

3. Environmental injustice and its manifestations in Africa and its relation to race, class, marginalization and Poverty

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Abstract:

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, or income in relation to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. That is, all groups of people, including racial, ethnicity, religious or socioeconomic groups should bear a proportional share of both positive environmental benefits and the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies. Despite this, environmental injustice is manifested in different parts of Africa in many ways like transnational toxic wastes dumping, natural resource exploitation and the like. This paper tries to explore the manifestations of environmental injustice in different parts of Africa and its relation to marginalization and poverty.

Keywords:

Environmental justice; Exploitation; Environmental racism; Climate change; Marginalization

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Introduction

The issue of environmental justice is the most important concept in environmental ethics. Because it requires the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, and any other differences in the implementation, enforcement, and regulation of environmental issues. In this sense, individuals, groups, states and different multinational corporations (MNCs) should bear a proportional share of both positive environmental benefits and the negative environmental burdens (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). While there are many manifestations of environmental injustice in Africa, some of these manifestations are transnational toxic wastes dumping and natural resource exploitation, land appropriation and natural resource exploitation adversely affecting the poor and powerless indigenous minorities in underdeveloped societies (Adeola, 2001). For instance, in Ethiopia, slaughterhouses in Addis Ababa and other cities of the country adversely affect the health, social, and economic life of the society living around those areas. This is one of the major manifestations of environmental injustice. In addition to this, in the African context, race, class and gender cause environmental injustice. For example, environmental racism results in a nationwide phenomenon in which minority neighbourhoods bear a disproportionately large environmental burden as compared to white neighbourhoods (Ulezalka, 2005). Environmental justice has negative relationships with poverty and marginalization. The poor and marginalized communities are the dumping sites for hazardous wastes and the risk-takers for environmental burdens that are caused mainly by MNCs (Adeola, 2001).

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Generally, this paper tries to explore environmental justice, the manifestations of environmental injustice in Africa, the roles of race, class and gender as a means of environmental injustice and the negative correlation of environmental justice with marginalisation and poverty.

What is Environmental Justice?

There are various definitions of environmental justice. But, the most comprehensive definitions of environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, or income in relation to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. In this sense, fair treatment refers to all groups of people, including racial, ethnicity, religious or socioeconomic groups should bear proportional share of both positive environmental benefits and the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies (Bullard & Johnson, 2000).

Environmental justice movement began in the U.S. in the nineteen eighties with landmark struggles of poor, often rural, African- American communities against some of the world's largest corporations and unresponsive government agencies. The definition of the movement first began as "environmental racism," a phrase coined by Benjamin Chavis in the year nineteen eighty-two. Environmental justice expanded the movement to include Hispanic, Native American, and poor white groups facing the unfair distribution of environmental injustices (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 285).

The major concern of environmental justice is to combat the inappropriate distributions of environmental goods and bads; because the poor and indigenous communities get more environmental burden and less environmental goods and protection. Some investigators of the movement and the concept of environmental justice focus on the significance of procedural justice and participatory justice (Shrader-Frechette, 2002). Environmental justice movement has

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many important concepts of justice like distribution, participation, and capability discourses. Environmental justice movement discusses, analyzes, advocates, and requires justice. That is equitable distribution, recognition, capabilities, and functioning for all individuals and societies at large. (Schlosberg, 2007, 4-5). The main point of environmental justice is to acknowledge and to give recognition and capabilities for nature(human, individual animals, other species, and natural systems) (Schlosberg, 2007, 9).

Environmental justice movement tries to balance the damage of pollution, mal-development, and resource depletion. Environmental justice demands for both fair allocation of environmental benefits and burdens and calls for the mass participation of the society in evaluating and distributing these benefits and burdens. Accordingly, the main task of environmental justice is to combat environmental injustices such as the exploitation of the minorities by the majorities, the blacks by the whites, the poor by the rich, the developing by the developed, and so on. In addition to this, politically disfranchised, socially exploited, and culturally discriminated groups are more likely than affluent whites to live near polluting facilities, eat contaminated fish, and employed at-risk occupations. In most cases, the causes of environmental injustice are transnational and national corporations and governments of the country that construct questionable factories and facilities in the society who had no information about or to stop when the need arises. In addition, the political, economic, and friend influence upon authorities to distribute these facilities, factories, land, etc leads to environmental injustice(Shrader-Frechette, 2002, pp. 8-9).

What exactly is environmental justice? Aristotle distinguished two types of justice: "distributive justice and corrective justice. Distributive justice concerns with how various benefits and burdens should be distributed; corrective justice is about punishment and compensation" (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 90). Even though it is reasonable to think that some aspects of environmental justice involve corrective justice, the main concern here is to think of environmental justice as primarily a kind of

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distributive justice. According to this view, the environment is a resource whose allocation needs to be administered and regulated by principles of justice. So long as it is impossible to transfer various aspects of the environment physically from one society to another, this view calls for the allocation of environmental burdens and benefits according to the principles of justice. When it is seen from this standpoint, environmental resources are similar to other facilities and distributive goods like money, food, health care, or others over which people have claims of justice. It is an open question as to how exactly environmental resources are defined, how benefits and costs are assessed, what principles of justice are appropriate for governing their distribution, and who are the subjects and beneficiaries of these duties (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 90).

It is in the nineteen seventies that the idea of duties of environmental justice acquired the scope of the global issue. In the year Nineteen seventy-two, the UN held a conference in Stockholm, Sweden on the issues of the human environment. At this conference, the concept of global environmental injustice was introduced to solve the injustice committed by the developed industrial countries in developing countries. Poor countries usually claim that developed countries posed different environmental injustices in the process of their development and perpetuate to pose the same danger by appropriating more than their share of the earth's resources. For instance, poor countries claim that the United States is not only the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases but also its annual increases since nineteen ninety have been greater than those of any other country except China. On a per-capita basis Americans emit twenty-two times as much carbon dioxide as Indians, eleven times as much as Brazilians, and eight times as much as Chinese (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 90).

Participatory justice is also important at the global level. Most of the time, those who do not take part in the decision-making process in environmental issues face environmental injustice. For example, rising sea levels caused in part by climate change are likely to destroy completely countries such as Sao Tome and Principe, Kiribati, Maldives, and Tuval. Because their landmass will be underwater,

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these countries may literally cease to exist. The large numbers of people around the world who will suffer from climate change, most of them are not included when decisions are made in environmental issues. In different environmental debates and conferences, developing and economically poor countries are without any voice and are forced to accept the decisions of the developed countries. In some cases, the participation of the poor is denied because those in question are not recognized as in the domain of justice (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 92).

Justice is the central concern of environmentalism. The concept of environmental justice is multidimensional. It deals with the allocation of the benefits and burdens of our relationship with the environment, the need for participation in the decision-making process that affect the environment, and the importance of extending our conception of who is within the domain of justice. Seeing environmental conflicts from this perspective gives an opportunity for transforming environmentalism from a collection of views and prejudices united mainly by their opposition to various policies and projects into a set of positive visions that can guide us into the future. Putting justice at the centre also gives environmentalism a motivational heart that it often seems to lack (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, p. 98).

Recently, the frame of environmental justice is important to understand and to stand against unequal or discriminatory environmental exposure around the world. And there are two types of inequalities: transnational and global environmental inequalities. Environmental justice movements resist both the global and transnational patterns of inequality in environmental exposure, where the world's poorest face different threats. For instance, there has been an enormous increase in demands of energy and leads to pollution-intensive stages of processing those minerals into intermediate products, not only by transnational but also by national and state-owned firms. The restructuring of the world economy in the current phase of increasingly global production is leading to an increasingly global pattern of environmental injustice. According to several environmentalists,

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environmental justice embraces the concept that every individual regardless of race, ethnicity, or class has the right to be free from ecological destruction and deserves equal protection of his or her environment, health, employment, housing, and transportation (Robert Gottlieb, 2007, 288).

Manifestations of environmental injustice in Africa

There are many manifestations of environmental injustice in Africa. One of these manifestations is transnational toxic wastes dumping and natural resource exploitation. Transnational toxic waste dumping, land appropriation and natural resource exploitation adversely affect the poor and powerless indigenous minorities in underdeveloped societies (Adeola, 2001). Toxic waste dumping represents one of several activities that involve serious ecological disruptions, and environmental injustice, especially cross-national toxic waste dumping, natural resource exploitation, seizing of communal lands lead to degradation of the means of subsistence of indigenous people and displacement of indigenous communities (Adeola, 2001).

Among the recent cases of environmental injustice in Africa, the assassination of Ken Saro-Wiawho was the leader and eight other members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in November nineteen ninety-five in Nigeria. The detention, torture, and repression of other members of MOSOP have not yet stopped. This detention, torture and repression of the members of MOSOP are among the most compelling cases of environmental and civil rights transgression in developing nations (Adeola, 2001).

We can also find another case of environmental injustice committed by government agents especially in Africa. In some African countries, government agents adopt a policy that systematically eliminates members of minority groups in order to forcefully take their lands and natural resources.

The subjugation of indigenous minority groups extends to the subjugation of nature and the consequent ecological degradation. Minority status, lower socioeconomic status,

powerlessness, and other conditions of marginalization constitute the major factors influencing the extent of environmental injustice. Indigenous populations, ethno-classes and other minorities, and their rights to land, natural resources, clean air, good health, and environmental protection are viewed by the dominant group as expendable for the sake of national security, national unity, and economic development (Adeola, 2001).

For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, there is the exploitation of natural resources. This natural resource exploitation (energy production, timber harvesting, mineral extraction, oil exploration, hydro-electric and other mega-industrial projects) is committed by MNCs and host governments cooperatively. The above act causes dislocation and decimation of numerous indigenous communities and disturbs the entire ways of life in that region. From this, we can perceive that in many developing countries, indigenous people and other vulnerable communities are generally the victims of environmental degradation mainly caused by resource extractive operations of MNCs in the name of development. The most vulnerable groups include subsistence peasants, fishing communities, hunters and gatherers, and nomadic groups. One of the places in Africa which faces a serious threat of environmental degradation is Niger Delta. As it is known, this place is full of a different natural resource. Consequently, MNCs extract these resources supported by national governments. Thus, this natural resource exploitation, degradation, and unfair distribution of associated environmental hazards by MNCs or other powerful foreign and local vested interests remain a serious threat to Africa (Adeola, 2001).

From this, we can understand that environmental injustice leads to the marginalization of minority groups. This marginalization, in turn, brings about poverty because if the victims do not use their resources and displace from their land, they would not have any means to feed themselves. In addition, if the minority marginalized by the majority, this leads to conflict/civil war which indirectly causes poverty.

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Internal colonialism is also a condition in which both the dominant group and subordinate groups coexist as natives of the same society. In this case, the majority exploits the minority in different ways. For instance, in Nigeria, we can find an example of internal colonialism that contributes to environmental injustice. There are three elements that are critical to internal colonialism in this country. These are an ethnic-centred political dominance employed by the majority(dominant) to exploit the natural resource of minority communities; the alliance of the core ethnic groups, multinational oil companies, political elites, the military, and the government which generally represses the opportunity structures for the minorities; and massive ecological disruptions and the subsequent destruction of the basic modes of subsistence of the resource-dependent communities of indigenous minority groups. Many developed countries used underdeveloped countries of the third world as a reservoir of garbage, toxic wastes, DDT, and hazardous products. Some of the commonly exported hazardous wastes are: “acids, asbestos, automobile scrap, computer/electronic scrap, banned pesticides and agro-chemicals, hospital waste, dioxins containing wastes from fossil fuel electric power stations, scrap tires, scrap PVCs, mercury waste, lead-acid batteries, and metallic and galvanic sludges, all known to be lethal”. For instance, in the nineteen seventies, the U.S. exported to Egypt the banned poisoning pesticide which caused illness and death among the people. This poisoning pesticide also caused the death of 1,000 water buffalo(Adeola, 2001).

The trans-boundary movement of hazardous wastes attracts the attention of the international community. One of these attempts to control the movement of hazardous waste is the Basel Convention. This convention was held in response to the demands of underdeveloped nations many of them are in Africa. In relation to this, Koko, a small town of Nigeria, gained international attention in nineteen eighty-eight. Koko became a dumping ground for toxic wastes generated and exported by two Italian firms. Consistent with economic contingency perspective, this case illustrates that poverty is often a critical factor enticing people into accepting hazardous wastes for cash (Adeola,

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2001). This environmental injustice forces the indigenous people to leave their place. As a result, these people suffer from poverty.

The rising cost of hazardous waste disposal and increased sensitivity to LULUs and other toxic waste Storage, Treatment, and Disposal Facilities (STDFs) have encouraged MNCs to venture into the interiors of Third World countries where they can avoid visibility, stringent regulations, liability, and environmental pollution accountability (Adeola, 2001).

If we have discussed this much about the manifestations of environmental injustice in Africa as an overview, now let us discuss in brief the manifestation of environmental injustice in Ethiopia particularly. For instance, in different towns and cities of Ethiopia, a huge amount of dumping wastage sites highly affect the neighbouring residents. People lived around these hazardous wastage sites are affected by different disease and exposed for further expenses. For example, in different parts of Addis Ababa, particularly around condominium and other residential areas, there are various waste bins and these cause different diseases such as common cold and other related communicable diseases.

There is no sufficient public toilet around different cities. As a result, peoples are forced to excrete anywhere. This highly affects the health of society and leads to unwanted expenses. In addition to this, the slaughterhouses in Addis Ababa and other cities of the country also adversely affect the health, social and economic life of the society living around that area. These are the major manifestations of environmental injustice in Ethiopia and other developing countries.

There are different companies in the world that invest their capital on horticulture (particularly, flower production) in developing countries, particularly in Ethiopia. These developed countries know very well the side effects of flower productions on the environment and the health of the people. But, they are engaged in this sector for their own sake, without considering its impact on us. However, in

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the current situation, the government of Ethiopia considers it as one of the major areas of investment. As a result, there are different flower production sites in Ethiopia. For example, in Oromia and Amhara regions foreign investors invest in this sector. However, peoples living in these areas and employees are affected by different diseases and it affects soil fertility. This has been clearly seen in Kenya. This is also another form of environmental injustice that is happened in Ethiopia and between developed and developing countries. So, this environmental injustice should also be addressed.

How do race, class and gender intersect in the African environmental context?

Environmental justice is an attempt of resolving the problems which arise from environmental discrimination, particularly environmental racism. Environmental discrimination is actions and practices which results from both individual ideologies and social structures that preserve and reinforce the domination of subordinate groups with respect to the environment. This discrimination with respect to race is environmental racism (Gelobter, 1993).

Environmental injustice includes economic injustice, social injustice and an unjust incidence of environmental quality. All of this injustice overwhelmingly indicates continuous exploitation of communities of colour, race and class dominated society on environmental matters (Gelobter, 1993).

Environmental racism is real. It is as real as the racism found in housing, education, employment and the judicial system. Environmental racism results in the nationwide phenomenon in which minority neighbourhoods bear a disproportionately large environmental burden as compared to white neighbourhoods. It refers to any policy, practise or directive that differently affects or disadvantages individuals, groups or communities based on race or colour. This is the outcome that the landmark "1987 United Church of Christ report on toxic waste and race claimed was not the result of mere coincidence."Indeed, evidence suggests that this disproportionate economic impact from

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environmental mismanagement was already considered a decade earlier, albeit without the suggestion of discriminatory intent (Ulezalka, 2005).

It was not until nineteen eighty-seven, however, that the term “environmental racism” was coined. It was described as discrimination in environmental policy-making, enforcement of regulations and laws, and the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste disposal and the putting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in light of the fact that the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants occurs mainly in communities of colour. This was the reality that the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice study uncovered and it is the reality of hundreds of minority communities across the United States. The residents of these communities know what environmental injustice is they live it every day. (Ulezalka, 2005)

How environmental justice does relate to marginalization and poverty in Africa?

To understand the relationship between environmental justice with marginalization and poverty in Africa, considering the case of Koko, in Nigeria and the Ogoni people in Niger Delta is relevant to make our discussion brief. Koko is a small town found in Nigeria and it attracted international attention in nineteen eighty-eight because it served as a dumping ground for toxic waste generated and exported by two Italian companies. Poverty is a critical factor that motivates society to acknowledge hazardous wastes for a cash payment from these two Italian firms(Adeola, 2001). This implies that due to economical problems some peoples in Koko accepts dangerous wastes either knowingly or unknowingly to get revenue from the Italian MNCs. Therefore, poverty is the main obstacle for environmental justice and leads to the existence of environmental injustice.

Like poverty, environmental justice is also influenced by marginalization. This is also visible in the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. Historically, the Niger Delta region has been the source of major conflicts between the native population, multinational oil corporations, and the

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Nigerian government military and police forces, and these lead to the Marginalization of the Ogoni people. Because of the Ogoni people represent one of various diverse minority ethnic groups found in Nigeria. And this person marginalized by the dominant tribal groups of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba due to their minor voices in the Nigerian government. The political power controlled by the majority of ethnic groups in Nigeria has been used to appropriate and transfer resources from the Ogoni people (Niger Delta) to develop their own areas. This, in turn, creates an increased marginalization among the subordinated resource-dependent ethnic communities or the Ogoni people. It is also true that in many parts of the world, minorities suffer various types of marginalization, discrimination, injustice, and environmental abuses.

Ogoni land is the most resourceful area with different minerals. Yet the Ogoni people were not the beneficiaries from the oil extraction activities which are done by foreign MNCs. The return for these people is only environmental burdens like pollution of their environment. Because it serves as a site of hazardous wastes rather than to acquire economical benefit from their own resources (Adeola, 2001). This is one major manifestation of the impacts of marginalization on environmental justice. In other words, it indicates the negative correlation between environmental justice and marginalization. Therefore, the poor and the marginalized communities are the dumping sites for hazardous wastes and risk-takers of environmental burdens that are caused by MNCs, supported by the local government. So, poverty and marginalization are the major manifestations of environmental injustice. From these two cases, we can deduce that worldwide disparity of authority and material goods, institutionalised bias at various levels, racial discrimination, neo-colonialism and internal domination, unprincipled global industry practices, dictatorial regime, and fraudulent local leaders are the bases of global environmental injustice. To realize environmental justice at the international level, the applications of the same environmental policies across the whole nation is mandatory without any bias and discrimination(Adeola, 2001).

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Conclusion

So long as environmental injustice affects the whole environment and climate (though the degree differs from one place to another) because its effect is not limited to a limited area, the whole human community must participate and should involve for positive impact. As such the environmental movement needs to meet the challenge of providing social justice by exploring the limitations of the current decision-making process and achieving a safe environment for all of us.

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