
Moral and Political Reasoning in Environmental Practice

edited by Andrew Light and Avner de-Shalit

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

2003

3

The Justice of Environmental Justice: Reconciling Equity, Recognition, and Participation in a Political Movement

David Schlosberg

While the environmental justice movement has gathered much attention from academics, activists, and government officials alike, it seems odd that little has been written on what, exactly, is meant by the *justice* of environmental justice. For the most part, the concept has been used to illustrate the fact that low-income communities and communities of color face more environmental risks than more well-off or white communities; this is linked, of course, to the other injustices in economic and social conditions disempowered communities face. Environmental justice activists and academics call for more equitable distribution of environmental risks—or, more succinctly, for less risk overall, but especially in communities already unduly burdened. But there is more to the conception of environmental justice than just this distributional aspect, and, in fact, a focus solely on distribution is problematic. Environmental justice activists have also called for *recognition* of communities as unfairly affected, and insist on being seen and heard by both a mainstream environmental movement and a government that has, for the most part, ignored them. Further, the movement has insisted on changes in the way environmental policy is made, in order to bring in community *participation* in both the design and ongoing oversight of environmental risks.

So the concept of environmental *justice* in political practice deals with more than simply distribution. But, again oddly, there has been no thorough attempt to try to define exactly what the justice in environmental justice means. I attempt an initial foray into the issue, starting with an examination of the conceptions of justice as equity, recognition, and participation in the political theory literature. This illustrates the theoretical discussions of justice by contemporary political theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Iris Young. I then follow each of those notions through

to an examination of the environmental justice movement. The argument here is that the movement embodies a number of different frameworks of justice, even if it is not always explicit about those differences. At various times, justice is defined as equitable distribution, recognition, and participation. The movement demonstrates, I believe, the possibility of employing these different notions of justice simultaneously in a comprehensive political project.

Defining the Environmental Justice Movement(s)

One of the fastest-growing sectors of the environmental movement in the United States is the environmental justice movement—or, rather, the set of movements that make up a concern with environmental justice. The term *environmental justice* is used to cover two overlapping parts of the grassroots environmental movement: the antitoxics movement and the movement against environmental racism.¹

The antitoxics movement got its start with Love Canal and the concomitant growth of awareness of the prevalence and dangers of toxics in communities. Dump sites and situations like Love Canal—contaminated communities with threats to human health—were the initial focus of the movement, and this focus continues. But the movement now covers a wide variety of issues relating to environmental threats to human health: not just old industrial waste sites (or new Superfund sites), but also municipal and hazardous waste dumps and incinerators, nuclear waste, industrial pollution in communities, pesticides, and dioxin exposure. A variety of networks tie the movement together, the largest being the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice (or CHEJ),² which began in 1982 as a response to the immense need for information communities began to request of the Love Canal Homeowners Association. The center now claims to have assisted over 8000 groups since its work began. But in addition to the CHEJ, there are a variety of networks focused on environmental justice, organized around issues such as, for example, oil refinery pollution and the effects of semiconductor manufacturing.³

The movement against environmental racism, which popularized the term *environmental justice*, focuses on environmental issues as they pertain to communities of color and the disproportionate risk those

communities often face. Most academics and activists trace the beginning of this movement to a 1982 protest against the dumping of PCB-laden dirt in a new hazardous waste landfill in Warren County, North Carolina. Warren County was not only one of the poorest counties in North Carolina, but also had a population that was 65 percent African-American. This part of the environmental justice movement was empowered and emboldened by studies in the 1980s and early 1990s that showed not just connections between environmental risk and poverty, but specific connections between race and environmental hazards.⁴

When one discusses “environmental justice,” the topic could be the antitoxics movement, the race-based environmental justice movement, or a combination of the two. There are certainly differences in these two parts of the movement, and many authors treat them separately. The antitoxics movement is discussed, for example, by Szasz as well as by Gould, Schnaiberg, and Weinberg.⁵ Epstein argues that the differences between the parts are crucial, even though she still wants to regard them as one large “environmental justice/toxics movement.”⁶ I do the same in my own previous work on the movement.⁷ I want to argue here that even given some of the differences in the greater grassroots environmental justice movement, there is a unity, of sorts, around the concept(s) of “justice.” First, however, the theoretical terrain of the concept must be explored.

Conceptions of Justice

Justice as Distribution

In the literature of political theory, justice has been defined almost exclusively as a question of equity in the distribution of social goods. Rawls, for instance, calls justice “a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed.” Justice, then, defines “the appropriate division of social advantages.”⁸ In his application of justice to the environmental arena, Brian Barry insists that justice only applies where distributive issues arise; other issues are merely questions of right and wrong.⁹ Justice, in this reading, is the set of rules that govern our distributive relationship. Justice as distribution is centered on socioeconomic factors, rooted in the economic structure of society. This conception of distributive justice is typically used to critique the

distribution in a given society, and to argue for social redistribution and more social equity. Of course, once one considers distribution as a means to justice, one needs to have a theory or set of principles regarding how, exactly, distribution (or redistribution) is to—justly—take place. The whole point of Rawls's notion of "justice as fairness" is justice as just distribution—or, more properly, the rules that govern a just distribution. Similarly, Miller discusses, in a now classic text, three different possible principles of distribution: need, desert, and entitlement.¹⁰

While theories of just distribution tend, as does Rawls's, to focus on absolutely universal principles, Walzer began a move away from a concern with a universal theory of justice in favor of understanding the concept in historical and cultural place; this move has particular resonance in dealing with environmental justice. Still wed to the notion of distribution, Walzer attempts to introduce a language of difference. He argues "that the principles of justice are themselves pluralistic in form; that different social goods ought to be distributed for different reasons, in accordance with different procedures, by different agents; and that all these differences derive from different understandings of the social goods themselves—the inevitable product of historical and cultural particularism."¹¹ For Walzer, not only are different things valued differently by different people, but this means that the very criteria for distribution will differ according to how we value things. Social meanings of objects, procedures, and principles are historical and will change over time; hence Walzer introduces a notion of a "distributive sphere," where conceptions of justice are limited in place and time. Walzer's approach to the discussion of justice in a real, diverse, world is more complex and more grounded than Rawls's "veil of ignorance." Even so, Walzer remains tied to the concept, and language, of justice purely as a concept of distribution.

Without doubt, the discussions within the equity framework are vast, rich, and complex. And to the credit of environmental political theorists, the framework has been comprehensively examined with an eye toward *environmental* justice in works by Dobson as well as by Low and Gleeson.¹² Still, as thorough as these works are, I find them incomplete, especially because the distributive conception of justice itself has come under intense critical inquiry by political theorists.

Justice as Recognition

In the past decade there have been numerous challenges to the traditional way in which the concept of justice has been approached in the political theory literature. Iris Young has made the most direct and forceful challenge to a justice based solely on issues of distribution.¹³ Injustice is not solely based on inequitable distribution, Young argues. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, she describes injustices based on a lack of recognition of identity and difference. Part of the problem of injustice, and part of the reason for unjust distribution, is a lack of recognition of group difference. Young begins with the argument that "where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression."¹⁴ In this, obviously, Young shifts the focus away from the more traditional territory of Rawls and other theorists of distributive justice, toward a focus on the postmaterial demands of new social movements around race, gender, and sexuality. For Young, distribution is not the only problem; a concept of justice needs to focus more generally on the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression, particularly of those who represent "difference."

The basic thesis of the politics of recognition has been laid out by both Taylor and Honneth.¹⁵ As Honneth argues, the key is a link between recognition from others and our own human dignity: "The language of everyday life is still invested with a knowledge—which we take for granted—that we owe our integrity, in a subliminal way, to the receipt of approval or recognition from other persons."¹⁶ Taylor insists that in this sense, "due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."¹⁷

Taylor distinguishes between two kinds of recognition: (1) the equal dignity of all, and (2) the politics of difference, where everyone is recognized for their particular distinctiveness: "*Everyone* should be recognized for his or her unique identity. . . . With the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else." This latter form of

recognition causes Taylor some distress. The "demand for equal recognition extends beyond an acknowledgment of the equal value of all humans potentially, and comes to include the equal value of what they have made of this potential in fact. This creates a serious problem."¹⁸ At this point, unfortunately, Taylor's discussion degenerates into a bit of neoconservative paranoia, criticizing what he calls at various points "incoherent," "radical," "subjectivist," "half-baked," "neo-Nietzschean" theories that support multiculturalism.¹⁹ As a number of responses to Taylor have pointed out, he seems to want only some identities recognized. Recognition becomes especially difficult for him when it comes to the margins, innovation, newness, and any challenge to the universalizability of identity.²⁰

Honneth's discussion is both a bit more complex and a bit more accepting of difference than Taylor's. There are, he argues, three different kinds of disrespect: the violation of the body (here Honneth refers to torture), the denial of rights, and the denigration of ways of life.²¹ Recognition here is much broader than a simple tolerance; individuals must be fully free of physical threats, offered complete and equal political rights, and have their distinguishing cultural traditions free from various forms of disparagement.

As with Young, both Taylor and Honneth contend that a *lack* of recognition—demonstrated by various forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at both the individual and cultural level—is an injustice not just because it constrains people or does them harm, but because it "impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self—an understanding acquired by intersubjective means."²² Taylor asserts that "the thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or *misrecognition* can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being."²³

Lack of recognition, then, is a harm—an injustice—as much as a lack of adequate distribution of various goods is.

Fraser argues that Honneth's politics of recognition is problematic because it is tied singly to self-realization; she argues that he does not recognize the key structural and institutional manifestations of

misrecognition.²⁴ But Honneth is keenly interested in the importance of self-esteem in the political realm, and the fact that such self-esteem comes from recognition by others—not just from individuals, but also from culture and the state—leads to a thorough critique of the effect of cultural and political institutions. Honneth's second notion of disrespect specifically "refers to those forms of personal disrespect to which an individual is subjected by being structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a society."²⁵ His third form of disrespect includes the cultural and institutional concurrence in the denial of self-esteem. Honneth argues that a focus on self-realization *and* the institutional limits to both self- and other-based recognition is at the core of existing social movement struggles. So the implications of Honneth's notion of recognition go far beyond a simple call for internal self-realization, as Fraser asserts; a structural and institutional critique is an absolutely necessary part of the call for recognition.

Obviously, numerous social movements have focused on responding to various forms of misrecognition; there is certainly a relationship between the everyday experience of disrespect and the emergence of social movements such as indigenous rights, civil rights, gay and lesbian rights, feminism, and the more general movement for multicultural acceptance. As Connolly argues, a form of resentment grows with misrecognition, disrespect, and disempowerment. This resentment is not just individual and existential, but becomes civil resentment as well. Social movements arise as responses to disrespect and misrecognition move from the individual and personal to the collective community. These movements are a "collective struggle for recognition."²⁶ One only has to recall the striking images of civil rights activists in the 1960s marching while holding a simple and poignant message: "I Am a Man." Certainly, the call there went beyond justice as distribution, into the realm of recognition—at both the individual and community level.

As Fraser, Honneth, and Young have all argued here, mis- or malrecognition is a cultural and institutional form of injustice. This type of cultural injustice is "rooted in patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication."²⁷ In confronting the injustices of cultural domination, nonrecognition, and lack of respect, various movements focus on remedies based in cultural, symbolic, and, ultimately, institutional change.

Justice as Procedure

Material distribution and recognition are two absolutely key notions of justice in the contemporary political realm. But a third focus on justice as *process*, including demands for broader and more authentic public participation, is often seen as the tool to achieve both distributional equity and political recognition. For Honneth, one form of disrespect or misrecognition—the lack of rights—is directly linked to democratic participation. Citizens are subject to a form of personal disrespect when they are “structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a given society. . . . The experience of being denied rights is typically coupled with a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a partner to interaction in possession of equal rights on a par with all other individuals.”²⁸ There is a direct link, for Honneth, between a lack of respect and recognition and a decline in a person’s membership and participation in the greater community, including their right to participate in the institutional order.

Young makes this connection clear as well. For Young, a concept of justice needs to focus more generally on the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression. To accomplish this, justice must focus on the political *process* as a way to address a variety of injustices, including both the inequitable distribution of social goods and the inequitable distribution of social recognition. In dealing with issues of justice beyond the distributive, Young insists on addressing justice in the “rules and procedures according to which decisions are made.”²⁹ She says that

the idea of justice here shifts . . . to procedural issues of participation in deliberation and decisionmaking. For a norm to be just, everyone who follows it must in principle have an effective voice in its consideration and be able to agree to it without coercion. For a social condition to be just, it must enable all to meet their needs and exercise their freedom; thus justice requires that all be able to express their needs.

The central focus for Young, in addressing justice both as distribution and as the recognition of difference, is on decision-making structures, and she argues for “democratic decision-making procedures as an element and condition of social justice.”³⁰

Likewise, Carol Gould insists that taking differences seriously in public life requires “a radical increase in opportunities for participation in contexts of common activity. . . . For if individuals have an equal right

to determine their own actions and further, if engaging in common activity is one of the necessary conditions for their self-development, then it follows that there is an equal right to participate in determining the course of such common activity.”³¹ Gould, like Young and numerous others who advocate a model of discursive or communicative democracy, insists that this participation needs to happen in a variety of social and cultural institutions, as well as in the more specific context of politics and government.³² Discourse models and calls for more participatory democracy are thoroughly compatible with the varied notions of justice in both theory and practice; they certainly address cultural norms, social discourses, and the role of institutions of power in issues of both equity and recognition. In this sense, increased participation can address issues of distribution and cultural misrecognition. Arguments for justice as procedure, then, demonstrate how varied notions of justice can be incorporated into a single project.

The Necessity of a Linked Approach to Justice

Some on the traditional left have lamented the move toward justice as recognition, especially as it has been developed in the “identity politics” of social movements or the postmaterial critiques of the “cultural” left. Unfortunately, Fraser notes, theorists have also generally insisted on a dichotomy between distribution and recognition, by focusing on one or the other conception of justice. But this sort of interpretation misses the point of those like Fraser, Honneth, and Young, who insist on a thoroughly integrated understanding of justice.

The whole point of Fraser’s forays into the examination of these various justice claims is to show that they are not antithetical. Fraser argues that this split in the academic left between “social” justice and “cultural” politics—justice as equity and justice as recognition—represents a false dichotomy. Fraser insists that “justice today requires *both* redistribution and recognition,” emphasizing that “justice requires both, as neither is sufficient.”³³ Communities, or collectivities, are, in fact, “bivalent”—they are often differentiated as a collective by both economic structure and the status order of society. In this case, neither a politics of redistribution nor one solely of recognition will suffice to remedy injustice. “In general, then,” according to Fraser, “one should roundly reject the construction of redistribution and recognition

as mutually exclusive alternatives. The goal should be, rather, to develop a two-pronged approach that can address the twofold need for both.³⁴

Likewise, Honneth also notes a relationship between material equity and justice as recognition. He recognizes the more utilitarian struggle over the equitable distribution of goods, including cultural goods, as a motivator for collective action. This is contrasted with a model of social conflict that has the denial of social or legal recognition at its core. But Honneth does not want to replace the theoretical model for the former with one for the latter: "It is important to stress . . . that this second model of conflict, based on a theory of recognition, should not try to replace the first, utilitarian model but only extend it." Like Fraser, Honneth argues that social movements encompass both notions of justice.³⁵

And, importantly, some theorists are beginning to note that the relationship between justice as equity and justice as recognition is played out in the procedural realm, because barriers in both areas can hinder the ability of individuals and communities to participate. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, one of Young's primary emphases is on institutions and the political process. While she argues that distributive justice does not go far enough because it does not include a recognition of differences in the social realm—differences that go beyond who has how much—Young goes on to examine the institutional features that lead to injustices in terms of *both* distribution and recognition. This leads directly to her insistence on participatory democratic structures to address existing injustices based in both distribution and recognition. In a similar vein, Fraser argues that when "patterns of disrespect and esteem are institutionalized, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, public education, and/or the social practices and group mores that structure everyday interaction, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities."³⁶

The point here is absolutely crucial: it is not just that political and cultural institutions create conditions that hamper equity and recognition, but that both distributive inequity and misrecognition hamper real participation in political and cultural institutions. Issues of justice are not just bivalent, but trivalent. In this case, improved participatory mechanisms can help meliorate both other forms of injustice, but those forms

of injustice must be addressed in order to improve participation. For a "parity of participation," Fraser argues, we need both objective and intersubjective conditions to be met. Objective conditions include a distribution of resources to ensure participants' independence and voice. Subjective conditions require that "institutionalized cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem."³⁷ As many discursive and communicative democrats argue, moral respect and the recognition of the right of all to participate are key principles for improving and extending democratic action.

Justice, then, requires not just an understanding of unjust distribution and a lack of recognition, but, importantly, of the way the two are tied together in political and social processes.³⁸ These notions and experiences of injustice are not competing notions, nor are they contradictory or antithetical. Inequitable distribution, a lack of recognition, and limited participation all work to produce injustice, and claims for justice can—some would say *must*—be integrated into a comprehensive political project. My argument here is that the environmental justice movement represents just such a project.

The Justice of Environmental Justice

It is quite interesting that even given the wealth of literature devoted to environmental justice and the environmental justice movement in the past decade, there is no single definition available that simply lays out a definition of the term. Rather, what one sees in the literature is a variety of framings of the issue, by a rich assortment of both academics and activists. Still, the argument here is that the movement represents understandings of justice as distribution, recognition, and procedure—with different notions appearing throughout the literature of the movement. In Robert Bullard's first edited collection on the movement, for example, there is no systematic attempt to define the broad term *environmental justice*. Still, mentions of equity (in the distribution of environmental ills), recognition (with a focus on cultural recognition), and participation (particularly authentic, as opposed to inauthentic or token, inclusion) are evident throughout the book. The same can be said for other collections on the topic.³⁹ Early on, activists in the movement took on the definition

of *environment*, broadening it beyond the more mainstream organizations' notion of parks, wilderness, and lands "outside." A refusal of narrow definitions is at the heart of the movement; this is explicitly stated in the case of the term *environment*, but is no less evident in the notion of justice as well.

Environmental Justice and Distribution

Still, the most often cited, and most obvious, evidence of environmental injustice is in the realm of distribution—specifically the inequitable share of environmental ills that poor communities and communities of color live with. Here, the call for "environmental justice" focuses on how the distribution of environmental risks mirrors the inequity in socioeconomic and cultural status. As Dowie has noted, "While created equal, all Americans were not, as things turned out, being poisoned equally." Benjamin Chavis's argument outlining "environmental racism" makes the point bluntly: "People of color bear the brunt of the nation's pollution problem."⁴⁰ Studies that demonstrated such inequity, such as a 1983 United States General Accounting Office report and the 1987 study by the United Church of Christ (UCC), *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, spurred and empowered the movement. The UCC study found race "the most significant among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. This represented a consistent national pattern." Similar conclusions have been found in studies done with regard to hazardous waste disposal sites, various types of incinerators, polluted water, toxic releases from industry, lead poisoning, and other types of environmental dangers.⁴¹ The antitoxics side of the environmental justice movement makes the same argument along class lines: that not just race, but poverty is a central indicator of the presence of environmental damage in a community. In addition, studies have shown that agencies such as the EPA enforce environmental laws in poor communities and communities of color less stringently than in wealthy white communities.⁴² The bottom line is that the "unifying insight of environmental justice recognizes that neither the costs of pollution nor the benefits of environmental protection are evenly distributed throughout our society."⁴³

Environmental Justice and Recognition: People, Culture, and Communities

While distributive equity seems to be the central definition of justice in the environmental justice movement, this type of equity certainly does not encompass all of the critiques or desires of the movement. A central concern of the environmental justice movement is a conception of justice as recognition. This interest is notable throughout the environmental justice movement's literature and political action. Laura Pulido argues that central to environmental justice struggles is an engagement of issues of cultural meaning, including, but not limited to, identity. As Bullard argues, the "focus of activists of color and their constituents reflects their life experiences of social, economic, and political disenfranchisement." Struggles for environmental justice "are embedded in the larger struggle against oppression and dehumanization that exists in the larger society." Krauss's study of women in the environmental justice movement demonstrates that for both white activists and activists of color, "the starting places for and subsequent development of their analyses of toxic waste protests are mediated by issues of class, race, and ethnicity." And Tesh and Williams argue that identity is crucial for the movement as well, especially in its insistence on the validity of the experiential, subjective knowledge of grassroots activists and communities.⁴⁴ The bottom line here is that environmental justice activists often see themselves as outside the cultural mainstream. As such, their identities are devalued. The movement, then, turns to recognition as a key component of the justice of environmental justice.

This question of recognition is discussed in the movement both at the personal level and at the level of community; misrecognition is experienced in both realms. The more personal issue comes up in numerous activist testimonials. Cora Tucker, an African-American activist, discussed her reaction at a town board meeting, when white women were addressed as "Mrs. So and So," while she was addressed simply as "Cora" by the all-white, all-male board: "I said, 'What did you call me?' He said, 'Cora,' And I said, 'The name is Mrs. Tucker.' and I had the floor until he said 'Mrs. Tucker.' . . . It's not that—I mean it's not like you gotta call me Mrs. Tucker, but it was the respect."⁴⁵ Lois Gibbs, of the CHEJ, tells a similar story of a public hearing in which representa-

tives appeared not to be listening to her testimony. She stopped speaking, and when the hearing official finally noticed the silence and asked if she was through, she simply said she was just waiting until someone was listening. Gibbs then continued her testimony. During the campaign to halt a proposed incinerator in South Central Los Angeles, women's concerns were often dismissed as irrational, uninformed, and disruptive. As Hamilton argues, male city and corporate officials "used gender as the basis for discrediting women's concerns." In hearings regarding a proposal to build a hazardous waste incinerator in Kettleman City, California, observers noted the different body language county commissioners expressed when Mexican-American residents and representatives of ChemWaste were at the microphone—patronizing on the one hand, and respectful on the other.⁴⁶ Misrecognition and disrespect on the individual level is an everyday experience for these activists; again, authentic recognition is a key element of their demand for justice.

But the question of recognition obviously goes beyond individual experiences and needs; questions of community and cultural recognition permeate the movement as well. The issue is community and cultural survival in a system where recognition is denied and communities and cultures are thoroughly devalued. Pulido argues that one key difference between the members of mainstream environmental organizations and members of environmental justice organizations is that the latter "draw people who already exist as a social or spatial entity in some way," as workers, a class, or community—and these communities insist on recognition.⁴⁷ A demand for community recognition was obvious in the battle of the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA) against the construction of a toxic waste incinerator. As Pardo notes, the "Mexican American women living east of downtown Los Angeles exemplify the tendency of women to enter into environmental struggles in defense of their community." She offers a quote from MELA activist Juana Gutierrez: "As a mother and resident of East L.A., I shall continue fighting tirelessly, so we will be respected."⁴⁸ Certainly, activists make a direct connection between the defense of their communities and the demand for respect.

For many in the environmental justice movement, this defense of community is nothing less than a matter of cultural survival. This is certainly central to Native American and other indigenous communities and

activists. Lance Hughes, director of Native Americans for a Clean Environment, makes clear the reason for his organization's focus on environmental issues: "We are not an environmental organization, and this is not an environmental issue. This is about our survival." Winona La Duke, a prominent Native American activist in the environmental justice movement, cites sovereignty issues and cultural survival as key reasons for her participation in the movement.⁴⁹ In one study, interviews with a variety of Native American activists show that they have "a genocidal analysis rooted in the Native American cultural identification, the experience of colonialism, and the imminent endangerment of their culture." For activists interviewed in another study of indigenous and Chicana women in the Southwest, threats "to the environment are interpreted as threats to their families and communities." They see "toxic contamination of their communities as systematic genocide."⁵⁰ As Peña argues, "to the extent that we construct our identities *in place*, whenever the biological conditions of a place are threatened, undermined, or radically transformed, we also see these changes as attacks on our identity and personal integrity." Communities often feel like endangered species, and environmental justice battles are battles for the preservation of the "homeland environment" and the local knowledges and senses of place that exist in those communities.⁵¹

So the environmental justice movement focuses on individual and community self-empowerment; the point is to gain recognition for oneself, for one's own community, and for the movement as a whole. The African-American feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins notes that the phrase "coming to voice" is being increasingly used in both feminist and black feminist writing; this notion includes breaking silence, developing self-reflexive speech, and confronting or talking back to oppressors.⁵² This coming to voice and self-empowerment has become a central part of the environmental justice movement. A mainstay of slogans of the movement is the notion that "we speak for ourselves." As Di Chiro argues, the question of agency inherent in "speaking for ourselves" is a key issue for activists in the movement. Bullard notes that "African-Americans and other people of color must be empowered through their own organizations and institutions if they are to effectively address the problem" of environmental injustice.⁵³ This holds not just for communities of color, but for all individuals and communities fighting the injustice of

misrecognition. The objective of the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice has been to empower local citizens to do their own organizing and networking. Women's experiences in these organizations have often transformed how they perceive their own identities. Gottlieb argues that these transformative experiences and the focus on one's own community create a very powerful image of that community. As Austin and Schill observe, grassroots people have proven that they are capable of leading, speaking, and doing for themselves. Finally, the various actions of individuals and community groups bring something else tied to political recognition: a sense of efficacy in the political process.⁵⁴

Environmental Justice and the Centrality of Participation

Without a doubt, the demand for political participation in decisions governing communities is central to the environmental justice movement. The construction of inclusive, participatory decision-making institutions—a "place at the table," or equal, informed, respectful participation—is at the center of environmental justice demands. Benjamin Chavis includes "the history of excluding people of color from the mainstream environmental groups, decisionmaking boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies" in his definition of the term *environmental racism*. In Freudenberg and Steinsapir's study of the movement, the first and major shared perspective across the grassroots is the "right of citizens to participate in making environmental decisions—emphasis on process as well as content of decision making." Gould, Schnaiberg, and Weinberg state that "from our perspective, these groups are attempting to exercise their rights as citizens. They seek to have some say in the local development of their communities, in order to ensure that the quality of their lives will be protected." Bretting and Prindeville found a strong belief in the rights of citizens to participate in making environmental decisions common among all indigenous and Chicana activists interviewed. Capek's environmental justice "frame" includes a demand for accurate information, respectful and unbiased hearing of claims, and democratic participation in deciding the future of contaminated communities.⁵⁵

The focus is on fully realizing democratic participation in environmental and community decision making. Bullard argues that democracy is key: "What do grassroots leaders want? These leaders are demanding

a shared role in the decision-making processes that affect their communities. They want participatory democracy to work for them." Likewise, Hamilton notes the expansion of the concept and practice of democracy to be more inclusive of community input. She argues that the focus of the movement is on ecological democracy, including new forms of citizen participation in governance: "Multiple decision making units (like neighborhood councils) should regulate development and ensure citizen input on economic and environmental decisions."⁵⁶

The demand for this type of authentic, community-based participation comes out of the experience of disenfranchisement. Krauss has discussed how white women in the movement originally believe in the political system and quickly learn the lesson that the government does not necessarily work for them: "In the process of becoming activists, blue-collar women who believed in the system dramatically shift perspective in their understanding of political life. They recognize the failure of the system as a whole to act on their behalf and their own disenfranchisement from the policy-making process. They have to find ways to expose this and make the system democratic." Lois Gibbs, former organizer at Love Canal and now director of the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice, recounts the same story.⁵⁷ Krauss observes that women of color activists already understand this lack of response through their personal histories of exclusions based on race and class. The lack of participation in environmental decision making comes, in large part, from the limitations of race, class, and gender. These present a range of structural obstacles—including less access to political, legal, scientific, and other resources—to full participation in environmental decisions.

Basically, environmental justice groups argue that the injustices they suffer come from a lack of state oversight (often based in mis- or malrecognition). The demand to counter this is not just a call for recognition, but also a call for more thorough and participatory local input into, and control over, environmental decisions. The call is often for "a place at the table."⁵⁸ Groups do not want others—either mainstream environmental groups or government agencies—simply saying that they will take care of the community's interests; they wish to be consulted from the start, speak for themselves, work with a variety of other groups and agencies, and be offered a full partnership in the making of decisions. Hunold and Young examine this relationship between participation and

recognition in the case of hazardous waste citing. Applying Young's theoretical framework, they argue that public deliberation is not only the most likely path to a distributively fair solution, but that the process itself respects the interests and autonomy of people.⁵⁹

Robert Lake is one of the few others who have directly examined the conception of justice in the environmental justice movement; he complains that the movement "generally overemphasizes issues of distributive justice" and "adopts an unnecessarily truncated notion of procedural justice."⁶⁰ Lake argues, along the lines of Young, that one simply cannot have a thorough distributive justice without having justice in the *procedures* for producing that distribution. Lake suggests that the movement's focus on distributional equity not only takes away from procedural equity, but also misses the centrality of procedure in producing inequitable distribution. But he seems not to recognize the amount of attention actually given to the issue of procedural equity in the movement. While he argues that the concern with procedural equity in the environmental justice movement is both limited and truncated, I see this concern as central. There is much within both the movement's literature and its political action that demonstrates the very key focus on participatory process.

These types of concerns with procedural justice are evident not just in the analysis of the problem, but also in the demands of the environmental justice movement. At the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Conference in 1991, calls for procedural equity were on par with demands for environmental and social equity. The Principles of Environmental Justice, adopted at the Summit, include demands that "public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples," "the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation," and "the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination for all peoples."⁶¹ The Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) has also developed a "Community Environmental Bill of Rights." It includes "the right to participate as equals in all negotiations and decisions affecting our lives, children, homes and jobs," and the "right of access without cost to information and assistance that will make our participation meaningful, and to have our needs and concerns be the major factor in all policy decisions." In

another example, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to the EPA includes a subcommittee on Public Participation, which has developed a Model Plan for Public Participation, to be used by federal agencies in designing a process for participation for communities affected by environmental policies under consideration.⁶² Again, in a place where policy is developed for the movement as a whole, procedure is central. The Model Plan suggests that policymaking procedures must encourage active community participation, institutionalize public participation, recognize community knowledge, and utilize cross-cultural formats and exchanges to enable the participation of as much diversity as exists in a community. Obviously, through these principles and policy suggestions, a shared and respected role in the decision-making process is a key demand of the movement. This demand for procedural equity is not just in the *principles* of the movement, but in actions on the range of diverse issues the environmental justice movement addresses.⁶³

The demand for more participation in community development of environmental policy represents another type of shift from the standard understanding of justice. Notions of social justice often rely on government intervention to implement or design a more just society. Most often, demands for distributional equity are made to government, which is where the remedy of such injustice is sown. But the environmental justice movement calls for government intervention only in part: to establish just laws on the distribution of environmental risk. But in its call for justice in terms of both recognition and procedure, the movement calls for more grassroots and community democratic participation. In other words, the movement recognizes that a central government can only go so far in establishing justice; for more extensive development of justice, democratic participation in the development of rules people live by in a community (including how industry lives in a community) is key as well.

The Interplay of Equity, Recognition, and Participation in Environmental Justice

As in the discussion of justice on the theoretical level, these three notions of justice in the environmental justice movement—regarding equity, recognition, and participation—are, and must be, thoroughly integrated. Conceptions of justice, and, more important, the experiences of