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Mainstreaming Environmental Justice? Right to the Landscape in Northern Sweden

Tom Mels

Introduction

Not everyone suffers equally from environmental degradation, nor does everyone equally enjoy environmental benefits. These inequalities clamour for attention from justice activists and scholars. What are the origins of these patterns of distribution? Why do they persist? The search for answers yields further discoveries about inequalities in the social fabric of society. It makes all the difference in the world if you belong to either the privileged or marginalized communities of justice. Exclusion from participation in social life and decision making constrains some people's control over the environment, while endowing others with benefits. Such questioning may reveal that disproportionate exposure to environmental risks emanates from structural misrecognition of the status and rights of marginalized communities. Research within the field of environmental justice seeks to analyse such environmental inequalities and the claims to justice they engender.

Nowadays, attention to environmental justice is no longer limited to activism and academic research. The importance of considering justice is increasingly recognized in mainstream environmental politics. But exactly what does this adoption entail? Juxtaposing justice conflicts over mining, energy, forestry and nature conservation landscapes in the far north of Sweden, this chapter focuses on a region increasingly appropriated by international media as 'a green jobs Klondike' (*The Guardian*, 2021). More accurately understood, current resource mobilization brings about a version of environmental justice that, in strategic ways, abstracts from the ongoing

production of a distinctively capitalist biophysical and ideological landscape. This abstraction from the landscape as a peopled polity and place reproduces rather than resolves structural injustice, including imperilling Indigenous livelihoods. In contrast to these mainstreaming tendencies, the chapter envisions environmental justice as a critical normative engagement with multiple contested boundaries of nature's commodification in the course of capitalist development.

Justice enthusiasm

Over the course of a few decades, there has been a steadily growing academic interest in understanding how social justice and environmental issues intertwine (Coolsaet, 2020). Nowadays, justice appears virtually everywhere in environmental policy making and planning discourse too, encompassing the pedestrian level of cities and countryside as much as the lofty realm of global conventions. Whenever there is an environmental problem calling for action, it is almost automatically accompanied by the language of justice: climate change comes with climate justice; biodiversity loss must include species justice; sustainable agriculture cannot be conceived without agricultural justice; organic food provision ushers in food justice; decarbonized energy production associates with energy justice; urban greening asks for considerations of environmental gentrification; transport system development leads to discussions on transport justice.

Behind this emergent profusion of justice foci lies a question-begging array of positions. In policy making and planning, justice is in many respects adapted to largely mainstream forms of sustainable development. On a planetary scale, the Global Goals (United Nations, 2015) embrace a host of *distributive* justice principles, including benefit sharing and access to economic resources and public spaces, several pleas to solve *recognition* conflicts, such as those related to gender inequality, and calls to *procedural* justice ensuring 'responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels' (Target 16.7). On a continental scale, the European Commission's implementation strategy of such global goals, the European Green Deal (2019) speaks of a 'mainstreaming of sustainability in all EU policies', staging a vaguely defined 'just transition', heavily resting on investment plans and other, standard economic manoeuvres and measurements (European Commission, 2019, pp 15–16). Accompanying this pleonastic logic of the mainstreaming of sustainability in the EU thus comes a mainstreaming of justice too that strategically fails to challenge the many underlying causes of oppression and ecological ruin in capitalist society. Adding more calls to justice into the standard sustainability mix of providing economic, ecological and equity benefits thus hardly seems to instil much political panic these days. It may even be seen as an innocuous add-on to the often equally bland language of sustainability.

Contrary to such a reading, it can be argued that the newfangled appeals to justice should be celebrated, simply because erstwhile marginalized notions of justice are gradually becoming the centre of attention. For whatever referential vagueness and practical futility, the recent turn to justice provides a language that, in a further process of substantiation, may oblige mainstream enthusiasts to consider socio-economic maldistribution, make procedural demands to political representation, or challenge cultural misrecognition, and even pay heed to lengthy histories of social struggle and inequality. Over the past decades, a rather extensive academic corpus suggests as much, including scholarly work on *just sustainabilities*. Empirical evidence shows it is possible to alleviate what Julian Agyeman (2005, p 44) calls the ‘equity deficit’ of mainstream sustainable development, pervading ‘most “green” and “environmental” sustainability theory, rhetoric, and practice’ (Agyeman, 2013, p 4). However, as Agyeman readily acknowledges, ‘there are strong forces ranged against such change: wealthy elites, corporate interests, and governments playing “race to the bottom” to attract inward investment and maintain reckless economic growth’ (Agyeman, 2013, p 164). The extensive turn to a greening of policies and practices motivated by a plethora of just sustainability transitions needs accordingly to address the underlying societal dynamics that drive that race to the bottom. In tracing that race, ‘all roads lead to one idea – namely, capitalism’ (Fraser, 2021, p 96).

My tentative hypothesis is that the current justice enthusiasm also entails a development towards what could be described as a *mainstreaming* of environmental justice. The diagnosis is that in the movement from civic, on the ground activism and the overt indignation of marginalized communities to the (avowedly) green fervours of corporations, bureaucracies and policy makers, something has been lost. To explain this loss, the proliferation of greening and justice needs to be scrutinized within the broader ‘institutionalized social order’ (Fraser, 2014a) that is capitalist society. The tendency to mainstreaming entails that claims to environmental justice are circumscribed and narrowed down to ambitions and practices adapted to, and hence fundamentally unable to challenge, that order. I will illustrate this by briefly exploring northern Swedish landscapes in crisis. After all, capitalism is not just an institutionalized social order; it is also a non-accidental spatial order dependent on the landscape that makes that institutionalized order possible.

Landscapes under pressure

The mainstreaming of justice needs to be grounded in the material landscape where that institutionalized social order takes shape. In northern Sweden, nature as the raw material for the timber industry and a source for energy

provision, alongside mining for ores and metals, provides an important context. These illustrate empirically central features of capitalist society and not just because they are evidently vital to commodity production for profit.

Taking a cue from Nancy Fraser's work, they reveal, first, how commodity production is something that relies on a supporting surrounding. Put more theoretically, the economic 'foreground' of commodity production depends on non-economic enabling conditions such as nature (minerals, forests, energy resources), and public power (planning and legislation concerning mining, forest management, energy transition). They also depend on the sphere of social reproduction unfolding in the everyday social lives and experiences of communities and workers. Second, they show that in 'a system devoted to the limitless expansion and private appropriation of surplus value' these non-economic enabling conditions tend to be increasingly commodified (Fraser, 2018, p 5). Third, this process of commodification is highly uneven. Fraser claims it entails the forced expropriation and exploitation of capacities and resources, the political imposition of uneven status hierarchies, and social domination. Fourth, because of this unevenness, processes of commodification do not go unchallenged. They cause a host of 'boundary struggles' in which opposing claims to justice come forth. The landscape of northern Sweden will show what this all means in practical terms.

Mining as a moral duty

Mineral resources occupy a special nook in Swedish sustainability discourse and policy making (Tarras-Wahlberg and Southalan, 2021). Recently, the Swedish Minister for Business, Industry and Innovation, Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, claimed it is 'almost a moral duty to open new mines' in the country to secure a strategic supply of (critical) raw materials (*Sveriges Natur*, 2022). This moral call fits well into the notoriously neoliberal Swedish Mineral Law (SFS, 1991) and the concomitant rhetoric of the Swedish Mineral Strategy (Näringsdepartementet, 2013).

Public efforts to facilitate mining concessions, prepare necessary physical infrastructure and offer ready access to the archives of the Swedish Geological Survey all invite capital to roam the country for mineral resources. They are also attuned to political discourse on expanding the exploitation of mineral resources within the boundaries of the European Union (European Commission, 2008).

Confirming Fraser's point about the capitalist economy's reliance on public power, these also bring about justice issues. On the one hand, EU political discourse reveals an awareness of social and environmental challenges such as the 'risks of human rights infringements ... or environmental destruction' (EESC, 2021, 5.9) and 'the lack of public acceptance for mining in Europe' (European Commission, 2020, p 14), yet in the hierarchical

order of other potential moral responsibilities, the duty to mining relies on sharp geographical confines: ‘mining in Europe is operating at the highest environmental and social standards compared to non-EU countries’ (EESC, 2021, 5.14). Outside Europe, mining is often plagued by ‘social exploitation and environmental pollution with usually only a few profiteers’ (EESC, 2021, 5.15). This, in addition to the various green growth policies, motivates proposals about the development of ‘a streamlined authorization process for mining activities’ in the EU (EESC, 2021, 1.5). The European Commission’s policy considerations in Critical Raw Materials Resilience (2020) also resulted in the instant launching of the industry-driven European Raw Materials Alliance (ERMA), with its outright aim of promoting public acceptance of the role of these materials in the green transition.

The notion of promoting public acceptance arguably underestimates the contradictions facing green transition policies, boundary struggles over mining in the landscape, and the tenacity of appurtenant conflicting claims to justice. As the largest producer of iron ore in the EU, and a leading exporter of copper, zinc lead, gold and silver, Sweden has substantial economic interests in developing its mineral deposits. The northern counties are particularly rich in minerals and host plenty of mining operations. From an environmental justice point of view, knowing that green growth spells exploitation, these also remain highly controversial.

In recent years, this has been very clear from the lengthy conflict over the unexplored Gállok/Kallak iron ore deposit in Jokkmokk municipality, beginning with an application for an exploitation concession permit by Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB (JIMAB, subsidiary of the UK based Beowulf Mining PLC) in 2013. Deeply troubled by ongoing deliberations, Håkan Jonsson, Chairman of the board of the Sámi Parliament, criticized the Swedish government’s continued prioritization of mining interests over those of reindeer herding and Sámi culture. This practice countered a number of international guiding principles including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Following widespread protests, the County of Norrbotten refused to issue mining permits in 2014. However, this decision was overruled by the Mining Inspectorate of Sweden, which transferred decision making on the case to the Swedish Government (*Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten*, 2017). By March 2022, the firm received an exploitation concession, allowing for further environmental and economic enquiries in the mining landscape.

Critics of mining in the area (located within the Laponia World Heritage Site) point out that green transition arguments are being mobilized for the promotion of fossil-free ironworks and access to critical minerals, while underestimating environmental risks, including drinking water contamination and Indigenous rights. Longstanding controversies such as

these do not just bear witness to a continued threat to local communities' right to the landscape, but, as Jonsson notes, to the fact that 'green arguments are driven forward for further exploitation of the Sámi heartland' (*Aktuell Hållbarhet*, 2021).

Another recent case concerns exploitation concession applications by Nickel Mountain AB for Rönnbäck/Rönnbäcken in Storuman municipality, which would be incompatible with the traditional pasture rotation for reindeer. By the end of 2020, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2020) concluded that the plans for mining were discriminatory by virtue of procedural justice deficiencies. While the CERD acknowledged the role of mining as a legitimate public interest, it criticized the absence of dialogue and consultation in a situation where the local Sámi community – not all of whom are reindeer herders – was under severe psychological pressure over threats to their livelihood. As a result, combined with profitability issues, the project was eventually shelved.

It's electrifying

As the green transition discourse suggests, developments in mining are immediately implicated in sustainable energy transition. With the emergence of a Nordic 'battery belt', with factories in Skellefteå (Sweden), Mo I Rana (Norway) and Vasa (Finland), it is unlikely that arguments about moral duties and securing supplies, combined with the sway of promoting public acceptance of mining, will cease anytime soon. Given such developments, reinvigorated attention to the nickel, cobalt and magnetite supplies at Rönnbäck, and minerals in other places, is to be expected.

While the energy-intensive metals and mining sector in Sweden traditionally relied almost exclusively on fossil fuels, the authorities have now settled for a national electrification strategy (*Regeringskansliet*, 2022). In 2016, the Swedish Parliament adopted a long-term energy policy aiming for a fast expansion of renewable electricity generation. With hydropower already developed on an industrial scale in earlier rounds of energy planning in the north, the current priority is a considerable expansion of wind power. Once fully developed, Svevind's Markbygden 1101 west of Piteå will become Europe's largest on-land wind farm, expected to generate around 8 to 12 TWh per year – a substantial part of Sweden's planned wind power (*Energimyndigheten*, 2021).

While Markbygden has created only limited controversy, this is not the case with furniture giant Ikea's wind power development in the mountains of Glötesvålen, Härjedalen. The project has attracted ample scholarly attention and featured in the well-known Swedish Radio series *Konflikt* (SR, 2021; Skarin and Alam, 2021). After a lengthy struggle with private landowners

over Sámi rights to herding in the 1990s, a curiously biased environmental impact assessment supported commercial wind power development in the region.

Like the hydropower projects of the twentieth century (for example, their impact on hydrology and landscape ecology in places like Rönnebäck), wind turbines stir controversy. Legal scholars have scrutinized inbuilt procedural justice issues of standard planning practices, where the state relinquishes consultation responsibilities to project developers. These practices demonstrate the state's failure to recognize the status of the Sámi reindeer herders as Indigenous people, including their special rights to land and resources (Allard, 2018; Cambou, 2020). They inspire one-way information exercises imbued with a belief in the viability of win-win solutions and the harmonious co-existence of reindeer herding and energy industries in the landscape. They also sustain a narrow *stakeholder* perspective, where reindeer herders are considered with regards to their entrepreneurial interests, and hence made fully comparable to wind power companies or other businesses, rather than special rights-holders concerned about their livelihoods (Larsen and Raitio, 2019, p 15; Bjärstig et al, 2020, p 13). Essentially, legal and policy arrangements structurally codify and enforce these matters in terms of a commodity logic that to an extent succeeds in escaping scrutiny in a wider, politicized justice perspective. What the resulting boundary struggles show, however, is that these livelihoods and rights embody social practices and values that clearly surpass commodity logic (see, for instance, Fraser, 2014a, pp 66, 69).

These examples of mining as a 'moral duty' and the electrification strategy show, in the first place, that any 'romantic view' that construes nature (mining resources, material landscape) and polity as intrinsically separate from capitalism simply is misguided (Fraser, 2014a, pp 69–70). Yet Fraser claims this separation is exactly what capitalist society's 'normative topography' tends to institutionalize (Fraser, 2014a, p 67). In the mining and energy field, the discussion seems to be about solving environmental crises by providing resources for sustainable transitions. It installs 'a natural realm, conceived as offering a free, unproduced supply of "raw material" that is available for appropriation' (Fraser, 2014a, p 63). Questioning the inner workings and commodity logic of capitalist society is not part of the equation. How commodification colonizes virtually all aspects of social life, sustaining exploitative processes and social dominance, hence is obfuscated (Fraser, 2018, p 3). Under these circumstances, it is hard to mobilize justice as a critical concept to grasp the broader institutionalized order that is capitalist society.

In the second place, mining and energy show that with every new boundary struggle, capitalist society breeds additional fronts in which it can become vulnerable. Capitalist environmental practice will thereby also continue to

threaten the social and ecological conditions that render accumulation at all possible, inevitably giving rise to new forms of crisis (Fraser, 2014a, p 63).

Right to the forest

In mining and energy landscapes, at the boundaries of commodification, multiple crises occur, accompanied by numerous forms of social resistance. This crisis tendency may call into existence new social movements questioning capitalist society's normative topography (Fraser, 2014a, p 69) and capitalism's subsumption of nature (see, for instance, Holifield et al, 2018). Regardless of their content, the frontiers of commodification will thus inevitably engender different claims to justice by different communities. A case in point is the so-called Forest Revolt (*Skogsupproret*), initiated by Sámi activists and environmentalists. Militating against 'Sweden's colonial forest destruction', the protesters made calls to 'decolonize Sápmi' (that is, the space traditionally inhabited by the Sámi people) and to 'democratize the forest' (Skogsupproret, 2022).

First, the identification of logging with a *colonial* present emanates from continued claims to injustice, in particular regarding Sámi rights. Granted, over the past decades, a number of significant legal and political changes have been made: Swedification policies were aborted in the late 1970s; the Swedish state constitutionally recognized the Sámi as an Indigenous people in 2010; and in 2021 a truth commission was set up to examine historical injustices levelled against the Sámi (Regeringen, 2021). The Swedish Supreme Court's recent (2020) recognition of exclusive hunting and fishing rights of the Sámi reindeer herders of Girjas has also been identified as 'an important victory' for the community by asserting its customary rights to land and natural resources. However, attention to the historical utilization of the landscape also roused 'increased racism and conflict between groups of Sami as well as between Sami and Swedish locals' (Allard and Brännström, 2021, pp 56, 57; see, for instance, Dahre, 2004). Moreover, it remains to be seen if these legal developments – the more sustained consideration of the ancient Swedish property law concept of immemorial prescription (*urminnes hävd*) and usufructuary rights to herd reindeer on public and private land – will prove to be of decisive aid in solving conflicts and remaining disagreements over the right to the landscape in Sápmi.

Second, the activists' demand to *democratize* the forest arguably emanated from the protracted historical experience of expropriation (central to Indigenous rights struggles), and it ties in with the increasingly vibrant rights agenda in international forestry. The latter encompasses a diverse repertoire of rights claims for the redistribution of benefits, the recognition of forest people's identities, and active promotion of participatory justice (see, for instance, Sikor and Stahl, 2012). Deficiencies in procedural rights,

such as opportunities to participate in environmental decision making regarding the forest, were a key issue behind the blockade against state-owned Sveaskog, in Jouksuvaara, Pajala municipality in May 2021. In a letter to the editors of the *Aftonbladet* newspaper, 29 Sámi communities summarized widespread grievances about the consequences of the ongoing privatization of state-owned forests (a programme initiated in 2002 by the then conservative government to support private forestry and regional development, in particular in the far north; see [Sveriges Riksdag Näringsutskottet, 2020](#)):

According to the State's owner policy, state companies should set a good example. But instead of being a paragon for the industry, Sveaskog seems to use the land sales program from 2002 as a pretext to systematically sell those very lands on which the Sámi communities year after year prevented logging precisely because they are vital to reindeer husbandry. The private landowner who acquires the property will usually be exempted from consultation obligations and, because supervision remains inadequate, will in principle be free to harvest the forest. After the felling, or as part of the business agreement, Sveaskog can buy back the timber from the private forest owner. By the time the Sámi community becomes aware of the deal, the land is usually already bare-cut and lost. The forest companies are destroying our reindeer pastures. (*Aftonbladet, 2020*)

This is certainly not a novel phenomenon and appears to reflect the legal prioritization of timber production over reindeer herding ([Brännström, 2017](#)). Over the past few decades, private landowners and the forest industry continue to assail Sámi use rights, based on controversial claims regarding property values and biodiversity:

The right of use is now being challenged in many places. Private landowners are literally conducting a legal hunt against the Sami today to inhibit reindeer herding. These legal cases are not just about financial compensation for damage to the forest. More fundamentally, they are about the existence of the Sami. ([Dahre, 2004](#), p 454)

Such regional skirmishes provoke international indignation over Indigenous rights and environmental conduct too. Relying on existing legal provisions, Sweden has resisted ratification of the International Labour Organization's 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO Convention No. 169) with its demands on the procedural right to consultation and recognition of land rights (the latter included Sámi reindeer husbandry and small game hunting and fishing).

This reverberates the justice claims surrounding mining and energy. Public investigation has made abundantly clear what is at stake: a fear of jeopardizing state and capitalist control over vast tracts of a resource-rich landscape (SOU, 1999, p 25). In the meantime, continued international discontent expressed by the UN, the Council of Europe and human rights bodies suggests that Swedish legislation does not meet the internationally accepted standards regarding the protection of Indigenous rights. The persistent appeal is for Sweden ‘to properly demarcate traditional Sámi land areas and adopt legislation that recognizes and protects Sámi land and resource rights, as well as secures legal aid to allow Sámi to assert their rights before the courts’ (Allard and Brännström, 2021, p 60). In the meantime, too, Sveaskog – the corporatized scion of what once was state forestry and currently the largest forest owner in the country – was awarded the Swedish ‘greenwash prize’ 2020 by Friends of the Earth for what was perceived as its strategic hoodwinking.

Production–reproduction

All over the board, conflicts over forests, minerals and energy production, and small game hunting and fishing rights, have multiplied, and they illustrate the actuality of Fraser’s notion of ongoing boundary work in capitalist development. These examples of using northern nature as a source of input to accumulative society – resulting in clearcuts, noise and air pollution, land degradation, tailings and waste dams – are familiar enough.

Although Fraser highlights important contradictions involved in treating nature as ‘raw material’ and ‘sink’ (Fraser, 2014a, p 63), she also insists that this strand of crisis needs to be connected to a larger social totality (Fraser, 2014b, p 549). The circumstances sketched above reveal how nature emerges in the sphere of reproduction, or, more accurately, in the production/reproduction nexus as identified by feminist geographers as *life’s work* (see, for instance, Mitchell et al, 2012). In Sámi lived realities and the material social practice of reindeer herding, labour and capital intimately and reciprocally relate to the environmental conditions of production. In other words, Sámi reproduction of the means of production inevitably encompasses the *environmental* conditions of production. The reconfigured relations with the primary sector of forestry, mining and energy noted earlier, precisely *because* they adversely affect these environmental conditions, therefore also entail a mounting crisis in social reproduction. Such an existential diagnosis sits well with environmental justice scholarship.

In addition to this, both capitalist capture of natural resources and traditional Sámi use value are increasingly confronted by (global) interests of using the landscape as a space for commercial tourism development and recreation. This is perhaps most obviously the case in the practice of nature conservation.

As a complement to accounts of mobilizing nature as raw material, there is the equally exclusionary practice of capturing the north as non-human wilderness and terrain of social reproduction for tourists: fabricating rural remoteness as a space for replenishment of urban labour power. Codifying on a deeply racialized status hierarchy, the Sámi appeared in earlier policies and representations as either a pre-modern voiceless part of nature (hence excluded from participatory justice), or a modern threat to the wilderness experience. Current tendencies toward the commodification of nature conservation in Sweden reveal a changing frontier (Mels, 2020). Regional development driven by a global experience economy once again makes the landscape subject to confiscation on the part of capital. ‘Who has the right to the mountains?’ is indeed a seriously complex question in this context, explored by Swedish television in a series highlighting ‘the struggle over the mountains’, where increased tourist presence interferes with reindeer herding (SVT, 2021).

Conclusion: Mainstreaming justice

The cases sketched in this chapter confirm a well-known theoretical observation insisting on attention to the geographical production of inequalities as a core focus for justice scholarship. Distribution, participation and recognition are not just philosophical concepts. They combine practically and confront us in the landscape as a peopled polity and place. However, current use of the language of justice in policy making and planning seems to make little practical difference to these environments. To rephrase: What is it about capitalist society that engenders the mainstreaming of environmental justice?

Landscapes under pressure help answer that question because they show how environmental justice claims are framed to fit the fabric of capitalist society. Mainstreaming tendencies seem to emerge from an ideologically driven reluctance – tied to political and economic interests of ongoing exploitation – to get in the way of ongoing commodification (Fraser, 2021, p 100). They serve an indispensable political function for accommodating rather than structurally questioning capitalism’s normative topography (Fraser, 2015). They thereby support ‘the sustainability of capitalism’, rather than ‘the sustainability of society and nature’ (Fraser, 2014b, p 549). Against such mainstreaming stands critical attention to justice issues concerning resource redistribution, cultural recognition and participation in policy development and planning (see, for instance, Fraser, 2008). All of these haunt the landscapes of forestry, mining and energy.

The boundaries of commodification cover critical historical and geographical terrain of social struggle in northern Sweden. If it is true that the ‘heartland of exploitation’ was to be found in the urban core, then the

northern periphery constituted in that sense the ‘iconic site of expropriation’ (Fraser, 2018, p 7), although the two are nowadays internally articulated.

Grasping this terrain is an antidote against wistful idealism. For all of its metaphorical intention, *The Guardian’s* characterization of the far north of Sweden as a new green Klondike is historically misleading because, as journalist Po Tidholm (2021) has noted, it may reproduce the unfortunate stereotype of a region ‘which after the latest boom has returned to some kind of wilderness that should be exploited, built and inhabited – again’. Not unlike earlier rounds of exploitation, the current stampede is motivated by ‘a higher, national, purpose: the transition to a green society’. This ‘recurring image of Norrland as a virgin source of raw materials’ matters precisely because of earlier historical experiences of ‘an infrastructure built primarily to transport raw materials, not to connect people and communities. And these communities have not been given proper tools for the future’. Rather than dreaming up spatial and historical similes, then, it is of immediate importance to ask questions like ‘For whose sake is Norrland being exploited this time?’ (Tidholm, 2021).

With threats to land rights from developments dictated by the market, it is indeed not altogether surprising to find even environmentally minded critics of the current Green Deal thinking about, and talking of, green colonialism. Are they facing a substantial change in dealing with environment and justice, the mere rhetorical adaptation of run-of-the-mill sustainable development or, indeed, old-fashioned greenwashing? Do the examples sketched in this chapter reveal a concern with the sustainability of capitalism or the sustainability of society and nature?

Against variants of philosophical idealism stand the tough realities of material landscapes. Forests, mines, energy and conservation raise increasingly unsettling concerns about groups being marginalized in social life and consigned to political subjectification. They reveal the occurrence of *multiple* struggles over raw materials and the cumulative effects in various parts of the landscape, often by the same people over the course of history (Naturvårdsverket, 2020). They produce landscapes of intensified boundary work where the exploitation–expropriation nexus has all but sustained environmental injustice.

Study questions

1. What are the relationships between natural resource use and justice in the cases described?
2. Can you explain what boundary struggles are all about and why they may help if you want to grasp capitalist society?
3. What do you see as viable solutions to the environmental justice issues identified here?

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