

A Triple Movement?: Rethinking Environmental Law in an Era of Expulsions

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Abstract:

Drawing on comparative ethnographic analyses of two environmental rights movements in the United States and Western Europe, this paper offers a set of theoretical reflections on the limitations of rights-based environmental law at a time that sociologist Saskia Sassen has recently described as marked by “expulsions” of all kinds – “from life projects and livelihoods, from membership, [and] from the social contract at the center of liberal democracy” (2014: 29). Taking primary theoretical inspiration from the recent work of feminist theorist Nancy Fraser and anthropologist Ghassan Hage, I use my case studies to highlight the need for Australian environmental rights activists to think more systemically about the interconnections between deepening environmental degradation and deepening democracy deficits of all sorts – deficits that are powerfully exacerbating social schisms along the lines of class, ethnicity, and nationality. Without more careful attention to the systemic logics that are culminating in deepening violence across a range of settings not usually considered relevant to environmental policy-making, my argument is that not only will these movements miss an opportunity to draw important links with a range of social justice activists, but they will fail to ground their work in a sufficiently expansive analysis of the expulsive pressures that are differently bearing down on both humans and non-humans.

BIOGRAPHY

Erin Fitz-Henry is a lecturer in Anthropology and Development Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her primary research interests are transnational social movements. She is the author of *U.S. Military Bases and Anti-Military Organizing* (2015) and is currently researching the rights of nature in the United States and Western Europe.