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The Socio-ecological Question, the Global Environmental Justice Movement and Anti-systemic Environmentalism

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Abstract

This article makes two central arguments: i) we can understand the current phase of anti-systemic movements predominantly through the globally expanding forms of resistance centered on environment, food, climate, soil, water, and so on as a collective socio-ecological critique and confrontation of the global capitalist relations of production; and ii) we can conceptually specify the global environmental justice movement through the notion of anti-systemic environmentalism expressing "the second contradiction of capitalism," i.e., the socio-ecological crisis of the capitalist world system. In making these arguments, it introduces the concept of *the socio-ecological question*, theoretically grounded in the value theory of nature, in establishing the world-historical relationality among diverse place-based socio-environmental movements.

Keywords

anti-systemic environmentalism – capital-nature relation – environmental rationality – global socio-ecological crisis – socio-ecological question – value theory of nature

1 Introduction

In the present moment, "history is mobilized primarily" not by social conflicts in the field of political economy, expressed in the form of "class struggle" or the labor movement, but "in the field of political ecology by socio-environmental

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conflicts" (Leff 2021:96). The voices raised in these movements have indicated a distinct form of environmentalism that is directly related with the material problems of unequal ecological distribution, deteriorating livelihoods, dispossession, displacement, and social marginalization (Bryant 1992; Gadgil and Guha 1995; Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997; Hornborg 2007; Martínez-Alier 2002; Peet and Watts 1996). This has been expressed through the proposition of "the environmentalization of social struggles" (Acselrad 2010). In this article, I will specify this argument further by introducing a new concept: the "environmentalization" of the anti-systemic movements or *anti-systemic environmentalism*. This is an interdisciplinary engagement linking political ecology to political economy to comprehend how the global spread of claims for alternative socio-ecologically based epistemologies and ontologies of lifeworld embedded in sustainable human-nature interaction politically challenge the world-historical capitalist value relations.

I contend that the globally expanding socio-ecological forms of resistance centered on environment, food, climate, land, soil, water, and so on present epistemological possibilities for: i) re-understanding anti-systemic movements as a collective critique of the global capitalist relations of production not solely through the collective agency of the 'working class' expressing the social contradiction between capital and labor, but also through the anti-systemic forms of environmentalism expressing what James O'Connor (1988) called "the second contradiction of capitalism," which I specify as *the socio-ecological contradiction between capital and nature*; and ii) reformulating the global environmental justice movement as a potent anti-systemic social force and political field enabling the manifestation of the socio-ecological contradiction between capital and nature. In these arguments, I introduce *the socio-ecological question* and indicate the historical shift from "the social question" that emerged in the nineteenth century to "the socio-ecological question" that emerged in the late-twentieth century as a point of departure to comprehend and examine the emergence of anti-systemic environmentalism as a form of "class struggle" in relation to global capitalist relations.

2 Historical Shift from the Social Question to the Socio-ecological Question: A Political Economy Perspective through the Value Theory of Nature

In introducing the notion of anti-systemic environmentalism from a theoretically and methodologically specific position, it is critical to specify the analytical distinction between the social question and the socio-ecological

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question as they correspond to distinctive ontologies of capitalist development. In explaining the former, I will refer to Wolfram Fischer's (1966) study of the nineteenth century "social question" and its transformation in the twentieth century. According to Fischer, during the nineteenth century, "the social question" represented the manifestations of the socio-historical contradictions of industrialization and urbanization in Western Europe. Until the mid-nineteenth century, it was understood at the societal level as a question of a distinctive historical form of pauperism emerging and expanding in the rising industrial cities contrary to the transhistorical understanding of pauperism before the rise of the European enlightenment. This new form indicated displacement of peasants, proletarianization, and uneven distribution of wealth. From the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, the social question meant the "labor question" and the exploitation of industrial labor, as the proletariat became a major socially visible class force of European cities. With the outbreak of the world wars in the early to mid-twentieth century, it turned predominantly into a question of societal order adapted to the needs of industrial expansion and modernization that generates social disintegration. In the postwar era, the notion of "the social question" was substituted by the fragmentary notions of "social problems" or "social pathologies" that could be broken down into rational and objective variables and delinked from the broader social processes of modernization (Fisher 1966:65–67).

In their critique of the disappearance of capitalism or of a critical political economy from contemporary social movement studies, Cox and Nilsen (2014) point out that the importance of Fischer's notion of "the social question" stems from its correspondence to the "the social movement" as well. As they put it, "the social movement" in the nineteenth century was a manifestation of "the social question" as "the social question in action." Therefore, the historical understanding of the social question was pivotal for understanding of the social movement itself. This linkage is critical for understanding the relationship between what I call the socio-ecological question and the environmental justice movements as the potent social forces of the contemporary era.

From the lens of Marx's theory of capital or value we can argue that what Fisher explains as the nineteenth century social question explicates the process of commodification of labor and the formation of capital-wage labor relation in Europe. Marx's theory of value revealed the fetishistic and exploitative character of capitalist development and created an epistemology of what we can express as "labor rationality" through the centrality of the concept of commodity and commodity fetishism, unraveling how commodity fetishism conceals the exploitation of labor or surplus value. Put differently, labor rationality embedded in the value theory of labor revealed and manifested the

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social question as a question of "proletarianization" and "exploitation." A class analytic perspective to the labor movement, in turn, rendered it as a form of action of this social question revealing and struggling with labor exploitation disguised by commodity fetishism.

The study of anti-systemic labor movements manifested the world-historical expansion of the nineteenth century social question in the form of the labor question from Europe to the Global South in the twentieth century, if not before during the colonial era. Labor rationality or the value episteme based on capital-labor relation constituted the theoretical basis of the understanding of the global labor movement as the most potent anti-systemic social force in the twentieth century (Arrighi et al. 1989; Silver 2003). The perspective of "anti-systemic movements" to social movements was developed in the 1980s by Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein (1989) to systematically characterize the social movements developed against "the world-system of historical capitalism." The critical importance of the anti-systemic movements analysis lies in that it locates the historical development of social movements in relation to the social and political change prompted by the world-historical processes of capitalist development. The "world-systemic" approach enables a historically concretized and long-term historical comprehension of the development of the movement by tracing the links between local/national political-institutional and socio-economic context and the global context of value relations, division of capitalist production, and relations of rule (MacPherson 2018:509–510). It situates "the social movement" as a counter-hegemonic confrontation against a world-historically manifesting "social question," although these movements may emerge in distinctive and non-identical forms and localities and with locally bounded claims and aims. Thus, it renders the social movements as the global social question in action.

Yet, by the turn of the twenty-first century, a conviction in social movement studies was prevailing that the working class as the major force of change was in a state of crisis in the aftermath of the emergence of "post-industrial society" in the Global North and the rise of non-class-based identity movements. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, a new wave of counter-hegemonic movements advocating opposition to war, capitalist dispossession, and to dictatorial regimes emerged starting with the Chiapas revolt. The anti-globalization movement and the formation of the World Social Forum spread the world over (Barker et al. 2013) vis-à-vis the destructive political and economic regimes and practices of neoliberal expansion (Martin 2008). Nonetheless, the study of this emerging anti-systemic social wave has remained limited in understanding the relationship between the specific historical forms of capitalist

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deepening and expansion and this movement wave. This paradoxical situation, noted in the expression of the "strange disappearance of capitalism from social movement studies," is explained with the positioning of the new social movements in relation to "post-material" issues such as autonomy, identity, and recognition independent of (re)distribution issues (Hetland and Goodwin 2013:83–86, 91–92). In *Forces of Labor*, Beverly Silver (2003) questioned this conviction, demonstrating that the relocation of the production to the Global South historically led also to the relocation of the working-class movement in new and less militant forms to both new geographical sites of production and new industrial sectors from the late nineteenth to late twentieth century. Nonetheless, she hesitated on whether a new form of global labor unrest could emerge at the turn of the twenty first century despite the visible crisis of the social legitimacy of the capitalist world economy. As reflective of this uncertainty, her conclusion is salient for the purpose of this paper:

> While the overlap between the racial and wealth divides on a world-scale has been consolidated, *environmental degradation* has proceeded at a pace and scale unprecedented in human history. Thus the ultimate challenge faced by the workers of the world in the early twenty-first century is the struggle, not just against one's own exploitation and exclusion, but for an international regime that truly subordinates profits to the *livelihood* of all (Silver 2003:179, *italics added*).

In these sentences, she emphasizes the need for an anti-systemic struggle by workers not only to strengthen their bargaining power vis-à-vis labor exploitation, but also to sustain the livelihood of all humanity in the face of environmental degradation of unprecedented pace and scale. She thus confers on the new working class of the twenty-first century the role of resisting the environmental crisis of capitalism. This theoretically ambiguous or incompatible position from a class-analytical lens or labor rationality centered on capital-wage labor relation constitutes a central theoretical departure point for the argument of this article. I argue that the conceptual incongruity in this contention results from the historical incongruity between the predominant social question of the nineteenth (as it was defined in Europe) and twentieth centuries (as it expanded globally) as a question of exploitation conceived via capital-labor relation and the predominant social question of the twenty-first century. I propose that the current historical moment of the social question has taken the form of a socio-ecological question and we need a distinct epistemological and theoretical lens to understand the distinctive historical nature of this question in the context of world capitalist development.

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The value lens of capital-labor relation misses the historically realized possibility that the centrality of the global labor movement as the major constituent of the anti-systemic social forces is shifting towards an expanding anti-systemic environmental movement. The first decades of the twenty-first century have seen not the internationalization of labor unrest, but the emergence and expansion of a global wave of socio-ecological movements entailing various local and transnational rural and (semi-)urban environmental, climate, food and agrarian, and water justice movements. We cannot explain the historical nature of these movements from a political economy perspective based on labor rationality. In the current historical conjuncture, the political-ecological critique has stronger "ability to connect the critique of structure with a strategic analysis" (Barker et al. 2013:15) of socio-ecologically based justice movements. I locate this socio-historical shift in the nature of the political field of social movements in the emergence of a socio-ecological question manifesting in the form of a global socio-ecological crisis of capitalist development or "the sustainability crisis" (Scheidel et al. 2018).

The global socio-ecological crisis became noticeable at the last quarter of the twentieth century, although its historical origins dates back to the formation of the capitalist world system (Moore 2017), which entailed colonial expansion, the plantation system, domination, and reconfiguration of local human-nature interactions and appropriation of local/Indigenous re(productive) labor and nature. It has manifested the (socio-)ecological contradictions and limits of the capitalist expansion and the hegemony of economic rationality. It has also revealed "the blind spots" of the historical materialism (Leff 2021) and of the value episteme that recognizes only labor as the source of (surplus) value while dismissing nature's contributions to value formation at the conceptual level (McMichael 2013; Schneider and McMichael 2010). The socio-ecological contradictions of the expansion and deepening of capitalist accumulation began to be recognized in various specific ways by eco-Marxism (Burkett 1999; Foster 1999; Gorz 1994; Moore 2003, 2017; O'Connor 1988). Yet, Eco-Marxism's approach to this problem through Marx's concept of "the metabolic rift" (Burkett 1999; Foster 1999) ends up with "an epistemological rift" (Schneider and McMichael 2010), as it explains the metabolic rift as an outcome of the capital-labor relation and, thereby, externalizes socio-ecologically based relations and practices from the analysis of capitalist development and social change. By denying "the significance of the ecological calculus, by which ecological cycles can be renewed at their earthly base," as Philip McMichael (2013) notes, "value theory renders invisible those who (must) work to renew and sustain ecological cycles, and the values by which they (must) live" (p. 155). Put differently, the value epistemology based on the analytic lens of capital-labor

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relation fails to envisage an ecologically sustainable ontology of life, because it presumes what James O'Connor (1988) called the "second contradiction of capitalism" as already immanent in the "first" contradiction between capital and labor (Schneider and McMichael 2010; Taşdemir Yaşın 2017). As such, it cannot reveal and manifest the socio-historical distinctiveness of the socio-ecological question.

Understanding the relationship between the socio-ecological question and the globally spreading ecology movements requires a new form rationality, i.e., "environmental rationality" as expressed by Enrique Leff (2021), that can reconstrue and historically reground the value theory in relation to nature, which "has been abandoned by eco-Marxism as an impossible task" (p. 152). Environmental rationality recognizes nature's quantitative-material and qualitative-non-material values, calling for a new theory that can "grasp the concrete processes that determine capitalist production in its post-industrial and ecological phase" (p. 89) and reconstruct historical materialism to be "capable of integrating the ecological conditions for sustainability and the cultural values assigned to nature" (p. 136). Such a new theory is critical in transforming the productive rationality based in labor productivity to account for "the incorporation of natural processes in the general conditions of production" and constructing "an environmental rationality based upon the principles of eco-technological-cultural productivity, ecological resiliency, territorial rights and environmental justice" (pp. 167–168). Rendering such a theory as the condition of possibility for unveiling "the second contradiction" of capitalist production, Leff writes, "In Capital, Nature appears less than as 'second contradiction' of capital, as a 'contradiction of second order': as the over-determined effect of the exploitation of labor rather than the dialectical movement of Nature" (p. 189).

We can acknowledge that the ontology of the nineteenth century can account for the epistemological relegation of the ecological contradictions of capitalist production to the "second order," as the ecological "externalities" of the development of wage-labor in industrializing Europe was transferred to the colonially ruled geographies outside Europe in the form of soil depletion or resource appropriation/exhaustion. However, we can also admit that at the present context this second contradiction has gained predominating urgency and, as such, the theory of capital needs to recognize it conceptually. What Leff states as "the ecological phase" of capitalist production or what I call "the socio-ecological question" can be revealed, following Dale Tomich's (2004) formative distinction between historical theory and theoretical history, by reconstituting "the theoretical categories in ways that can enable re-establishing the connection between theory and history in understanding

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the historically specific relationship between nature and capital" (Taşdemir Yaşın 2017:3). As Tomich (2015) argues, in Marx's theory of value, wage-labor is not "the exclusive form of capitalist production and nor is capitalist accumulation the unilateral product of its unfolding," as it regards the capital-wage labor "not in isolation, but as a part of the totality of relations of capital" (p. 359). The value form is reconstituted in relation to other sources of surplus value, which is "the product of the whole system, the production and reproduction of capital on a world scale" (p. 362), including nature.

I argue that an epistemic movement from labor rationality to environmental rationality calls for an alternative theoretical approach that can recognize that the contradiction of the capitalist value production is reconstituted as the social relation of capital and nature and, thereby, account for the ecological contradictions of capitalist relations of production (at the concrete level) through "capital-nature relation" (Taşdemir Yaşın 2017). This conceptual reconsideration emphasizes that capital accumulation unfolds not only through over-exploitation of cheap labor based on a world division of labor, but also through appropriation, social abstraction, and domination of nature based on a world division of nature. Such domination also involves the domination, devaluation, or dissolution of what Ariel Salleh (2010) calls "the meta-industrial labor" that "catalyzes metabolic transformations" at the local/micro levels such as peasants, Indigenous cultivators, women, and gatherers and "the metabolic value" that is created and sustained by "the meta-industrial labor" to support ecological integrity and the social metabolism. In other words, abstract nature negates "human labor mediation of nature 'for nature'" (p. 212). Based in environmental rationality, envisioning of the value theory as a "value theory of nature" reconceives "the commodity form" as the most central and generalized form of capitalist accumulation that "not only structures social labor," as the value theory of labor suggests, "but also structures nature and the human-nature interaction through a socio-historically specific pattern of domination and objectification of nature" (Taşdemir Yaşın 2017:397):

> It is the embodiment of both labor time and ecological matter/space that is transformed into the commodity form. If labor constitutes the temporality of the commodities, i.e. their "formation by living time" (Marx 1973 [1857]:361), nature constitutes their spatiality, i.e., *their formation by living space*. The alienation of the former deprives labor from his life; the alienation of the latter deprives the ecological basis of life. "The simultaneity of substantial and abstract dimensions" not only of labor (Postone 1993:269) but also of nature, in turn, creates the dual character of the commodity. The social alienation of nature and of the human-nature

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> relation structures the concrete socio-ecological interaction which gains historically specific character (Taşdemir Yaşın 2017:398, *italics added*).

This approach provides the conceptual and epistemological possibilities to recognize ecological conditions of production and reproduction, to historically explore the uneven and conflictual processes of capitalist incorporation of nature and ensuing geographically differentiated socio-ecological transformation, and to envision socio-ecologically sustainable and resilient alternatives. The social transformation of nature as living space/ecosystem or socio-ecological habitat into a material resource and commodity through its subordination to value relations is generalized as the historical distinction of "the extractivist turn" of neoliberal global value accumulation (Bebbington 2009). While living ecosystems are turned into frontiers of "socio-natural commodities" (Peluso 2012) of the capitalist world economy, their living spatiality turns into an objectified and valorized dead form in commoditized spaces. From this perspective, the global socio-ecological question that entails various interlinked socio-ecological forms of crises emerges as an outcome of the expansion and deepening of capital-nature relation through the world division of nature and of socio-ecological frontiers configured/organized by the commodity form. This historical relation manifests itself in the form of an unavoidable global socio-ecological crisis involving the multiple crises of climate change, agro-environmental, food, water, and biodiversity crises, malnutrition as well the accumulation of precarious/redundant populations (through dispossession/depeasantization/denaturalization) in the urban slums (distinct from proletarianization) as divergent yet world-historically linked faces (Taşdemir Yaşın 2022).

3 The Socio-Ecological Question in Action: Political Ecology of Environmental Justice

The conceptual understanding of the socio-ecological question through the value theory of nature has critical implications for understanding the nature of environmental conflicts and struggles. I will specify the global wave of environmental justice movements as the new major forces of social change in the context of the present moment. The political ecological perspectives on the conflictual relationship between environmental movements and the global socio-environmental change provide a critical empirical realm that deepens our comprehension of the geographically distinct or place-specific local manifestations of the socio-ecological question in action to rephrase Cox and Nilsen (2014). Particularly, in the field of environmental justice, the perspectives of

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"the environmentalism of the poor" and "the global environmental justice movement" renders how the historically specific socio-ecological question translates into the global rise and spread of environmental movements.

The concept of the environmentalism of the poor, introduced in the works of Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997; Martínez-Alier 2002; Martínez-Alier et al. 2016), constituted the first systematic approach to the relationship between capitalist development, socio-ecological transformation and the emergence of environmental movements in the Global South. This perspective introduced a new social and political understanding of environmentalism that recognized the forms of resistance of local-indigenous communities who depended on nature for their life and livelihood such as peasant, pastoralist, tribal, artisanal, and landless laborer communities against the processes of "resource capture" and "ecological degradation." It revealed how the disruption of their access to land and "natural resource" bases, or socio-ecological habitats, has ended up with their dispossession from their territorially-embedded relations triggering the formation of a new class of people whom they called "ecological refugees" in rural, semi-rural, or urban areas or slums (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997:12, 17). By addressing the question of the historical discrepancies, incommensurability, and clashes between the local-Indigenous forms of valuations of nature and the economic valuation of nature based in the capitalist world market, it informed the multiple temporalities of human-nature interactions with contradictory epistemologies (Martínez-Alier 2001, 2002).

This approach has been transformative in multiple ways opening up an epistemological space of study that situates environmental change and environmentalism in the socio-historical and political-ecological context. It revealed how socio-ecological change induced by capitalist expansion and domination and the consequently emerging environmental conflicts were interlinked with the questions of human rights, distributive justice, cultural values, livelihood and survival. It did not signify struggles of rural-indigenous communities "for preservation of nature for its own sake" (Anguelovski and Martínez-Alier 2014:169). Rather, it addressed how they choose to protect and reclaim their interaction and bonds with nature, established in the long-term as a constitutive aspect of their social reproduction, cultural values, and territorial identities against the destructive processes of capitalist incorporation and accumulation through the formation of nature-based commodity frontiers (Moore 2000), land appropriation, resource extraction and/or waste disposal (Anguelovski and Martínez-Alier 2014; Martínez-Alier 2014).

Early in the 2000s, the concept of "the environmentalism of the poor" paved the way for "the environmental justice movement" with a socially and spatially broadened scope. The latter indicated a convergence between the

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worldwide environmentalism of the poor and the urban-based environmental justice movement developed in the US against environmental racism at both historical and theoretical levels (Martínez-Alier 2001, 2002, 2014; Nixon 2011; Schlosberg 2007). While Robert Bullard (2000) located this concept in relation to the unequal distribution of social costs of environmental burdens among different classes and racial/ethnic groups, Schlosberg (2007) broadened the theoretical scope of "environmental justice" from a pluralistic perspective to comprise not only ecological (mal)distribution (of environmental goods and bads) (Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996), but also (mis)recognition, (lack of) participation and (in)capabilities. Although popularized within the US, the concept of environmental justice has been readily adopted in the environmental resistance movements developed transnationally or based in the Global South (Schlosberg 2007).

In the last decade, a broadened global framework of environmental justice emerged through the concept of "the global environmental justice movement" (Anguelovski and Martínez-Alier 2014; Martínez-Alier 2014; Martínez-Alier et al. 2016 Sikor and Newell 2014) that recognized and reflected the global escalation and scaling of environmental justice movements among (semi-)rural peasant/small farmer/Indigenous communities and urban populations in relation to the expansion of nature-based/extractive commodity frontiers entailing mining and extraction, land use and land grabbing, water use, waste disposal in rural socio-ecologies; land speculation, gentrification, contamination, and access to ecosystem services in urban spaces throughout the world (Anguelovski and Martínez-Alier 2014). The global environmental justice movement is documented by the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice that maps ecological conflicts from all over the world (Temper et al. 2015). Appendix 2 presents an overview of all the reported cases of conflicts as of June 2022.

In my view, the perspective of "the global environmental justice movement" has three critical epistemological and conceptual contributions. First, it indicates a socio-historical relationality among diverse place-specific environmental conflicts and movements in the Global South. It locates the global sources of the development of local environmental injustices in the context of contemporary capitalist expansion based in increased social metabolism of the world economy, expanded commodity extraction, agri-business, and waste disposal as well as ecologically unequal exchange and debt (Martínez-Alier 2014; Taşdemir Yaşın 2019). Second, it widens the analytical space of the environmental distribution and valuation conflicts to include not only rural but also urban areas and, thereby, recognizes the relationship between rural and urban forms of socio-ecological transformation (Anguelovski and Martínez-Alier 2014). Finally, it addresses "the environmentalism of the dispossessed" (Temper

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2014) that signifies a broader movement of politicized environmentalism challenging the dispossession of the rights to the environment (Martínez-Alier et al. 2016; Temper 2014). It indicates the struggles against processes and practices of dispossession of livelihoods and disruption/dislocation of local socio-ecological relations embedded in capitalist incorporation or expansion through the formation of new (agro)extractive frontiers (Taşdemir Yaşın 2022) and "socio-natures" (Bakker 2010; Latorre et al. 2015). These can be in the form of direct expropriation and forced displacement, situated in the processes of "accumulation by displacement" (Araghi 2009) or of "displacement without moving" as "one's place of living loses its life-sustaining features" including land, resources and knowledge through the long-term "slow violence" imposed by the domination of capitalist logic (Nixon 2011:19).

While "the environmentalism of the poor" employed a relatively localized methodological frame that underscored diverse place-specific rural conflicts, "the global environmental justice" provides a lens to critically situate the development of diverse forms of ecological and socio-ecological injustices as a global process leading to place-based environmental struggles (Özkaynak et al. 2012; Sikor and Newell 2014). This is expressed as follows:

> There is a global movement for environmental justice, although almost all conflicts in the EJatlas are local and they target specific local grievances. The movement is global because such local events belong to classes of conflicts that appear regularly elsewhere in the world (e.g. on open-cast copper mining, on oil palm plantations), or because they raise the conflict issue to a global level through movements' connections and networks and, by doing so, they actually create and operate at a global scale … We claim that there is a global environmental justice movement that shares some common goals, frames and forms of mobilization, although obviously there is no single united organization in charge, no politbureau or central committee. This is also the case, for instance, in the global feminist movement (Martínez-Alier et al. 2016:747).

At the epistemological level, this stance on "the global environmental justice movement" recognizes a new historically specific global wave of movements in the forms of environmentalism of the poor and/or environmentalism of the dispossessed. Yet, at the methodological level, it points at a central tension to be overcome. It indicates that the diverse local struggles that form this global wave demonstrate recurrent/similar sources of conflicts and claims and goals of the movements. Consequently, it holds a local-global tension, which can be expressed by Harvey's (1996) concern of "militant particularism,"

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negotiated by the organizational level of processes and links that globalize the scale/experience of the local/micro-level movements. The understanding of globality hinges on two main dynamics. One is the globalizing impacts of the social connections and networks of the movements at the organizational level. The other is the recurrence or comparability of the concrete social sources and nature of environmental conflicts and, therefore, common goals and claims emerging in each local "case." At the empirical level, these are crucial to the formation of a global wave of environmental movement. Yet, at the conceptual-methodological level, they do not specify how the diverse place-specific movements are globally interrelated at the world-historical level. This has political implications for understanding anti-systemic environmentalism as well.

Despite the diversity of conceptions and practices of environmental conflicts at the local levels, temporally and spatially comparative empirical research has shown that the deployment of claims in environmental justice movements demonstrate a dynamic nature transforming over time and across scales (Urkidi and Walter 2011). While the relatively short-term claims of environmental justice movements are formed predominantly by the particularistic aspects of the conflicts shaped by local histories and the materialities of nature, commodities, and dispossession/extraction/accumulation processes; in the longer-term, place-specific claims converge on a shared understanding of a profound socio-ecological disorder, and a slow violence that disrupts human-nature interaction as the central constituent of social reproduction (Taşdemir Yaşın 2019). While economic distributional claims are more apparent at the inception of the conflicts, the wider and longer-term socio-environmental impacts that cannot be compensated gains greater predominance with time (Urkidi and Walter 2011:692–693). Therefore, as noted by Sikor and Newell (2014), "There is an urgent need to interrogate the universalizing and globalizing tendencies of environmental justice struggles and examine the concrete scale-making practices and political economic processes which generate environmental (in)justices and underlie environmental struggles" (p. 155). They point out this as the "strong case for examining how questions of place-specific environmental justice relate to larger-scale political and economic processes" calling for thinking "innovatively and in an interdisciplinary way about how to make sense of environmental justice issues as they relate to and are experienced by people all around the world" (pp. 151–152). This point addresses the need for situating political ecology and political economy through the conceptual tools that can account for both the logic of capital and world-historical value relations and the logic of environmental rationality and ecologically embedded local-indigenous epistemologies, and how the former dominates the latter.

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4 Anti-systemic Environmentalism: Linking Political Economy and Political Ecology

The analysis of the global environmental justice movement already implies, but not yet specifies, the emergence of a world-historical movement of environmental justice that is an anti-systemic environmental movement. This article suggests methodologically the understanding of the global environmental justice movement in relation to the world-historical level of value relations/accumulation as the unit of analysis of each of the local instances, i.e., the object of analysis. The world-historical methodology implies reconceptualizing the global environmental justice movement as an anti-systemic movement as the form of action of the world-historical socio-ecological question that I conceive through the lens of capital-nature relation. This is an undertaking that is comparable to the relationship between "the social question" and the anti-systemic labor (working-class) movement epistemically conceived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the lens of value theory of labor.

The anti-capitalist (Temper 2014:188) and counter-hegemonic (Martínez-Alier 2021) character of the global environmental justice movement has already been noted through empirical research. This article specifies the anti-systemic nature of the global environmental justice movement from a new conceptual place. It proposes its re-comprehension in its geographically and multiple, diverse, and complex forms as a counter-hegemonic force and a socio-ecological confrontation against the hegemonic forces of capitalism and its ecological and socio-ecological contradictions inherent in the capital-nature relation. The value theory of nature specifies environmental justice movements as products of the uneven extension and deepening of global value relations through a generalized social abstraction of nature in the production of surplus value. This unfolds not independent of but in complex mutually constitutive interaction with capital-labor relation.

Thus, the value theory of nature links political ecology and political economy. If reconceived from the value theory of nature, the global environmental justice movement emerges as a leading anti-systemic social force in the context of the deepening global socio-ecological crisis/question. The ontology of life-world envisioned by the anti-systemic environmentalism is not about an equitable distribution of wealth created by "productive forces" or attainment of "state power" as aimed by the precedent anti-systemic labor movements (Arrighi et al. 1989). It is about an alternate and socio-ecologically sustainable form of "productivity" and "wealth" based on environmental rationality/ecological logic that can ensure the creative and locally divergent/plural/diverse co-evolution of nature, culture, and life (Leff 2021:203). Anti-systemic environmentalism recognizes, revalues, and reclaims ecologically embedded

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local-Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies of human-nature interaction that were dominated and made invisible by the unequal structures of power and knowledge, i.e., coloniality, nationality, and globality of power, embedded in the long history of the capitalist world-system (Ribeiro 2011:290) and rediscovered and revitalized in the twenty-first century (Figueroa-Helland et al. 2018). Diverse socio-ecological justice movements converge and form new alliances in building political power (Borras Jr. et al. 2018; Tramel 2018:1302) and in envisioning the common futures of an "emerging ontology" that revalues nature and local-Indigenous socio-ecological relations "as essential to general social and ecological sustainability" (McMichael 2008:46).

This can be traced in the existent "vocabularies of resistance" (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997) of many place-specific and transnational environmental justice movements for autonomy, sovereignty, rights, territory, and recognition of socio-ecologically based values (Leff 2021; Martínez-Alier 2014; Martínez-Alier et al. 2016; McMichael 2008; Rodríguez-Labajos and Özkaynak 2017; Taşdemir Yaşın 2019). The concepts of environmental racism, biopiracy, the ecological debt, climate justice, food sovereignty, water justice, and many others emerged from grassroots campaigns (Martinez-Alier et al. 2016). They have accounted for the processes that had not yet been thought and defined by the field of critical political economy at the theoretical level. At the current conjuncture, the local knowledge produced by activists and grassroot organizations not only ensures the legitimacy and visibility of the environmental justice movements, but also enters in and sometimes precedes the scientific (co)production of knowledge leading to "activism mobilizing science" (Conde 2014). These vocabularies have become influential conceptual tools for critically understanding the distinctive yet interlinked dimensions of the global socio-ecological question. From the value theory of nature lens, they manifest the uneven and destructive processes of socio-ecological transformation induced by the world-historical expansion of capital-nature relation. This perspective, thus, removes the tension between anti-capitalist politics versus environmentalist politics (Arsel et al. 2015).

5 Conclusion

The political ecology of environmental justice has demonstrated and documented that there is a growing global environmental justice movement composed of thousands of place-specific environmental struggles with similar or converging claims. This article has argued that these various local movements rising out of locally specific environmental conflicts are materially and

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geographically differentiated constituents of an anti-systemic environmental movement at the world-historical level.

The anti-systemic environmentalism underlining the claims of the environmental justice movements, in turn, calls for an alternative socio-ecologically based ontology of life prioritizing the sustainable human-nature interaction. While anti-systemic environmentalism emerges in divergent socio-ecological faces ranging from the climate justice movement to the food sovereignty movement, what is central to all is the anti-capitalist spirit that is refusing the socio-ecologically destructive relation of capital to nature.

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APPENDIX 1 A comparison of the social question and the socio-ecological question based in distinctive epistemological approaches

	The Social Question	*The Socio-ecological Question*
World-historical expansion	16th century onwards	16th century onwards, accelerated during the 20th century
Temporality of epistemic recognition	19th century (Europe), 20th century (global)	Late 20th century and 21st century
Ontological content/ substance	Urban poverty, social inequalities in the cities, proletarianization, the labor question (exploitation) (Europe/ Global North), colonial/ national/global class-race-gender based labor exploitation and underdevelopment (Global South, global)	Agro-environmental crisis, climate change, food crisis, water crisis, biodiversity crisis, malnutrition crisis, high unemployment/precarious work, new forms of urban poverty in the expanding planet of slums
Main dynamic/ source of accumulation	Enslavement/ proletarianization/ commodification of labor/ colonial/international/global division of labor and expansion of labor frontiers	Commodification of nature/ deepening and expansion of extractive commodity frontiers
Processes of dispossession	Dispossession from the means of production in the process of proletarianization	Dispossession of nature, limits to access to nature, displacement, the accumulation of redundant populations in the urban centers
Theoretical understanding	Value theory of labor – Capital-labor relation (world-historical) – Abstract social labor as the source of surplus value	Value theory of nature – Capital-nature relation (world-historical) – Socially abstracted nature as the source of surplus value
Central contradictions of value relations	Social contradictions: issues of social exploitation/justice and income/wealth distribution problems	(Socio-)ecological contradictions: issues of socio-ecological destruction/justice (environmental, agrarian, food, climate, water …), environmental distribution/livelihood and valuation problems

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APPENDIX 1 A comparison of the social question and the socio-ecological question (*cont.*)

	The Social Question	***The Socio-ecological Question***
"Externalities"	*Ecological externalities*: the metabolic rift resolved through colonial expropriation and ecologically unequal exchange	*Social externalities*: displacement, increasing redundant populations in the cities, unemployment, expansion of slums, malnutrition crisis
Anti-systemic politics	The social question in action: Working class or labor movement and/or social justice movements as major social forces of social change/transformation	The socio-ecological question in action: Environmental justice movements as major forces of socio-ecological change/transformation

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APPENDIX 2 General overview of the world-wide environmental conflicts reported by the Global Atlas of Environmental justice (N = 3689)

Variable characterizing the conflict	Number	Freq. (%)
Population type		
Rural	2169	58.8
Urban	584	15.8
Semi-urban	759	20.6
Unknown	84	2.3
Total	*3596*	
Success level		
Failure	1863	50.5
Not Sure	1205	32.7
Success	573	15.5
Category of the project		
Mineral ores and building materials extraction	688	18.7
Fossil fuels and climate justice/energy	668	18.1
Biomass and land conflicts	514	13.9
Infrastructure and built environment	382	10.4
Waste management	286	7.8
Industrial and utilities conflicts	270	7.3
Nuclear	149	4.0
Biodiversity conservation conflicts	142	3.8
Tourism recreation	82	2.2
Reaction stage to the project		
In reaction to the implementation (during construction/ operation)	1393	37.8
Preventive resistance (precautionary phase)	1314	35.6
Mobilizations for reparations once impacts felt	687	18.6
Latent (no visible resistance)	101	2.7

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Variable characterizing the conflict	Number	Freq. (%)
Country of company investing in the project		
USA	432	11.7
China	338	9.2
Canada	295	8.0
India	274	7.4
Brazil	180	4.9
France	175	4.7
UK	171	4.6
Spain	168	4.6
Italy	131	3.6
Mexico	128	3.5
Japan	117	3.2
Russian Federation	106	2.9
Australia	103	2.8
Netherlands	100	2.7
Germany	82	2.2
Indonesia	82	2.2
Switzerland	65	1.8
Turkey	46	1.2
Norway	40	1.1
Sweden	39	1.1
Total of 20 countries	*3072*	*83.3*
Intensity of the conflict		
High (Widespread mass mobilization, violence, arrests, etc. …)	1046	28.4
Medium (street protests, visible mobilization)	1627	44.1
Low (some local organizing)	723	19.6
Latent (no visible organizing at the moment)	193	5.2

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