension involves the ‘horizontal’ emergence of the language and rhetoric of environmental justice in new settings around the world. Here the international utilisation of the frame can be mapped, along with analysis of the processes of diffusion, reproduction and contextualisation that have taken place within the political and institutional cultures of different countries. The second dimension of globalisation involves the ‘vertical’ extension of the scope of environmental justice frames to encompass concerns that do not end at national borders but which involve relations between countries and global scale issues. Through such ‘scaling up’, environmental justice activism can no longer be characterised as being only about local disputes or ‘militant particularisms’ (Harvey 1996) and the intranational distribution of environmental bads (Dobson 1988). This again has implications for how we understand the scope of environmental justice and the practice of activism from local to transnational scales.

It is impossible to take stock of each and every application of an environmental justice frame around the world, so I have selected the cases of the UK and South Africa for closer examination. However, it is with the original framing processes, the collective political action in the US that started it all, that we will begin.

The environmental justice movement in the US

The environmental justice movement in the US has been specifically analysed in terms of the framing work involved (Sandweiss 1998; Taylor 2000). Framing work within social movements has a number of typical elements (Benford and Snow 2000). These include the articulation of normative ideas (visions and objectives for how things should be), the diagnosis of problems and responsibilities for

problems, and the prognosis of solutions and processes of change. Gamson (1992) also argues that notions of justice and injustice are routinely part of the framing work of social movements. Victims of injustice are identified and their victim status is stressed to call attention to situations and circumstances that need to be addressed. Each of these elements can be identified within the establishment and development of the environmental justice frame in the US.

Capek (1993) provides one of the first analyses of the framing of environmental justice in the US, identifying its salient characteristics as it emerged from local community struggles over the siting and operation of toxic and waste sites in minority communities through the 1980s. She traces how local residents, mobilising against various perceived threats to their safety from pollution, leaks and contamination, began using a common language of environmental justice, giving them a political edge that was new and distinctive. Particularly important were, first, the way in which it tapped into the discourses of the civil rights movement, introducing issues of race and racism into environmental debate, and, second, the interplay between the scale of the specific local community struggles and the broader arguments and claims that emerged at a national level about the concentration of waste and toxic sites in minority communities. Benford (2005) in a later analysis argues that the initial discourse of environmental racism, which resonated with minority communities mobilising against risks to their safety and well-being, productively broadened to the environmental justice frame, which was more inclusive of the many forms of environmental discrimination that were being diagnosed. The language of environmental justice, he argues, was also more positively orientated, focusing on citizens' rights and on visions of what a more environmentally just world would be like. For Taylor (2000), the rapid growth in the use of the environmental justice frame in the US through the 1990s, as hundreds of groups formed around the country and a national movement emerged, even gave it the status of a 'master frame', a broad canvas that transcended the particularities of specific local disputes.

The movement achieved significant impacts in the 1990s both through local legal challenges to siting and other decisions, and through the lobbying of national policy-makers. Most significant in policy terms was concerted lobbying at federal level, which led to the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the signing of Executive Order 12898 by President Clinton in 1994 requiring federal regulatory agencies to make environmental justice a part of all they do. In Box 2.1 the key provisions of the Executive Order and the story of its controversial and much criticised implementation within the EPA are outlined.

In the face of political change to a Republican administration in 2001 the environmental justice movement struggled to maintain its salience and momentum. A major backlash emerged from corporate interests, with political attacks being made by organisations and commentators working with very different frames and objectives (Benford 2005). 'Counterframes', deployed through what Faber (2008: 238) refers to as globalised tactics of the 'polluter-industrial complex', were for a while influential in criticising the economic impacts of environmental

Box 2.1 Executive Order 12898 and its troubled implementation

In 1994 President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 as the culmination of a long period of campaigning and lobbying by environmental justice activists. The key requirement of this legislation is that 'each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations'. The passing of this legislation was seen as a major political achievement, but there has since been much debate about how the principles and requirements of the Order have been interpreted (or some would say reinterpreted), particularly within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA has been criticised from many directions, especially after 'interim guidance' was produced in 1998 on how it would assess whether pollution control permitting decisions made by state and local level agencies were in compliance with environmental justice policy (so-called Title IV decisions). Lyle (2000) provides a detailed account of the often vociferous reactions to this guidance. State and municipal-level interests objected to federal intervention in their local decision-making and the potential blocking of investment in job-creating industries. Industrial lobbies also weighed in with much force.

Having had its fingers burned by this furore, the EPA largely backed off from pushing environmental justice policy at a strategic level, leaving each region to develop its own approaches. Faber (2008) also argues that the EPA was deliberately denuded of resources during this period and undermined as a result of pressure from powerful corporate interests. An evaluation by the Office of the Inspector General in 2003 concluded in very strong terms that the EPA had neither fully implemented Order 12898 nor consistently integrated environmental justice into its day-to-day operations 'Although the Agency has been actively involved in implementing Executive Order 12898 for 10 years, it has not developed a clear vision or a comprehensive strategic plan, and has not established values, goals, expectations, and performance measurements' (Office of the Inspector General 2004: i). The consequence, they concluded, was an inconsistent approach by the EPA regional offices. Most fundamentally, the report argued that the EPA had reinterpreted the meaning and intention of the Order away from a focus on poor and minority populations towards seeking 'environmental justice for everyone'.

justice activism and undermining its progressive objectives. Some environmental justice groups, by then established in many communities across the US, faltered, but many survived through adapting their tactics and to some degree their profile of campaigns and activities.

With the election of President Obama in 2009, the environmental justice movement has found itself again more in step with the currents of political power, and there is some optimism about the potentially positive impacts of stimulus packages for deprived communities, and the greening of energy infrastructure (Holifield *et al.* 2010: 19).

Seven key characteristics of the US frame

There is much more that could be said about the development of environmental justice in the US, and elements of this story will figure in later chapters. However, from the account so far, and the body of analysis which underpins it, we can identify a set of seven key characteristics of the US environmental justice frame as it has evolved over the past 30 years:

- 1 It has emphasised a *politics of race*, reflecting its emergence from a history and infrastructure of grassroots civil rights activism. This made it not only an innovative and radical frame but also a new brand of environmentalism (Schlosberg 1999; Taylor 2000), involving a far more diverse constituency of activists than the traditional environmental movement, a diversity which has extended over time to include many different racial, ethnic and cultural groups. It would be wrong therefore to characterise the US environmental justice frame as being *only* about a politics of race (Faber 2008), as other forms of class and identity politics, including that of gender (Kurtz 2007; Stein 2004), have been involved, although the initial emphasis has arguably remained in place throughout.
- 2 It has maintained a focus on questions of *justice to people* in the environment (Agyeman *et al.* 2003: 327), rather than expressing a politicised concern for justice to nature – a separate question of ‘ecological justice’ in the categorisation of Low and Gleeson (1998). This anthropogenic placing of people and communities at the centre of the frame, particularly those who are marginalised economically and politically as well as environmentally, again distinguished environmental justice from the traditional framings of environmental groups in the US, which focused on wilderness and conservation concerns (Shrader-Frechette 2002).
- 3 In terms of the framing of its *environmental boundaries*, the early formulation of environmental justice was narrowly focused on forms of technological pollution, waste and risk – particularly those forms of ‘environmental bad’ associated with proposed new sitings of landfill, incinerators, chemical plants and the like. As we saw in Chapter 1, this narrowness has since given way to a far broader profile of environmental concerns, moving beyond environmental burdens to include access to environmental benefits

and resources of various forms (Mutz *et al.* 2002) and concerns which some argue could, or should, be classified as social rather than environmental (Benford 2005).

- 4 It has similarly evolved beyond an initial emphasis on issues of *distributive justice* to be more inclusive of other forms of normative claim and assertion. Environmental justice activism has always been concerned with more than distribution, including demands for participatory justice in particular (Schlosberg 2007; Shrader-Frechette 2002; Wenz 1988). Box 2.2, which reproduces the mission statement of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization in Chicago, makes this clear with its strong emphasis on ‘democracy in action’, ‘participation’ and ‘self-determination’. However, distributive claims – about who gets what in the environment – have dominated most representations of environmental justice in the US. This is partly because of the close association between the initial phases of activism and statistical studies which analysed patterns of distribution of environmental bads in relation to the racial and income profiles of affected communities, finding repeated patterns of bias and disproportionate concentration in poor, African-American and Hispanic areas (Bowen 2002; Brown 1995; Mohai and Saha 2006) and using the courts to challenge siting decisions which further reproduced these biases (see Chapter 3 for more specific discussion).
- 5 In diagnosing the causes of inequality and injustice, or assigning *blame and responsibility*, it has been focused on industry and corporate actors, and on the institutionalised (and racist) practices of the state. For example, both

Box 2.2 Mission statement of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Our mission is to work with our families, co-workers, and neighbors to improve our environment and lives in Little Village and throughout Chicago through democracy in action. We work for a real voice in building democracy, including if, how, when and where any development of our communities takes place, as the basis for environmental, economic and social justice. Our environment is where we live, work, study, play and pray. We work with, not against, our Mother Earth and Nature to once again make our air healthy to breathe, our water safe to drink, and to free our earth from poisons to grow healthy foods.

We believe democracy means giving time and space for every voice to be heard and counted in everyday matters, full participation in all types of decision-making that affects our lives, and determining the future of our neighborhood and city.

We work to unite our community's talents, assets, and power to build a society that treats all of us equally: no matter what race, culture, ethnicity, age, or gender we are. In Unity we have the strength to forge economic, environmental and social justice to overcome the barriers of poverty that surround us and build self-determination.

We work for justice at home and abroad, connecting our local struggle for democracy with the global one and live by the principle that, as working and poor people of color, we have the right to control our lives and resources.

Source: <http://lvejo.org/about/mission-statement>.



Figure 2.2 Protest march by the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization in Chicago.

Source: Toban Black.

- industry and government bodies have been blamed for inequitable siting decisions (see Chapter 4) and the operation of industrial installations to varying standards (Gouldson 2006).
- 6 It has been explicitly inclusive of multiple interconnected *scales of analysis*, but until recently these have been contained within the borders of the US. As noted earlier, a key strength of the environmental justice frame has been both the horizontal interconnections made between numerous local

grassroots struggles across the US and the vertical scaling up to national claims and regulatory settings (Kurtz 2002; Towers 2000). However, for some time these horizontal and vertical scalar connections remained bounded within national borders.

- 7 Whilst a broadly based environmental justice frame has been rooted in a vibrant social movement – as well as in the work of academics with whom the movement has been closely connected (Cable *et al.* 2005) – other versions of an environmental justice frame have emerged within the US *government and its agencies*, in part because of the success of activists in demanding policy attention (as outlined in Box 2.1). An essentially managerial framing has been adopted by the EPA and other agencies, one that is far more narrowly conceived than that of the activist community, and much criticised in its implementation (Block and Whitehead 1999; Faber 2008; Holifield 2001, 2004).

Whilst not exhaustive, these seven dimensions provide a sufficient characterisation with which we can proceed to examine how the use of an environmental justice frame has emerged in places outside of the US, across new networks and at a global scale.

The international travelling of the environmental justice frame

[I]f the environmental justice movement is to survive at all it must go global. It must go global, because the sources and causes of environmental inequality are global in their reach and impact.

(Brulle and Pellow 2005: 296)

The movement of the environmental justice frame beyond the borders of the US has happened over an extended period, although as Debbane and Keil (2004) show, through case studies based in Canada and South Africa, each particular case of transfer may happen relatively rapidly. The first manifestations can be found in the early to mid-1990s, with a more expansive diffusion taking place after 2000. A snapshot taken in 2010 provides an indication of how far the use of the language of environmental justice has reached. Table 2.1 lists the countries in which the specific term ‘environmental justice’ has been applied and written about in relation to indigenous environmental concerns, based on a search of academic and grey literature databases and web searches. This listing is indicative at best, as there are problems in relying on database and web searches; on the one hand, an environmental justice frame may be in use within a country without this having been written about (in English) or named precisely in this way, and, on the other, environmental justice may be used as a framework for academic analysis rather than being explicitly part of the discourse of those involved in activism or policy debates. It would also be wrong to interpret the adoption of an environmental justice framing as synonymous with the extension or

Table 2.1 Countries included in written material using an environmental justice frame

Region	Countries
Africa	Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Cameroon, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique
Asia	Taiwan, Israel, India, Singapore, Philippines
Australasia	Australia, New Zealand
Europe	United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, France, Spain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Latvia
North America	United States, Canada, Mexico
South and Central America	Brazil, Peru, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Columbia

development of an indigenous environmental justice *movement* – this being far more than a matter of framing. Even so, the list of 37 countries in Table 2.1 is extensive and demonstrates that the language of environmental justice (at least) has been in use in each of the major global regions and in some cases across many of the countries within these regions.

This indication of the scale and extent of environmental justice framing activity militates against simple generalisation or distillation of the mechanisms of diffusion and adoption that have been involved. It is clear though that deliberate transnational networking between environmental justice activist groups in different countries has been part of the story, paralleling wider trends across various forms of social movement (Routledge *et al.* 2006; Smith and Johnston 2002). For example, the Coalition for Environmental Justice, a civic action network of activists, lawyers and researchers from environmental and human rights organisations in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia, was set up in 2003 to actively promote an environmental justice frame across Central and Eastern Europe. Network activities included linking up with environmental justice activists in the US to form a ‘Transatlantic Initiative on Environmental Justice’ in 2005 (Pellow *et al.* 2005), and the laying out of an agenda of key issues for Central and Eastern Europe, particularly focusing on the Roma who are discriminated against across the region (Steger 2007). There have been a number of such transnational initiatives using an environmental justice framing within other regions, such as South America (Carruthers 2008), or focused on particular environmental issues such as an ‘anti-toxics’ agenda (Pellow 2007).

Such networks have been significant in promoting diffusion from the US as well as generating interaction and learning between countries within regions – although these may not be the only mechanisms involved. A more in-depth analysis is required to understand not only how frames have emerged in new places, but also how an environmental justice framing once travelled becomes contextualised in its new cultural and political setting or becomes ‘locally grounded’ (Debbane and Keil 2004: 210). For this reason two cases will be examined in greater

detail – the UK and South Africa; these cases contrast in many ways but, as we shall see, also show similarities in the contextualisation processes involved.

Environmental justice in the UK

In 1998 Dobson noted that, in comparison to the emphatic arrival of justice on the environmental agenda in the US, there had been no ‘direct equivalent’ in Britain (1998: 26). The closest contemporaneous parallel to the US experience had been the UK Black Environmental Network (BEN), which in the 1980s highlighted the white, middle-class nature of much environmentalism and worked with local black communities to develop environmental awareness and involvement in conservation work (Agyeman 1987). However, the BEN remained small scale and failed to mobilise any significant constituency of support or to develop a more radical campaigning profile. Similarly, whilst there was a history of opposition to the siting of ‘toxic’ and polluting facilities in the UK – including the formation of networking initiatives such as ‘Community Lobby Opposing Unhealthy Tips’ and ‘Communities against Toxics’ – these had failed to develop any form of collective agenda around justice arguments.

In contrast then to the grassroots emergence of environmental justice in the US, it was a mainstream and established environmental group, Friends of the Earth (FoE), that first started to work with an environmental justice frame in the UK. In the mid-1990s FoE had begun to develop a more socially aware and urban theme to its work (for example, related to fuel poverty issues) and to work in closer collaboration with social and development NGOs (for example, through the Real World Coalition formed in 1996), and an environmental justice framing fitted well with these developments. Through collaborations with academics working to formulate a UK environmental justice agenda (Stephens *et al.* 2001) and networking with US activists, there was both a drawing on the US environmental justice frame and a purposeful redefinition to fit the UK political context at the time. Bob Bullard, a self-described ‘kick ass sociologist’ and key activist in the US environmental justice movement, was brought to the UK as a guest speaker at a number of academic and NGO events. However, the agenda he laid out was very much reinterpreted in the UK situation. In particular, an opportunity was seen to make the environment more directly relevant to the recently installed ‘New Labour’ administration, which had campaigned strongly on social exclusion and inequality issues. A series of pamphlets and publications produced by NGOs, consultancies and political groups were highlighting the linkages between the New Labour government’s priorities on social exclusion and the social dimensions of environmental concerns. Jacobs (1999), for example, in a pamphlet for the centre-left Fabian Society developed arguments around ‘environmental exclusion’ as a component of a new environmental modernisation agenda.

This combination of drawing on the US framing with the redefinition of its elements in the UK context can be seen across FoE’s work at this time. Its first significant move was to undertake research which closely mirrored the US model

of analysing the distribution of polluting industrial facilities to reveal biases in siting patterns (Friends of the Earth 2000, 2001). In making this step, it explicitly sought to convey a new style of gritty urban environmental concern (with some parallels to the positioning of activists in the US):

this is the sharp end of social exclusion. On top of unemployment and crime these families and communities face the grime of industrial pollution. Here pollution is as far from a middle-class concern as it can get.

(Friends of the Earth 2000: 2)

However, the research focused not on siting in relation to patterns of race or ethnicity, but on patterns of income – a social-class orientation which reflected the political context at the time and the lack of strong race-based civil rights mobilisation in the UK. Key agenda-setting publications developed by FoE in collaboration with academics and other NGOs are similarly positioned – introducing environmental justice by referring to the US experience, before then laying out a set of concerns that are quite distinct from the emphases of the US framing (Boardman *et al.* 1999; Stephens *et al.* 2001). These include international and intragenerational issues, inequalities in access to environmental resources including food, energy and water, transport needs and risks and aesthetic, mental and spiritual needs (such as quiet and access to the countryside). Again the lack of a distinct racial dimension is apparent in, for example, the way the foreword to one such publication positions the significant social divisions in class and age terms: ‘environmental problems are serious and impact most heavily on the most vulnerable members of society, the old, the very young and the poor’ (Boardman *et al.* 1999: 1).

Another distinctive feature of the diffusion of the environmental justice frame into the UK was its ready adoption into the discourses and policies of governmental bodies (Agyeman and Evans 2004; Bulkeley and Walker 2005). Whereas it took many years of concerted campaigning in the US to get the EPA to begin examining questions of environmental justice, its equivalent in the UK, the Environment Agency (EA), proactively did so early on as part of its own strategic political positioning (Chalmers and Colvin 2005). The EA included a debate on ‘environmental equality’ at its 2000 annual general meeting and initiated its own analysis of patterns of the social distribution of various environmental indicators in two commissioned research projects on ‘environment and social justice’ and ‘addressing environmental inequalities’. These projects followed the classic US environmental justice method of statistically analysing spatial data sets at national and regional scales, but focused not on race but on social deprivation (for example, Walker *et al.* 2003, 2007).¹ The reframing work undertaken by the EA

1 I was involved in these projects and some of the results and methodological and political complexities involved are discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to river water quality, Chapter 6 on flooding and Chapter 7 on greenspace.

included not only its definition of relevant social and environmental concerns (including flooding and water quality, both central to its regulatory remit), but also the naming of the frame itself. Whilst clearly derived initially from the US environmental justice frame, the EA settled on naming its own agenda as being one of ‘environmental inequalities’; this was seen as both less politically contentious and more aligned with familiar policy discourses such as that on ‘health inequalities’. As outlined in Box 2.3, a position statement under this heading was produced in 2004 (Environment Agency 2004) that laid out some concerns and good intentions, but very little in terms of concrete commitments.

Box 2.3 Key aspects of the Environment Agency’s position statement on environmental inequalities (Environment Agency for England and Wales 2004)

The EA position statement identifies two key issues – the variability of environmental quality between different areas and communities and the bias of the worst quality environments towards ‘people who are socially and economically disadvantaged’ and ‘the most vulnerable and excluded in society’. This is seen as affecting health and well-being, adding to the burden of deprivation and limiting opportunities for people to improve their lives. The solutions called for position the EA as only one actor amongst many; ‘government, business and society all have a role to play in addressing environmental inequalities at a national, regional and local level’. Five specific ‘solutions’ are called for:

- 1 A better understanding of environmental inequalities and the most effective ways of addressing them, through commissioning research.
- 2 Government policy that promotes a reduction in environmental inequalities through integrating environmental equality across all policies, evaluating new policies for their impacts on those living in the worst quality environment, and using tools such as equity assessments.
- 3 Addressing environmental inequalities through tackling disadvantage by building the environmental aspects of multiple deprivation into neighbourhood regeneration and health inequality programmes.
- 4 Regional and local planning that prevents environmental inequalities, through planning authorities carrying out Strategic Environmental Assessment, cumulative impact assessments, and addressing environmental inequalities in community plans.
- 5 Communities being supported and involved in decisions that affect their local environment, through information provision and involvement of people from deprived communities in decision-making.

A framing process going on more widely within government – led by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which coordinated a cross-departmental working group on environment and social justice and commissioned a wide-ranging evidence review (Lucas *et al.* 2004) – also served to incorporate environmental justice ideas into pre-existing sustainable development framings (Agyeman and Evans 2004), rather than taking these up to form a distinctive new theme. Sustainable development was well established as a ‘master frame’ in the UK by the late 1990s and, through incorporating the interaction between the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainability, was seen to readily accommodate questions of social difference and inequality. In this vein the 1999 national sustainable development strategy stated that ‘everyone should share the benefits of increased prosperity and a clean and safe environment ... Our needs must not be met by treating others, including future generations and people elsewhere in the world, unfairly’ (UK Government 1999).

In various ways, then, through adoption and reframing environmental justice in the UK was contextualised into contemporary cultural and political conditions, ‘moving from the margins to the mainstream’ (Agyeman and Evans 2004: 159), but also arguably in the process being stripped of some of its more radical and distinctive qualities. Its adoption by ‘elites’ in existing established environmental groups and government agencies (Bulkeley and Walker 2005), its lack of grassroots mobilisation and its renaming and incorporation into existing framings, each to some degree weakened the frame’s substance and significance in comparison to the US version. This is brought home by the contrast between two self-named ‘Environmental Justice Summits’ held on either side of the Atlantic. The first, held in Washington in the US in 1991, brought together over 650 representatives of grassroots organisations from around the country working within an environmental justice frame; the second, held in London in 2008 and organised by Capacity Global (the only clear example of a group organised around an environmental justice framing in the UK) with funding support from a government department, involved 50 people, most of whom were academics and representatives of government agencies or of national-level NGOs and consultancies.

Whilst this analysis may characterise the London-focused picture in the UK, in Scotland things have been a little different, demonstrating that forms of contextualisation can take place at levels below that of the state. In Scotland political opportunities were presented by the devolution of substantial responsibilities of governance to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) deliberately chose this moment to adopt a more substantial and radical environmental justice campaign than elsewhere in the UK (Scandrett 2007) which interlinked local and global issues, supporting this with various forms of training and networking activity intended to empower local-level activism (Dunion 2003). Having been promoted strongly by FoES, a version of the environmental justice frame, focused in this case on local environmental conditions (or ‘environmental incivilities’), also moved into government, with Jack McConnell, Scotland’s first minister, declaring in 2002: ‘I am clear that the gap between the haves and have-nots is not just an economic issue. For quality of life,

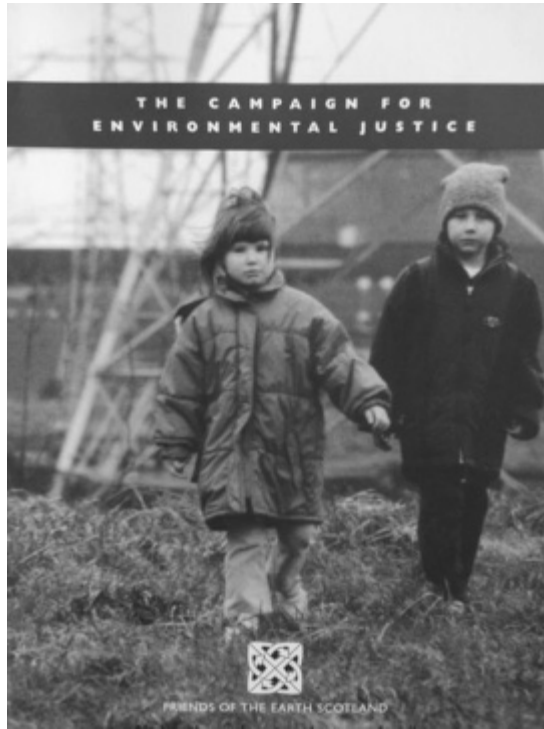


Figure 2.3 Friends of the Earth Scotland environmental justice campaign leaflet, 2001.

closing the gap demands environmental justice too. That is why I said ... that environment and social justice would be the themes driving our policies and priorities.' (McConnell 2002). This speech, briefly at least, catalysed attention and promoted the explicit use of the term environmental justice as a policy objective, with a dedicated team being established in the Scottish Executive. Various resource commitments were made to fund research (Curtice *et al.* 2005; Fairburn *et al.* 2005), support community action and review the implications for planning legislation and pollution regulation (Jackson and Illsley 2007; Poustie 2004). The 2002 Scottish sustainable development strategy was also explicit in its appeals to environmental justice, stating that 'sustainable development is about combining economic progress with social and environmental justice ... we should have regard for others who do not have access to the same level of resources, and the wealth generated' (Scottish Executive 2002). Despite such rhetorical commitments, Scandrett (2007) is critical of the way in which the environmental justice frame in Scottish policy has evolved, in particular its failure to in any way challenge the interests of capital. The election of the Scottish National Party to power in 2007 led to new policy discourses around environmental concerns as the new administration sought to distinguish itself from the old.

Consequently, the environmental justice frame has not been sustained in policy and the campaigning work of FoES has also become much less strongly orientated around this.

Environmental justice in South Africa

The first traces of the emergence of an environmental justice frame in South Africa can be found in 1992–3, a few years before those in the UK. Key events referred to in various accounts include an Earthlife International Conference in 1992, leading to the formation of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF) in 1994, which has since grown into a network with over 400 members across a diversity of civil society organisations (Duma 2007). Here the US influence appears to have been significant in various ways. A participant account by Kalan and Peek (2005) traces early initiatives by students from South Africa studying in the US to connect the environmental struggles in the US with those of their home country. The ‘South African Exchange Programme on Environmental Justice’ (SAEPEJ) sought to develop two-way exchanges of various kinds – exchanges of information and research, the meeting of people from grassroots organisations and communities mobilising around similar environmental problems in the US and South Africa, and even the collection of samples of toxins from South Africa that were then taken for analysis in labs in the US. For Bobby Peek, who formed groundWork in 1999 as a group seeking to promote environmental justice activism both within South Africa and more broadly across the region, the link to the US was crucial: ‘the language that was appearing in the civil rights movement and around the environmental justice movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s was something that came to South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s’ (ibid.: 261). The two-way nature of the exchange is also clear, however, with learning about organising at a local level in South Africa being instructive for US activists, and the understanding that ‘these things happen globally’ (ibid.: 260) pushing US groups towards a more international perspective. Their account shows how the movement of knowledge and commitments embodied in particular people can be important in frame diffusion (Faber 2005).

Struggles against the operation of oil refineries and other sources of pollution in the heavily industrialised basin of South Durban were also significant in giving a focus and profile to the emergency of environmental justice activism. As Barnett and Scott (2007) trace in some detail, the South Durban concentration of industrial development took shape during the apartheid era, with non-white communities being forcibly relocated into the area in the 1950s and 1960s under the Group Areas Act. Concerns about high levels of ground, air and water pollution were already long-standing, and there was a strong profile of local civic organisation and political activism which had inputs into the ANC’s environmental policy in the early 1990s. This provided the foundation for the formation of the umbrella organisation the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in 1996, which took up an agenda explicitly using the language of environmental justice that was by then circulating within NGO networks.

Over subsequent years the work of the SDCEA has made 'South Durban's two oil refineries (two of only four in the country) emblematic of environmental justice conflict' (ibid.: 2616) and a model for how to engage in community mobilisation in other pollution 'hotspots' around the country.

In the environmental justice frame that has emerged in South Africa there are many parallels with the US (Debbane and Keil 2004; McDonald 2002). Most significantly, the connections between the civil rights movement in the US and anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa meant that the discourse of environmental racism resonated strongly in a country where the racialisation of space had been institutionally organised and maintained through state power. Other parallels included the focus on toxic and polluting activities and on anti-corporate campaigns, and the deliberate contrast drawn between new activist discourses and traditional South African environmental concerns of wilderness and nature conservation based in colonial and post-colonial ideology (Martinez-Allier 2002).

The post-apartheid arrival of democracy in South Africa in 1994 had the task of addressing deep inequalities, including environmental inequalities of various forms which discriminated against the majority black population. The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution accordingly included several statements of environmental rights: 'everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water ... an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being ... to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations' (Republic of South Africa 1996: s.27.1, s.24).

Whilst this positioning of environmental rights at the heart of the new constitution appeared a powerful assertion of the environmental justice frame, a number of observers have critiqued the way that environmental management has since been practised. They have particularly pointed out the lack of procedural as well as distributive justice – in the form of meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making – and the obstacles presented by other more powerful framings of environmental governance. As in the UK, Patel (2006) argues that the sustainability frame, which became rapidly established in post-apartheid South Africa (O'Riordan *et al.* 2000), has been dominant, often interpreted in technical and managerial ways that have failed to shake off the legacies of established colonial approaches to conservation and environmental management. She contends that, consequently, social and environmental justice dimensions have failed to be addressed within sustainability programmes and that the use of standard environmental assessment tools has failed to consider distributional consequences (Patel 2009). Bond (2000) similarly sees a neoliberal 'ecological modernization' perspective at work, overriding the individual rights supposedly protected by the constitution, whilst Oelofse *et al.* (2006) point to both a reliance on technocentric scientific approaches and an institutional implementation deficit as limiting the way that environmental objectives have been pursued. Debbane and Keil (2004) point to particular tensions of these forms in the case of management of water and water supply in the post-apartheid period. In these ways the enshrining of environmental justice rights in the constitution has not, as yet at least, had a

significant impact on established dominant policy framings of key actors, such as the Department for Environment and Tourism, or on the deeply embedded structural legacies of apartheid (Kalan and Peek 2005). Similar tensions are identified in research using an environmental justice frame focused on land reform in conservation areas (Geisler and Letsoalo 2000) and urban resettlement programmes (Dixon and Ramutsindela 2006).

Amongst environmental justice activists, however, the focus on questions of inequality and justice and the distributive and procedural rights of historically marginalised township communities has remained in place, but the scope of their framings has extended into a diversity of socio-environmental issues affecting the lives of ordinary people (McDonald 2002). These have included the provision of basic resource and infrastructural needs – such as water and electricity (Bond 2000; Debbane and Keil 2004), health and safety for workers in the mining sector, and the health risks of asbestos and herbicides (Martinez-Allier 2002). For example, the Environmental Justice Networking Forum has approximately 400 members across a diversity of civil society organizations, including faith-based, trade union, women's, youth and children's organizations, and a stated profile of concerns that include mining, food security, energy, waste, water and biodiversity – although it has struggled, as have many such initiatives, to maintain its infrastructure and resource base (Duma 2007). These groups have also readily worked with both an environmental justice and a sustainability framing, strategically shifting the labelling they use in different contexts and interactions.

In part as a consequence, McDonald (2005) argues that there have been significant differences of opinion amongst environmental justice groups in South Africa over the importance of race, gender and class as social framings and the potential to achieve meaningful reform within a market-based economy. Barnett and Scott (2007), in their analysis specifically of the work of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, identify many such tensions, for example, in the potential for the group to become co-opted through inclusion in formulaic decision-making processes and in its relationship with international donor NGOs pushing for cooperative rather than confrontational ways of working with the state and business. In moving towards partnership working and procedural inclusion, the SDCEA has faced major challenges in reconciling these strategies with foundational demands for historical redress and accountability for discrimination and environmental harm experienced over the long history of apartheid rule.

Comparisons and contextualisation

In the examples of the UK and South Africa we can see various forms of contextualisation, or grounding of the environmental justice frame. There are similarities and contrasts between the experiences in each country. Similarities include:

- a clear reference to and learning from the environmental justice frame in the US, and examples of international networking and interactions which promoted frame diffusion;

- an environmental justice frame having been taken up not only as a collective action frame within social movements, but also by government bodies who have introduced their own meanings and interpretations;
- differences having opened up between activist and governmental framings in terms of their constituent elements, specific languages and application;
- environmental justice being set alongside or within an existing sustainable development master frame, both by campaign groups and governments, leading to tensions as to their compatibility and relative importance;
- the importance of particular political events – new democratic institutions, devolution, new administrations – in providing openings for the introduction of an environmental justice frame into political debate and policy commitments.

Contrasts in the contextualisation of environmental justice in the two countries centre particularly on the extent to which the frame has been part of grassroots networking and has encompassed a discourse of environmental racism. Faber (2005) identifies a number of different competing discourses dominating environmental justice politics, only one of which is based around racial identity. In the UK the environmental justice frame has been promoted primarily by a mainstream environmental NGO. A wide range of socio-environmental issues have been included within the frame but without an emphasis on racial or ethnic identity politics. In Faber's (2005) categorisation, a 'socialist politics' has dominated, focused primarily on shared material interests or social class – although in Scotland there has been more substantial grassroots activism and the politics have had something of a nationalist flavour. In South Africa, there is more evidence of environmental justice emerging as a frame for grassroots mobilisations, following more closely the US trajectory, and including race as a key, if not dominant, discourse. Because of this, and its foundation in anti-apartheid politics, the environmental justice frame in South Africa has maintained a more radical edge, with activists positioned more clearly in opposition to rather than in consensus with governmental actors, although strategic tensions around this have been identified.

This profile of similarities and differences both between the two cases, and in comparison with the US, is sufficient to demonstrate that the environmental justice frame is not singular but flexible and dynamic, open to reconstruction as it moves both in space and time. In this way Williams and Mawdsley (2006) argue that the geography of environmental justice matters; it has to be defined within the context of each site in which it is used rather than being readily universalised under only one conceptualisation. As environmental justice globalises, its initial meaning derived from the US context is not simply reproduced, although neither is it entirely abandoned. There are a growing number of national contexts now being discussed within the literature which demonstrate this. For example, there is the way in which environmental justice in Israel engages with the dominance of security concerns and the intensely politicised status of the Arab minority population (Shmueli 2008), in Brazil with post-colonial legacies

(Souza 2008), and in Taiwan with the country's emergence from a military dictatorship and a growing movement for indigenous rights (Huang and Hwang 2009).

Before returning to discuss further the implications of these observations, we can now move to examine how the environmental justice frame has globalised not only 'horizontally' in space but also 'vertically' in its scales of concern.

Environmental justice framings of global issues

The environmental justice movement is potentially of great importance, provided it learns to speak not only for the minorities inside the USA but also for the majorities outside the USA (which locally are not always defined racially) and provided it gets involved in issues such as biopiracy and biosafety, or climate change, beyond local instances of pollution.

(Martinez-Allier 2002: 14)

For those looking from the outside, a striking feature of the US environmental justice frame in its earlier manifestations was its introspection. As already noted, its dominant concerns were with 'who got what' within the cities and regions of the US (Dobson 1988), not with questions of distribution, disproportionate impact or marginalisation extending beyond the borders of the US to encompass people elsewhere and the implications of international or global environmental processes (Newell 2005). For some observers, enthusiastic in other ways about the new form and constituency of environmentalism that had emerged in the US, this was a significant limitation (Martinez-Allier 2002), as it was failing to grapple with the justice issues which were paramount for many environmental and social advocates outside of the US and already situated within a sustainable development framing.

The shift towards environmental justice framing beginning to vertically 'upscale' its scope of concerns is not disconnected from the horizontal travelling of ideas and meanings discussed in the previous section. Part of the contextualisation processes that take place in frame movement involves redefinition of the scope and reach of the frame, and this redefinition can readily encompass not just indigenous local and national issues but also international and global ones. For example, in Scotland, when Friends of the Earth first formulated its environmental justice campaign theme, it adopted a definition of environmental justice which neatly and succinctly expressed the simultaneous local and global reach of justice issues 'no less than a decent environment for all: no more than a fair share of the Earth's resources' (Friends of the Earth Scotland 1999). Here justice is conceived in terms of both local rights to environmental quality and importantly also global responsibilities deriving from patterns of consumption (Dunion and Scandrett 2003). Similarly, when environmental justice became the framing for transnational activist networks, this was not restricted in substantive terms to connecting up mobilisations focused on local disputes over facility siting, access to clean water and so on. Transnational networks also positioned responsibilities for harm

in distant internationally dispersed locations firmly within the frame, connecting globalised economic and political relations with their environmental consequences (Pellow 2006). For example, the agenda of the Coalition for Environmental Justice transnational network in Central and Eastern Europe includes the exporting of risks from richer to poorer countries alongside a range of country-specific concerns (Steger 2007).

Looking, then, across the international and global scope of the various environmental justice framings that have been adopted internationally – as well as the organic development of the frame in the US, which in the late 1990s increasingly began to look beyond its own borders (Bullard 2005; Pellow 2006) – a diversity of internationally structured issues can be identified. Two of these will be discussed in later chapters – the international movement and disposal of hazardous and electronic wastes in Chapter 4, and global issues of climate change and climate justice in Chapter 8. Trade agreements are an important third example. The engagement of environmental justice activism with international trade and trade policy has been most directly analysed by Newell (2007) in the context of various forms of mobilisation in South America against both continent-wide and sub-regional trade agreements. He argues that groups working with, or drawing in part on, an environmental justice framing have been able to mount a stronger environmental critique of regional trade integration in the Americas which is far more grounded in justice to people and communities than the nature conservation agendas advanced by mainstream environmentalists involved in trade agreement campaigning. This deliberately atypical form of environmentalism, grounded in ‘campesino’ and indigenous peoples’ movements (and thereby claiming a broad constituency of support), has been driven by the local experience of living with neoliberal approaches to the control of resource rights and basic services such as water provision. Furthermore, he argues that an environmental justice frame has provided the basis for critiquing the procedural elements of trade policy, ‘who participates, on whose behalf and who gains from trade policy and at whose expense’ (ibid.: 238). Even where trade agreements have in principle conceded greater transparency and been opened up to a greater diversity of voices, the practices of involvement have been shown to be exclusionary and inaccessible to groups with a weaker resource base. Schlosberg (2007) makes a similar point in arguing that groups mobilised against global trade agreements in various parts of the world have been concerned not only with inequalities in the distribution of consequent environmental bads (pollution, waste and resource depletion), but also with matters of social and cultural recognition and participatory justice (see next chapter).

This and other examples of international-scale environmental justice concern show again how the frame has been open to evolution and recontextualisation over time. In the process of ‘scaling up’, other dimensions have also had to evolve, further distancing these evolved framings from the characteristics of the early US collective action frame. As we shall see in Chapter 8, with climate change in particular the assignment of blame and responsibility has extended beyond corporate and state actors to include the consumption practices of nations

and their citizens, a crucial development for more directly revealing the structural fault lines in relationships between the Global North and South. Climate change has also extended the driving concern for justice to people to include those who form part of future as well as current generations (Schlosberg 2007). The established prognostic demands for action by national and local levels of government have also had to extend further, to include demands for action on environmental justice by transnational intergovernmental regimes.

The implications of ‘going global’

So it is clear that environmental justice mobilisation and framing has now taken on an increasingly global form and perspective and that its reach extends far beyond the US and hence into very different socio-political circumstances. Both Joan Martinez-Alier (from Spain) and David Pellow (from the US), whose appeals for a more global environmental justice have been quoted earlier in this chapter, would approve. It is becoming an international master frame that, as Dawson (2000) argues, does not appear to require a particular political or economic context in which to flourish. In moving horizontally across space, vertically across scales and temporally as socio-environmental and political conditions have shifted, the environmental justice frame has shown the capacity to take on alternative emphases and to evolve and re-contextualise. Sometimes in both its horizontal and its vertical movement the environmental justice frame is proving instrumental in identifying new concerns and new material cases of inequality and injustice. It is more often though becoming attached to existing local, regional and international issues, framing and labelling these as matters of justice and thereby identifying them as part of wider systemic processes and wider demands for fairness and the protection of basic needs and rights (Schroeder *et al.* 2008).

In some ways it is ironic that environmental justice framing has emerged from the US, a country so deeply implicated in patterns of economic and environmental exploitation around the world, and in the causes of global scale problems such as climate change. Indeed this has itself created some difficulties and tensions for activists in countries such as South Africa that have strategically not wanted to be seen to be simply following a US-created discourse and model of campaigning (Kalan and Peek 2005). However, it has become clear from the preceding analysis that whilst the early US experience and networking with US activists have been influential, there is a large degree of local reinterpretation and reframing going on. As Debbane and Keil (2004) argue, and as discussed in the previous chapter, this demands a relative and scaled understanding of what constitutes environmental justice rather than one based on notions of universality and conformity. That is not to say that the environmental justice frame is born anew in each place it emerges, or that it has evolved out of all recognition from where it began. There are clear common reference points – around, for example, the incorporation of core demands for distributive and procedural justice, and, Schlosberg (2007) has argued, for individual and community-level recognition

and capability to function (see Chapter 3) – but the ways in which these are interpreted, combined and operationalised are open to variety and diversity. In a similar vein, Schroeder *et al.* (2008) argue that the core issues at the heart of environmental justice struggles, wherever they are found, are universal, part of broader patterns of distributive, procedural and racial injustice with global significance.

Whilst the capacity to co-evolve with socio-environmental and political change and to go global can be seen as both positive and necessary for environmental justice framings to continue to be relevant and to ‘do work’ for activists groups and the communities they represent, the analysis in this chapter has also identified tensions within this process. There is demonstrable scope for the radical edge of claims for environmental justice and the realisation of environmental rights to become blunted through reframing, relabelling and incorporation into the managerialist frameworks of government bodies. The case of the UK is instructive here. Much has been learnt, the evidence base on environment and social difference has progressed considerably (as we shall see in later chapters), and there is yet scope for a more strident justice discourse to emerge – particularly around international and global issues. It would clearly be wrong, though, to talk about an environmental justice *movement* in the UK, or indeed anywhere else in Western Europe, where managerialist and technocratic versions have tended to predominate.

The interaction between environmental justice and sustainable development framings is also interesting territory. For some observers and activists, their coming together is absolutely necessary and productive under the framing of ‘just sustainability’ (Agyeman and Evans 2003), but, as we have seen in South Africa, for others the tendency of sustainability perspectives to emphasise compatibility with the market, consensus approaches and ecological modernisation solutions can mean that questions of inequality and impacts on vulnerable and excluded groups are too easily downplayed, if not pushed aside.

Summary

Framing has been used in this chapter as a concept to examine how the environmental justice frame first emerged in a US context and how this gave it a series of distinctive characteristics that shaped its scope, priorities and assumptions. We have then traced how the use of the term has since globalised in two dimensions – horizontally in emerging in other places and cultures around the world, and vertically in becoming concerned with international and global justice issues. This, it has been argued, has implications for how we understand environmental justice as a frame that has multiple forms and is contextualised within the settings of its particular uses. Whilst the focus in this chapter has been predominantly on environmental justice as a frame for political activism – or collective action – we have seen how environmental justice discourse has also been translated into policy domains, with consequences for how it is then interpreted and understood.

Further reading

There are a number of edited books that have brought together contributions from different parts of the world and emphasised the international dimensions of environmental justice – these include Agyeman *et al.* (2003), Bullard (2005), Holifield *et al.* (2010) and an excellent recent addition: Carmin and Agyeman (2011). Several journal special issues have also followed this approach – *Geoforum* (2006, vol. 37, no. 5); *Society and Natural Resources* (2008, vol. 21, no. 7); *Antipode* (2009, vol. 41, no. 4). The work of Martinez-Allier (2002) on the ‘environmentalism of the poor’ has a broad international scope. The journal *Environmental Justice* (www.liebertpub.com) also has an international scope and has included short papers discussing environmental justice in various countries, including Taiwan, Brazil and Israel.

For material specifically on the UK context, see a special issue of the journal *Local Environment* (2005, vol. 10, no. 4) and reports and presentations available at the research and resource site at Lancaster University: <http://geography.lancs.ac.uk/EnvJustice/>. Capacity Global, a UK-based environmental justice group, has a useful website at www.capacity.org.uk/.

Environmental justice activism in South Africa is examined in a book by McDonald (2002), as well as various journal papers, notably Leonard and Pelling (2010) and Barnett and Scott (2007).