

## Exporting Injustice

Thinking of environmental justice in international terms is what first drew me to the subject, but this week's readings raised many important issues regarding universality of justice, revealing the legal burden and blame of global environmental issues to be extremely difficult to assign despite clear practical and ethical transgressions. Yang (2003) directly advocates the perspective of a global commons (an idea which is invoked to greater or lesser extent in all of the articles) when approaching potentially deleterious environmental impacts because pollution cannot be contained within political boundaries. The negative physical, economic, and social repercussions associated with environmental hazards are quickly transmitted around an increasingly globalized world far from their geographic origin. In order to secure a healthy and sustainable future for ourselves, we must protect our physical environment by ensuring that fundamental human rights are respected. Yang blames industrialization, population growth, and lax regulation as drivers of the environmental crises in the developing world. Adeola (2000) goes further to implicate the capitalist economic system in general. Intuitively the vision of developed, industrialized nations sending their waste to lesser developed southern countries seems blatantly unjust, but, is it? For me, the issue becomes much less straightforward once we move out of a purely domestic framework due to conflicts between international organizations/legislation, national sovereignty, and self-determination of individuals and groups. How can environmental justice in the developing world be maintained in an international context without becoming a new sort of 'white man's burden'? It is not fair for certain groups to be unfairly burdened with environmental hazards, but it also seems unjust for an unindustrialized country to be told that, for its own good, it cannot follow the same path to industrialization that so many now-prosperous northern nations took early in the century. I do not, by any means, think that LDCs should be forced by economics or politics to unsustainably exploit their resources or endanger their populations either by their own initiatives or those of MNCs or foreign governments, but I do fear a system where the well-meaning West condescends to protect the 'powerless' rest. In many cases post-colonial governments pander to large corporations or more powerful nations in order to support their own regimes to the detriment of their affected populations (eg oil in Ogoniland, Amazon). In this case, the sovereign decision of the state to go into business with a large MNC clearly results in an unjust burden to those receiving little to no benefit from the development. The apparent way to end this sort of injustice is to take away the economic incentive to site facilities in the developing world--an internationally standardized set of environmental regulations so that states cannot use weakness of environmental protection as a means to attract investment. But, in reality, this does nothing but ensure that undeveloped nations stay undeveloped unless a new type of incentive can be provided to encourage clean and sustainable development. In a globalized system, countries must be able to distinguish themselves in one way or another in order to attract investment and develop. One way is to attract business by the regulatory climate or labor force--both of these raise human rights issues. Another way is to provide a large market for the goods, which rarely describes the LDCs often targeted for noxious uses. In a capitalist system the businesses and crooked governments always win. If they don't see big profits in one geographical region, they will move on to the next. Under the current economic system, it is a very difficult relationship to break at an international level where it seems like there will always be a country willing to sacrifice its longterm well-being for short-term prosperity.