The "Environmentalization" of Social Struggles – the Environmental Justice Movement in Brazil

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Introduction

There is strong support in the sociological literature for use of the term "environmentalization" to characterize the historicity of the environmental issue (Buttel,1992; Leite Lopes, 2004). The term can be used to designate both the adoption of a generic environmental discourse by different social groups, as well as the concrete incorporation of environmental justifications to legitimate institutional, political and scientific practices. Its theoretical pertinence gains particular strength, however, because it allows characterizing specific processes of "environmentalization" to given places, contexts and historic moments. It is by means of these processes that new phenomenon are being constructed and exposed to the public sphere, as well as old phenomena are renamed as "environmental," and a unification effort encompasses them under the seal of "environmental protection." In conjunction, disputes over legitimacy arise, in an effort to characterize the different practices as environmentally friendly or harmful. In these disputes, in which different social actors give their discourses an environmental perspective, collective actions are sketched in the constitution of social conflicts over these objects, whether by questioning the technical standards of appropriation of the territory and its resources, or by contesting the distribution of power over them.

The concept of the "environmental movement" has been evoked, in Brazil, to designate a special space of circulation of discourses and practices associated to "environmental protection," which takes the shape of an "associative nebula" composed of a diversified group of organizations with different degrees of structural formation, from NGOs and representatives of international environmental movements to "environmental" divisions of not specifically "environmental" groups and grassroots groups organized around specific situations. This group of entities involved in the Brazilian environmental debate has always confronted a central question: how is it possible to engage in

campaigns that evoke "environmental protection" without neglecting the evident priorities of the struggle against poverty and social inequality? That is, how can they prove that they are capable of responding to the current developmentalist proposals that strive for the profitability of capital in the name of generating employment and income. In other words, how is it possible to achieve legitimacy for environmental issues, when concern for the environment is frequently presented as an obstacle to confronting unemployment and overcoming poverty? How is it possible to give a logical and socially acceptable treatment to the environmental implications of the struggles against social inequality and for economic development? This article is a response to these questions, and discusses how the environmentalization of social demands and conflicts in Brazil has created specific conditions for the rise of rhetoric and an organizational dynamic associated to the notion of "environmental justice."

Cleavages within "Environmentalism"

The expression "associative nebula" used by André Micoud (2001) to describe environmentalism in France, proves to be dually pertinent in the Brazilian case, both because of the diffuse and multiform character of the institutions that the concept involves, as well as the nebulous lack of transparency that increasingly involves certain procedures of environmentalization under which: companies suspect of predatory practices create environmental discourses, while simultaneously refusing external controls and proclaiming their capacity for environmental self-control; government authorities make environmental legislation more flexible, alleging gains of speed and rigor in licensing; promoters of large hydroelectric projects that de-structure the lives of indigenous communities affirm that they will develop "sustainability" programs aimed at "assuring the continuity of economic, social, cultural and environmental factors" of the indigenous groups, and so on.

How can the organizations of the "environmental nebula" be analytically portrayed? Certainly , by their condition as agents involved in the elaboration of the environment as an issue and problematic horizon of social construction and not by their simple inclusion in formal registers of entities. Not by the rhetorical excuse that they make of the mission to "protect the environment" – a fruit of a self-proclamation strongly influenced by outside stimuli – but first by the substantial distinction of their practices (which certainly include their discursive practices).

Strictly speaking, in their first phase, environmental associations had no legal structure, having been created with specific objectives that constituted the core of their activities, equally presenting a variety of complaints from informal residents groups and victims of environmental impacts of industrial or agro-industrial corporations (Viola, 1987). The most common targets of these associations were problems that affected the life of local communities – whether

in the cities, where urbanization provokes locational conflicts associated to the effects of agglomeration, construction of infrastructure and industrial factories, or in rural areas, where the expansion of capitalist activities and the implantation of large investment projects destabilize the forms of existence of traditional communities. The arrival to the country of representations of international environmental entities also gave shape to a more restricted field of broad campaigns, linked to international debates about biodiversity and climate change. A certain number of entities were established to directly influence government policies and the legislative debate.

A distinction, internal to "environmentalism" has proved, from the start, to be directly related to the way that the fight against inequality was or was not related to the content of environmental struggles. It is now recognized that the strong connection between environmental and economic issues had been underestimated during the initial phase of the constitution of entities that were dedicated to environmental protection. The relationship between the environment and social justice, however, gained particular importance in the mid 1980s, culminating with the formation, in the conjuncture opened by the realization of the United Nations environmental conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, of a new entity for articulation, the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development – through which they sought to incorporate the environmental issue to the broader critical debate and search for alternatives to the dominant development model. Since then, an inconclusive but persistent dialog has been established around the construction of common agendas among environmentalist entities and union activists, the movement of landless rural workers, those affected by dams, community movements on the peripheries of cities, rubber-tappers, extractivists and the indigenous movement.

The current literature indicates that an important change took place in the Brazilian environmental movement in the 1990s, with internal differentiations caused by an institutionalization process. Groups were established with professional, technical and administrative staffs with a systematic ability to capture financial resources, sparking, at the time, a debate about the redefinition of the identities of those who see themselves as part of the "environmental movement." But amateurism and professionalism, informalism and institutionalization appear to have been relatively formal aspects of more substantive divisions that riddled the "environmental nebula" of that period, which was increasingly divided between a paragovernmental or paracorporate pragmatism and criticism of the dominant developmentalist model; between being an instrument of "ecological modernization" of Brazilian capitalism and a social actor with an investment in the expansion of the field of rights. It is a fact that some of the entities are dedicated to acting directly in the managerial-administrative domain, serving the bureaucratic apparatus of the "environmental sector of government" and providing information, technical reports or conflict mediation." They are thus strongly oriented toward the state, eventually seeking to occupy space in the

representations reserved for "civil society" in firms that consult environmental policy agencies, or the market, providing discursive solutions, mediations and legitimation to the "environmentalization" of companies. The trend observed towards making environmental policies more "scientific" has been contrasted by a trend to make the movements more scientific; official technocracy was confronted by "countering technical experts" and the so-called "environmental sector of government" came to correspond to an environmental community of associations of specialists. Institutions of a para-administrative character were formed that functioned in networks, either within the state, or serving as a transmission belt for the execution of their policies, via pedagogical practices or consulting. Many of these organizations tend to give priority to the pragmatism of effective action rather than to democratic measures and social organization.

Another subset of entities of the "environmental nebula" affirm themselves, in turn, as agents in a force field, putting into play the distribution of control over territorialized resources through direct or symbolic conflicts in the dispute for the legitimate definition of what is or is not "sustainable", environmentally benign, etc, but aimed notably at society, from the perspective of their organization and considering the environmental question from an eminently political nature. Militants active in this field, referred to the situation in the late 1990s as follows: " the philosophical ecological movement was overcome by a more pragmatic ecological movement"; "the environmental movement began to decline because a certain confusion arose: the original struggle was for a new form of development and not a search for palliative solutions," because "we are not consultants, we want to change society" and "our role is to work for the government; it is not to hide the conflict, but to make it visible"; "the group of combative entities grew less than those which are aimed at the market"; "most of the directors of the NGOs are focused on services, offering consultancy, mainly for polluting companies." These statements are found in the thesis of Loureiro (2000, p.210-7).

Well -established social movements entered the field of militant "ecologism," which put the environment on the agenda of the subaltern groups that they sought to represent, as occurred, for example, in the 1980s with rubber-tappers in Acre State. This is the case of the Movement of People Affected by Dams, which accused the electrical sector of profiting by expropriating the environment from those displaced by the dams and by the Landless Farmworkers Movement (MST), which questioned the concept of productivity, affirming that land is not "productive" if it produces "anything at any cost". The MST accused large agribusinesses that use chemical-mechanically intensive production techniques of destroying resources rich in fertility and biodiversity and thus not complying with the social function of property.

During the 1990s, the impression developed among analysts and social actors that militant environmentalism was substituted by a pragmatic and technically oriented "result-oriented environmental movement." Nevertheless,

this impression was not generalized, given that some actors – and authors – affirm that a neutralization of the environmental movements was conducted by multilateral organizations, companies that pollute and governments, in an effort that had been successful only in conjunction with what they call the "rootless ecology movement," which lacks strong ties to social movements. For Arnt & Schwartzman (1992, p.125), "the rootless environmentalist idea reveals the distorted truth of its falsity: it expresses a modernization of a system that obeys its own interests." In an earlier work (Acselrad, 2002, p.13), we suggest that

> a portion of the "rootless ecology movement" responds favorably to the consensus-seeking discourse promoted by multilateral agencies, which is apologetic of public-private partnerships, of delegitimizing the national sphere in favor of the local sphere and of favoring fragmented actions in detriment to articulated coherence in political action.

There are, in fact, indications that the "substitution" of a militant project for technical-scientific action associated to the discourse of localism and to the application of technologies for forming consensus is a common proposal among multilateral agencies, governments and polluting companies. In a recent report for Brazil, the World Bank said it "recognized its role as a catalyst" in promoting the participation of civil society (Garrison, 2000). It thus pretends to promote an action of anticipation, capable of capturing the militant movements to bring them within the dominant standard of development, which they had called "ecological modernization," a notion that designates the process by which political institutions internalize ecological concerns in order to conciliate economic growth with the resolution of environmental problems, giving emphasis to technological adaptation, the celebration of the market economy, the belief in the collaboration and in consensus (Blowers, 1997).

This type of neutralization of critics in which there is "a change of the place and social condition of critical confrontation, to allow the dominant actors to avoid losing relative superiority and to attribute to them strength derived from new circumstances," is called by Boltanski & Chiapello (1999) "dislocations" or shifts. These are organizational changes or alterations in the criteria for social allocation by which capitalism assures continuity to its own mechanisms, which help to dilute the criticisms that are aimed at them. The "shift" that takes shape by transforming "confrontation into collaboration,"1 seeking to make the ecological conflict a dimension of the "partnership between civil society and government," would not, however, achieve success with what is seen as a socially enrooted ecology movement. The militant environmentalists sought to preserve the space of environmental criticism of the developmental model and assure that the environmental question is considered in the elaboration of a counter-hegemonic political project. It is not exactly the providing of services to the state and to companies that is the object of criticism: what the militants of the militant ecology movement reject is the legitimacy of political action guided by

cooperation through consensus. The militant environmentalists affirm that "the NGOs of the market try not only to occupy the space for providing services, but also the institutional spaces, the channels of popular participation" (Loureiro, 2000, p.212).

The entities and the movements that in the first decade of the 21st century began in Brazil to associate their actions to the notion of "environmental justice" are certainly part of this group that is more militant than professional, which is more involved in a critical discussion of public policy than in providing technical assistance to governments and companies.

The Issue of Environmental Justice and its Construction in Brazil

The concept of "environmental justice" expresses a resignification of the environmental issue. It results from a unique appropriation of the environmental issue by socio-political dynamics traditionally involved with the construction of social justice. This process of resignification is associated to a reconstitution of the arenas where the social conflicts over the construction of possible futures take place. In these arenas, the environmental issue is increasingly central and understood to be linked to the traditional social issues of employment and income.

In speaking of a resignification of the environmental question, it is important to conduct a brief review of the meanings that have been attributed to it in recent history. Since the beginning, the environmental issue has had distinct meanings, either countercultural, or utilitarian. The first constitutes a movement that questions the lifestyle that has justified the dominant standard of appropriation of the material world - so-called Fordist consumerism, coupled with mechanical-chemical industrialization of agriculture etc. The second is a utilitarian meaning initially presented by the Club of Rome, 2 which after 30 years of economic growth in the central capitalist countries, was concerned with assuring the continuity of capital accumulation and economizing resources in material and energy resources.

Heterodox economist Georgescu-Roegen then intervened in the debate by warning: economizing quantities of materials and energy will only delay the problem. It is not a question of only economizing resources, but of asking why we appropriate material and energy. Ecology, he said, does not translate only in scarce quantities, but in the quality of the social relationships on which are based the social uses of the planet. Thus, according to Georgescu-Roegen, the fundamental ecological question is: do we use the planet's resources to produce plows or cannons?

Therefore, utilitarian and cultural concepts have since the begining, disputed the construction of the environmental issue. According to the hegemonic utilitarian logic, the environment is one, and composed strictly of material resources, without specific and distinct sociocultural contents; it

is expressed in quantities; it justifies questioning the means and not only the ends by which society appropriates the planet's resources; it presumes a single, instrumental environmental risk – the rupture of capital's sources of supply of material and energetic inputs, as well as the rupture of the material conditions of capitalist urbanity – that is, the risk of the growing inviability of the productive city, because of pollution, congestion etc. Given this sole environment, the instrumental object of the accumulation of wealth, pollution is seen as "democratic," and does not make class distinctions.

The cultural logic, in turn, questions the ends by which humans appropriate the planet's resources; the environment has multiple sociocultural qualities; there is no environment without a subject– or that is, there are distinct meanings and logics to its use according to the distinct standards of societies and cultures. Environmental risks, in this view, are differentiated and unequally distributed, given the differing capacities of social groups to escape the effects of the source of these risks. Revealing the distributive inequality and the multiple meanings that societies can attribute to their material foundations, opens space to the perception and the charge that the environment of certain social subjects prevails over the environment of others, giving rise to what has come to be called "environmental conflicts." The environment thus comes to become one of the issues pertinent to the culture of rights – the metaphoric rights of future generations, in a first instance, constitutive of an also metaphoric conflict between current subjects and ones who are not yet born; but then, the perception that, beyond the metaphor of intergenerational conflict, , it is also necessary to consider the reality of "truly existing environmental conflicts," experienced by the co-existing subjects. And these co-existing subjects of environmental conflicts are frequently those who denounce environmental inequality, or that is, the disproportional exposure of the socially more dispossessed to the risks of the technical-productive networks of wealth or their environmental dispossession by the concentration of the benefits of development in few hands. Pollution is not, in this perspective, necessarily "democratic," and affects different social groups in different ways.

The two logics sketched here correspond to two models of strategic action. The utilitarian logic shapes the strategy called ecological modernization, through the affirmation of the market, technical progress and political consensus. The "society of owners" advocated by neoconservatism is its guide: a revolution of efficiency is evoked to economize the planet, giving price to that which has no price. In contrast, the cultural logic gave origin to actions that denounce and sought to overcome the unequal distribution of the benefits and environmental damage. Considering that social injustice and environmental degradation have the same root, it would be necessary to alter the - unequal - mode of distribution of power over environmental resources, and remove from the powerful the ability to transfer environmental costs of development to the more dispossessed. The cultural diagnosis indicates that the unequal exposure to risks is due to the

different mobility of social groups: the most wealthy are able to escape risks, while the poor circulate within a circuit of risk. This gives rise to action to combat environmental inequality and to give equal environmental protection to all social and ethnic groups.

It thus involves – as has progressively taken place since the 1990s – a conflict of projects, involving differing discourses, concepts, institutions and practices. Ecological modernization refuses political regulations; proposes giving a price to that which has no price; opposes the logic of rights with the logic of interests; and tends to see the environment within the logic of private property – the "tragedy of the commons".3 It is a paradigm that presents the privatization of common goods as a solution for their economic use (countering the conquests of movements such as that of babaçu coconut crackers in Maranhão or arumã collectors in Baixo Rio Negro, for example, which affirm territorialities and a heterogenic legal system). The "environment" is seen as a "business opportunity" (as found in the dominant concepts presented in the successive Multi-Year Investment Plans presented by Brazilian governments). The environment and sustainability become important categories for interterritorial and interurban competition; to lure capital, the "ecology" and "sustainability" become a single symbol, a brand that wants to be attractive.

The strategy anchored in the notion of environmental justice, in contrast, identifies the unequal exposure to risk as a result of a logic that causes the accumulation of wealth to be based on the environmental penalization of the most needy. The operation of this logic is associated to the functioning of land markets, whose "coordination" causes harmful practices to be located in undervalued regions, as well as the absence of policies that control the market. This socio-territorial segmentation has deepened with the globalization of markets and the commercial opening – that is, with the greater liberty in the movement and displacement of capital,4 with a decreased cost of relocation and increased power through the exercise of locational blackmail by capital, which can use the need for jobs and public revenue to impose polluting practices and setbacks in social rights. Criticisms of the operation of these mechanisms and the mounting of organizational capacity and resistance to locational blackmail, are, as a consequence, tools for the redefinition of current social and technical practices for the appropriation of the environment, the spatial location of activities and for the distribution of power over environmental resources.

In the social sciences, the concept of environmental inequality has gained theoretical weight among a number of authors, such as the NeoWeberian Murphy (1994), who suggests that societies are increasingly structured in "environmental classes" – some that gain from degradation and others that pay the environmental costs. Schnaiberg et al. (2004), affirm that the population is divided in economic terms, part of it involved in the "mill of production," with those rejected being allocated to common spaces where the most poor live, exempting those who decide from suffering the local environmental damages.

A criticism of the common logic that the environmental cause is intrinsically beyond class, can be found in scholars of development such as Peter Newell (2005), for whom "the political and social cleavages of race, class and gender are key to the understanding of the global organization of environmental inequality. " Ultraliberal thinking, in contrast, challenges this, alleging that there is no injustice when people voluntarily decide to accept disproportional risk in exchange for economic advantages (Perhac, 1999) or that "ecopopulism is much more concerned with political pressure than with the health of communities: the goal is to increase the political power of the communities." "Mass poisoning" – add the critics of the environmental justice movement – is an issue used to stir anxiety, to subordinate the general objectives of democratization; the environmental justice movement does not want more equal pollution, but to increase the role of the communities" (Foreman, 1998).

What is effectively in play in this conflict? Everything suggests it involves how the material and spatial conditions of social production and reproduction are organized. More specifically, it involves how different social forms of appropriation of environmental resources are distributed in space, and how, in this distribution, the duration of an activity, characterized by certain spatial practices, 5 is affected by the operation of other spatial practices. For example, it involves how the expansion of the monoculture of Eucalyptus causes *quilombo* residents to lose their lands and water sources. It is found when expansion of genetically modified soybeans makes unviable the activities of small organic farmers. It is seen when the production of cheap energy for multinational aluminum companies means the fishermen and river dwellers of Tocantins lose their ability to fish, and when workers in petrochemical production are contaminated by persistent organic pollutants that damage their health.

Environmental justice is, therefore, an emerging concept that is part of the historic process of the subjective construction of the culture of rights. In recent experience, this notion of justice rose from the strategic creativity of social movements that alter the configuration of social forces involved in environmental struggles and, in certain circumstances, produce changes in the state and regulatory apparatuses responsible for environmental protection.

In the United States, the Environmental Justice Movement rose in the mid 1980s, denouncing the socioterritorial logic that make the social conditions for the exercise of rights unequal. Contrary to the "Nimby" or Not In My Backyard logic, the actors who began to join this movement propose the politicalization of the issue of racism and environmental inequality, denouncing the logic that they maintain has always been dominant "in the poor people's backyards" (Bullard, 2002). After nearly 20 years of criticisms that denounce the mechanisms that produce environmental inequalities in the United States, the question earned national visibility in 2005 with the global display of the socio-demographic profile of the victims of Hurricane Katrina that struck New Orleans. 6 Even before this, representatives of some Environmental Justice Movement networks

in the United States were in Brazil, in 1998, 7 to promote their experience and establish relations with local organizations willing to establish alliances in the resistance to processes of "exportation of environmental injustice." 8

Contacts were made at this time with NGOs and academic groups, which were re-established through the realization of various workshops at different editions of the World Social Forum. A first initiative to re-read the U.S. experience by Brazilian entities took place through discussion materials prepared and published by the nongovernmental organization IBASE, by the representatives of the environmental commission of the CUT workers union center in Rio de Janeiro and by the research groups of IPPUR/UFRJ. The three volumes of the series Unionism and Environmental Justice (IBASE/CUT-RJ/IPPUR-UUFRJ, 2000) had limited circulation and impact, but stimulated other university groups, as well as NGOs and unions, to explore the core of that debate, which led to the organization of the International Environmental Justice and Citizenship seminar held in Sept. 2001 in the city of Niteroi, joining representations of different social movements, NGOs, researchers from different regions of Brazil, and a few intellectuals and representatives of the Environmental Justice Movement in the United States, including sociologist Robert D. Bullard, responsible for the first environmental inequality map that was used as an empirical base to substantiate charges made by movements in the United States. 9

Because of this seminar, 10 the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network was created in Sept. 2001, which, after debate, prepared a declaration expanding the scope of the complaints beyond the issue of environmental racism in the allocation of toxic waste, which had led to the founding of an organization born in the realm of the black movement in the United States. The definition of a category of "environmental justice" then expanded to include a set of principles and practices that:

> a – assure that no social group, whether it is ethnic, racial or class-based, bears a disproportionate portion of the negative environmental consequences of economic operations, political decisions and federal, state and local programs, as well as the absence or omission of such policies;
>
> b – assure just and equitable, direct and indirect access to the country's environmental resources;
>
> c – assure broad access to relevant information about the use of environmental resources and the destination of residue and location of sources of environmental risks, as well as democratic and participative processes in the definition of related policies, plans, programs and projects;
>
> d – favor the establishment of collective subjects of rights, social movements and popular organizations that are protagonists in the construction of alternative development models that assure the democratization of access to environmental resources and the sustainability of their use. (Acselrad, 2004, p.13-20)

From 2001 to 2004, the Network established itself basically as a tool for the digital exchange of experiences and complaints, joining about 100 entities. At the first meeting held in 2004, members of the Network met to clarify the lines of confrontation of the group of actors and social movements represented there with a development model "aimed at the production of profits at any cost." In the Amazon, for example, they denounced the injustices associated to the mechanisms of primitive accumulation, characterized by the sequence of illegal land sales and occupation, exploitation of lumber, deforestation, extensive cultivation and entrance of high technology soybeans – a type of "ornitorrinco" applied to territory, to use, by analogy, the term coined by Sociologist Francisco de Oliveira (2003) to designate the unique articulation between modern and globalized forms of production with primitive forms of exploitation of labor and extraction of wealth.

Given the more limited integration of the Brazilian territory to the circuits of globalized capital, with the subordinated exclusion or integration of local communities, alternative routes are traced of a territorial articulation of the local forms of production with the domestic market, without submission to the strong agents in the world market. The struggles that evoke these alternatives politicize the environmental issue and question the development model that articulates the different spatial practices. The protagonists of these struggles are characterized by their resistance to the "locational blackmail of investments" and a willingness to discuss the conditions in which they intend to integrate the local populations to the market. This is because powerful agents in the world market are important subjects in the country's development model. The strength of these agents resides in the "locational blackmail" by which they submit everyone who is seeking employment to the generation of profits and government tax revenue at any cost. On a national level, if it does not have financial advantages, freedom to remit profits, stability, etc., internationalized capital threatens to "dislocate" to other countries. On the subnational plane, if it does not receive tax advantages, free land, flexible environmental, urban and social norms, it also "moves," thus penalizing the states and municipalities with stronger measures to preserve social and environmental conquests. At the same time, by choosing the most profitable space to relocate (or that is, those locations where they are able to obtain fiscal and environmental advantages), they wind up rewarding with their resources states and municipalities where the level of social organization is lower and the effort to assure respect for legal conquests weaker. That is, in this political-institutional framework, capital is able to "internalize the ability to disorganize society," punishing with a lack of investments the most organized spaces, and rewarding with its resources the more disorganized spaces. The so-called "dual standard" 11 - the adoption of distinct environmental criteria by a single company in different points of the planet – is an expression of the so-called "locational blackmail," which is part of the political strategy of the large companies that seek to force the less organized sectors of society to accept

pollution levels rejected by better organized countries and social sectors, which are more discerning when they define environmental regulations and pollution restrictions. It is in this adverse context that we see the establishment of collective subjects that refuse the imposition of a "dual standard" in environmental regulations, demand broad access to relevant information about the use of environmental resources and the ability to make decisions about their own territories autonomously, with the goal of establishing fair and equitable access to the environmental resources of the country - as the concept of environmental justice has been materialized in the recent Brazilian experience (Acselrad, 2008a, p.75-97). 12

Through a definition expanded and reinterpreted by the country's social actors, those understood to be subjects of resistance to the production of environmental inequalities include: the victims of contamination of not directly productive spaces, found around large projects that carry risk and in the peripheries of cities where environmentally undesirable installations (garbage and toxic waste dumps, etc.; a) in this case, inequity would result from the lower capacity of the residents of these peripheries to be heard in the decision-making spheres or even give their consent – given the lack of employment, income, public health and education services – in the expectation that these projects would bring some type of local benefit ; b) the victims of the "productive" contamination internal to the environments of industrial and agricultural labor, by which economic interests profit from the degradation of workers' bodies, through disinformation, counter-information, and dressing up of information as well as employment blackmail (Malerba, 2004); c) victims of dispossession of environmental resources – soil fertility, water and genetic resources, as well as territories essential to the identity reproduction of communities and socio-cultural groups – by large infrastructure projects and productive projects that destabilize the spatial practices of traditional populations. The criticism of the movements is therefore aimed both upstream and downstream from the productive projects, and at the very locus of the production of goods. In this realm, the reading of the environmental question by groups of workers leads to a questioning of the legal frontier between the interior and the exterior of the productive units, offering new possibilities for alliances among workers who deal with dangerous substances and residents around the polluting units. 13

The struggle for environmental justice, in the Brazilian case, thus combines: the defense of culturally specific environmental rights – traditional communities located at the frontier of the expansion of capitalist and market activities; the defense of rights to equitable environmental protection from socioterritorial segregation and the environmental inequality caused by the market; the defense of rights to equal access to environmental resources, and opposition to the concentration of fertile land, water and safe grounds in the hands of the powerful economic interests. But the defense of the rights of future generations must also be highlighted. And how do the movement's representatives

make the logical articulation between present struggles and "future rights"? By proposing to interrupt the mechanisms that transfer the environmental costs of development to the most poor. What these movements try to show is that, as long as environmental problems can be transferred to the most poor, the general pressure on the environment will not cease. They thus establish a link between a generic discourse about the future and the concrete historic conditions by which, in the present, the future is being defined. This is where the strategic junction between social justice and environmental protection takes place: through the affirmation that, to impede the destructive pressure on everyone's environment, it is necessary to begin protecting the weakest.

How can the predatory pressure exercised on the weakest be identified? The "locational blackmail of investments" is the central mechanism, in the conditions of liberalization prevalent today, for imposing environmental and labor risks on the most destitute populations. Thus, without suitable environmental policies for licensing and inspecting of activities and without social policies and consistent employment, the most poor and unorganized populations tend to succumb to the promises of employment "at whatever costs." The dynamic of these movements suggest, however, that the condition of destitution of certain social groups is a key element in favoring the profitable investments in polluting and dangerous processes. It is for this reason that, in the understanding of the popular sectors mobilized around the environmental struggles, the fusion between environmental risk and social insecurity is increasingly more clear – these are the central elements in the reproduction of the inequalities in times of economic liberalization. The understanding is increasingly diffused that environmental protection is not, contrary to common sense, a cause restricted to urban middle classes, but an integral part of the social struggles of the majorities. It is by means of their argumentative strategies and innovative forms of struggle that the social actors in Brazil, whose practices we analyzed here, have sought to make the environment a space of construction of justice and not only of utilitarian logic in the market.

Notes

1   This is the title of a World Bank report for Brazil (cf. Garrison, 2000).

2   The Club of Rome is the institution that requested the research report that took the name the Limits of Growth, which in the early 1970s, simulated the future perspectives of the world economy, indicating the risks of a crisis in capitalism because of the lack of material and energetic resources.

3   "Tragedy of the commons" is the parabola the conservative ecologist Garret Hardin (1968) used to represent the ecological problematic concerning the paradigm of scarcity resulting from the fact that resources such as air, water and biodiversity are of common use, thus not the object of private property.

4   Dislocation is the term that describes the fact that certain corporations will be removed from their locations of implantation to be relocated to another place, region or country where the political-institutional conditions are more favorable to the accumulation of wealth – such as those with weak environmental norms, social rights reconsidered and flexible urban laws.

5   We consider, in keeping with Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, "material spatial practices" to refer to "physical and material flows, transfers and interactions that compete in and along space to guarantee social production and reproduction" (cf. Harvey, 1992, p.201).

6   In Sept. 2005 Newsweek magazine had a cover headline" National Shame," and the lead article presented maps of environmental inequality in the United States.

7   Representatives of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network, the Southern Organizing Committee, the Southwest Public Workers Union and the Environmental and Economic Justice Project from the United States and the Cordillera People's Alliance of the Philippines participated in the meeting with the Brazilian Environmental Justice movement. It was held at the Praia Vermelha campus of UFRJ, in June 1998,

8   In the Brazilian academic realm, the concept of environmental justice and its problematic had previously been addressed in the doctoral thesis of demographer Haroldo Torres (1997) and presented in the article "A demografia do risco ambiental," published in Torres et al. (2000). In the interim in March 1998, the journal Proposta, published by Fase, included the article "Cultura e desigualdade, o tema raça nos movimentos feministas e de justiça ambiental", by Arlete Maria da Silva Alves, who is now an economics professor at the Federal University at Uberlândia. Alves earned her PhD in development studies at the University of Wisconsin in 1996. In that article, she cited another by Epstein, published in the journal Capitalism, Nature and Socialism, of 1997, about the racialization of the struggles against toxic waste in the United States.

9   This map is presented on page 21 of the book O que é justiça ambiental (Acselrad et al., 2008b).

10 The seminar was held by the joint initiative of the Laboratórios Lacta/UFF, et-tern/ uFRJ, Cesteh/Fiocruz, of the project Brasil Sustentável e Democrático/Fase and of CnMa/Cut (cf. Herculano, 2002; Firpo de souza Porto, 2005).

11 An example of the struggle against the adoption of the "dual standard," as well as of the interlocal and international character of the articulations that it supposes, is the campaign that questioned the initiative of Petrobras to explore and drill for oil in Equador's Yasuni National Park, which was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, and is the ancestral territory of the indigenous peoples of the Huaorani ethnicity. It was understood that "the development of extractive activities by Petrobras in this region, as the adoption of a dual behavior standard by the company, which in Brazil is prevented by law from drilling in national parks and indigenous territories." "The members of the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network, which participated in international initiatives to protect the Yasuni and their peoples, began a campaign before Brazilian society and government which called for a public commitment from Petrobras to not undertake activities in indigenous territories and in areas of recognized socio-environmental fragility such as national parks.[...] Amid the pressure of environmental and human rights groups inside and outside Brazil, in Sept. 2008, Petrobras and the Ecuadorean government signed a term of understanding for the return of Block 31 to the State. In an interview with the Gazeta Mercantil newspaper, a Petrobras executive said that, "in addition to the

complications with the renegotiation of contracts and with the process of nullification, the overlapping of the region with an indigenous reservation caused the company to be concerned about the social and environmental complications that could come to be" (cf. Malerba, 2009).

12 At the 2009 meeting of the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network, the participants affirmed that they intend to "discuss with society what is produced, why and for whom, and also where and how things are produced, seeking alternatives to the given industry of Environmental Impact Studies EIA-RIMAs and other market schemes of environmental evaluation, seeking to evaluate the environmental equity of projects by independent entities in the productive sector, guaranteeing the right of choice of communities: the right to be well informed and to say 'no'" (III Encontro a Rede Brasileira de Justiça ambiental, Relatório da Plenária Final, 26.3.2009-28.9.2009, Caucaia, Ceará). The methodological and epistemological criticism of the procedures and of the current institutions of environmental evaluation of development discussed within the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network was expressed in the document "Por avaliações sócio-ambientais rigorosas e responsáveis dos empreendimentos que impactam o território e as populações" [For Rigorous and Responsible Socio-Environmental Evaluations of Projects that impact the territory and populations] (Fase – ettern/Ippur/uFRJ, 2009).

13 The statements of workers mobilized in environmental struggles reveal the restricted forms of access to information and to the recognition of environmental risks in industry: "if I had not been contaminated, I would still be working without awareness or participating in the political process, without access to knowledge." Interview with a member of the Association to Fight Pollutants (ACPO), in Calderoni (2006). In relation to the risk of accidents, a director of the Association of Workers Exposed to Chemical Substances Associação dos Trabalhadores Expostos a Substâncias Químicas (ATESQ) affirmed: "we were well trained to not die inside the factory" (Nogueira, 2005, p.102).

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Abstract – a strong distance was maintained by traditional social movements that, despite the intense circulation of ideas through the whole Rio 1992 unCed process, lacked confdence towards environmental discourse. In 2001 this distance began to be reduced, after the creation of the Brazilian network of environmental Justice. the present text describes the steps towards this network creation, as well as the observed specifc process of local re-appropriation of international experience, mainly that of the us environmental justice movement. It is discussed here how this process was characterized by an effort of reframing both the environmental-justice dissociation felt currently in the Brazilian experience and the american environmental justice concept, as it was originally built on the us black movement experience.

Keywords: Environmental Justice, Social Movements, Environmentalization.

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