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Abstract

The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement in the United States is comprised of diverse groups of people with a variety of environmental grievances and interests coming together to obtain equal distribution of pollution burdens across communities, reduce environmental hazards, and ensure fair enforcement of laws and policies meant to safeguard the environment for all. The 17 Principles of Environmental Justice developed in 1991 at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit remains a touchstone document today. In addition to Indigenous and Black leadership, religious communities also made the Summit possible. Religious adherents and institutions have always influenced the movement by offering material and/or non-material support. Non-material support comes in the form of moral suasion, that is, religious values put into action to promote the EJ movement. Material support includes the use of religious spaces, organization, built-in audiences, time, money, affinity groups to take direct action, and mutual aid practices of religious communities for the EJ movement. This paper features 21st century examples of moral suasion from Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity, showing how each case study relates to the EJ Principles. Religions in and of themselves are long social movements that have existential claims. While codified over time, religions remain fundamentally groups of humans who work together to promote a socio-cosmic order. The ongoing interactions of the EJ movement and religions (as social movements) matters in the quest for a livable, sustainable world where all beings can flourish in the large web of life.

Keywords

Environmental Justice (EJ), EJ Principles, Moral Suasion, Religions as social movements

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Sarah Elizabeth Nahar[1]

Abstract

The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement in the United States is comprised of diverse groups of people with a variety of environmental grievances and interests coming together to obtain equal distribution of pollution burdens across communities, reduce environmental hazards, and ensure fair enforcement of laws and policies meant to safeguard the environment for all. The 17 Principles of Environmental Justice developed in 1991 at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit remains a touchstone document today. In addition to Indigenous and Black leadership, religious communities also made the Summit possible. Religious adherents and institutions have always influenced the movement by offering material and/or non-material support. Non-material support comes in the form of moral suasion, that is, religious values put into action to promote the EJ movement. Material support includes the use of religious spaces, organization, built-in audiences, time, money, affinity groups to take direct action, and mutual aid practices of religious communities for the EJ movement. This paper features 21st century examples of moral suasion from Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity, showing how each case study relates to the EJ Principles. Religions in and of themselves are long social movements that have existential claims. While codified over time, religions remain fundamentally groups of humans who work together to promote a socio-cosmic order. The ongoing interactions of the EJ movement and religions (as social movements) matters in the quest for a livable, sustainable world where all beings can flourish in the large web of life.

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Introduction

> The environmental crisis cannot be solved by good engineering..., cannot be solved by economic planning, cannot even be solved by cosmetic changes in our conception of development and change. It requires a very radical transformation in our consciousness.
>
> -Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2002: 119)

> I used to think the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we lawyers and scientists don't know how to do that.
>
> -J. Gus Speth (2021)

The admission from an environmental lawyer that environmental problems are not simply matters facing the natural world – and whose solutions are beyond the realm of technical, scientific ones

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– is at once disorienting and empowering. Speth (2021) was the environmental advisor in the Carter administration, former dean of Yale's School for the Environment, and co-founder of the National Resource Defense Council. Here he calls for a spiritual and cultural transformation, that is, *human changes*, in order to address the pressing matters in the *more-than-human* areas of biodiversity, ecosystems, and global climate. A significant way these human changes come is in the form of religious mobilization that is attentive to environmental justice.

Environmental Justice (EJ) is a historic and contemporary movement seeking to reduce environmental hazards, obtain equal distribution of pollution burdens across communities, and ensure fair enforcement of policies and laws meant to safeguard the environment for all (Agyeman et al., 2003; Taylor, 1997). Material and non-material support from religious adherents and communities have undergirded much of the contemporary EJ movement for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, religious institutions are ubiquitous across the United States (U.S.). Secondly, where other government social services and schools have failed to ensure community flourishing, religious institutions have stepped in to try to bridge the gap. This includes organizing for clean air, water, soil, and health (Immergut, Kearns, 2012).

Below, I first discuss the origins of the EJ movement in the U.S., noting how religious support made possible the 17 Principles of EJ document that guides the movement today. I then present five case studies of EJ support from religions – Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity – using the 17 principles of EJ to illustrate how these religious mobilizations reflect these principles. Though social movements themselves, religions are much more easily identified *as institutions rather than movements* (Shenk, 2011). However, I contend that at their core religions remain people's movements, and so it is relevant to focus on the movement-crossover between religions and EJ. While religious institutions tend to address problems at the individual level, some parts of the movement choose to make connections upstream to challenge or affirm systemic actors and forces. One of the ways they do this is by promoting EJ in their contexts and advocating for human flourishing despite the climate crisis.

The EJ Movement and Religious Connections

Commonly, the origins of the EJ movement are cited in the 1970s. However, the beginnings of this movement can also be viewed as originating with environmental injustices that native and marginalized groups have faced because of colonialism and racist ideologies (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019). The violence perpetuated globally against Peoples/Places by the Doctrine of Discovery and Domination (DoDD), is clear in its linking of land, water, place, and non-Christian people as material resources to destroy, reduce, and enslave (Charles, Rah, 2019; Newcomb, 2008). Indigenous Peoples (and allies) embodied the ideals of EJ as they resisted colonization, which negatively impacted their land and societies as they experienced pollution, disproportionate burdens, and hazards from European colonial land-use policies, "natural resource" laws, and property laws (Arnold, 2023). These environmental injustices resulted in death, displacement, and sickness of Indigenous Peoples from the 15th century onwards (Jarratt-Snider, Nielsen, 2020).

Similarly, Dorceta Taylor has demonstrated that environmental concerns existed for centuries among other People of Color, within their race-based organizing (Taylor, 1997). For instance, in the 1970s, there was significant momentum to put anti-Black and anti-poor *environmental* policies front and center as part of advancing justice for marginalized groups (Schlosberg, Collins, 2014). Activists noted there was not an equal sharing of environmental burdens: Black individuals suffered labor exploitation in hazardous work environments due to racism, and housing segregation and zoning policies put Black communities disproportionately proximate to severe environmental hazards (Agyeman et al., 2003). Their activism built on a legacy of Indigenous Africans resisting kidnapping from their home environments to

which they were deeply connected, and creating kinship networks with people and places despite the horrific oppression by the many manifestations of the DoDD (Nahar, 2023).

Citing both resistance to colonization and the Civil Rights movement as origins of the EJ movement is important because Indigenous and Black communities have at times been pitted against one other in the U.S., leading to divides that have damaged the movement and reduced its overall power (Hayes, 2015; Whitaker, 2019). Yet, there is a deep interrelation and history of cooperation between Indigenous-led and Black-led struggles for EJ, so it is important that this work brings together their frames of justice struggles (Maynard, Simpson, 2020; Waldron, 2018). For example, there were Indigenous communities involved in the 1982 iconic struggle in Warren County, North Carolina when Black community leaders began a massive and prolonged nonviolent campaign that alleged racism was at play in the state's decision to dispose of 60,000 tons of soil contaminated with Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) near their homes. Situated on Saponi, Occaneechi, and Lumbee traditional land, Black people led and organized the majority of the campaign, yet indigenous peoples were invested in attempting to prevent the contamination of their drinking water supply, and supported their neighbors (McGurty, 2007; Fletcher et al., 2023). Reciprocally, there were Black communities supportive of the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which, among other important wins, allowed Indigenous Peoples to access their sacred sites. The Act became a powerful tool for the Indigenous-led EJ movement to win permit denials that prevent the construction of mines, pipelines, and landfills in areas considered sacred by Indigenous stewards (LaDuke, 2005). The EJ movement was more than only a merger of Indigenous and Black organizing for environmental, social, or civil rights, however. It included public health and safety movements, urban environmental groups, the occupational health and safety movement, and various economic justice groups (Faber, McCarthy, 2003).

Partnerships like these led to the development of the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice, which is one of the most powerful EJ movement documents. How the document came to be was through the collaboration of Indigenous, Black, and other EJ streams at the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. This summit brought together over 1,100 leaders and representatives from all 50 states, Federal Reservations, U.S. occupied territories such as the Marshall Islands, and Puerto Rico (Berndt, 2021; Loh, 2012). Writing and learning about the environmental injustices faced in other communities, they crafted a document that articulated what EJ was. Their work even redefined how "the environment" was conceptualized (De Oliveira Finger, Zorzi, 2013). In white dominated environmental movements, "the environment" meant remote wilderness areas or pristine natural landscapes. The Summit group defined environment as the place where people lived, studied, prayed, worked, and played (Berndt, 2021). Therefore, the 17 Principles of EJ conceptualized housing, worker safety, self-determination, transportation, Indigenous sovereignty, and pollution as environmental issues (please see the Appendix for the preamble and principles).

Despite 30 years of wear and tear, this document remains the touchstone for the movement today (Pellow, 2018; Schlosberg, Collins, 2014). This Summit would not have happened, and the document would have not been produced, without the financial, logistical, administrative, and non-material support of a religious movement, the United Church of Christ (UCC) (Lee, 1992/2019). After all, the EJ movement in Warren County, North Carolina, against the dumping of PCBs was unsuccessful. Though it featured massive civil disobedience, 500 arrests, and some solidarity activities nationwide, it may have gone unnoticed in history except that the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice and the Southern Christian Leadership Council used the failure to spark a nationwide conversation (Fletcher et al., 2023). Present on the ground during the Warren County struggle, UCC staff later worked with community members and academics to document the patterns of environmental racism, in a booklet called *Toxic Wastes and Race*

(Bullard, 2021). As protestors continued putting pressure on North Carolina governor James Hunt, the UCC put additional staff time, money, and organizational resources into organizing a summit.

The mobilization of the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice highlights how religions are representative of long social movements that have existential claims. Religious claims, organizing strategies, and tactics have become codified over time, but religions remain fundamentally groups of people who work together to manifest a socio-cosmic order. They are often, but not always, trans-local and trans-geographic. Through stories that direct ultimate orientation, religions make meaning, reinforce values, and offer material benefits to adherents (Long, 1986). As such, I use the term religion in reference to all parts of the social movement: communities, sacred texts, people, rituals and accumulated wisdom. Though not all aspects of any given religion are liberatory, each contain within them ways for adherents to take upstream responsibility to abate the destruction of society and the environment. The concept of upstream responsibility is the idea that it is possible, and advantageous, to address societal problems at the source, rather than consistently triaging the disastrous ramifications downstream (Redekop, Kraus, 2017). Religious communities, with their ability to morally persuade people to action, as well as the material support they can offer, are a key part of moving further upstream to abate the entwined environmental and social harms.

Moral Suasion: Religious Actors Put Values into Action

Within the large swath of humanity that accepts the impacts of the current manifestations of anthropogenic climate change and realizes environmental injustice exists, the question of how to respond to this reality remains: how to think about it, what to do about it, and how to do it. These are topics of intense debate. There are people at every level of society organizing and employing various strategies and tactics to mitigate and/or adapt to the impacts of climate change on human and more than human communities. Given that most people in most societies consider themselves "religious" it makes sense that a substantial number of people working on climate are religious (Schrei, 2024; Young, 2020). This is significant because only a small portion of people in the EJ movement may consider themselves professional scientists who have access to the tools for technical intervention in environmental problems such as hazardous waste, water pollution, or air quality, and who are trained to use those tools. However, the issues of selfishness, greed, and apathy, what Speth (2021) names as the top environmental problems are within religious practitioners' base of "training." They are likely equipped with tools to make "technical" interventions in these areas (e.g., spiritual practices of consumption *kenosis*, or communal rituals of empathy) (McFague, 2013). This can spur the "radical transformation of consciousness" that Nasr indicates is needed (Nasr, 2002: 119).

The category of "scientist" and "religious practitioner" are not exclusive. Many environmental scientists are themselves part of religious communities (Gardner, 2006). Furthermore, scientists and technicians of all types have roles to play in addressing environmental injustice, in both specialized and general ways. For example, the data they find can be used by religious leaders in persuasive speeches as they connect with their following.

The most obvious contribution religious movements make to the EJ movement is non-material; it is moral suasion. Moral suasion is the power that religious pro-environmental values have when expressed publicly (Gardner, 2006.). Through a literature review, I share case studies from a variety of world religions to illustrate how moral suasion functions. At times, the epistemologies and ontologies of groups covered in this writing – Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, and Christians – have been pitted (or pitted themselves) against EJ (Gardner, 2006; Dochuk, 2019; Ratcliffe, 2019). Yet, these traditions (among others) have offerings to bring to the EJ movement. The EJ movement is weaker if the power of moral

suasion to get groups of people to change their behavior, participate in advocacy, and reshape their consciousness is ignored by more mainstream or non-religious approaches to taking upstream responsibility.

The moral suasion employed by each case study is a decidedly contemporary manifestation from the U.S. context in which there is frequent interaction among groups via spiritual activists who operate in "interfaith spaces." The case studies are 21st century efforts that align with the contemporary EJ movement specifically, rather than for environmental stewardship and sustainability broadly, of which there is much more literature (Bennett et al., 2018). In a world that is becoming hotter, wilder, and wetter, the following case studies create a useful framework to inform more effective EJ activism within religious contexts and show how various resources have been and can be effectively deployed for EJ purposes.

Islam

The Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet by Ibrahim Abdul-Matin (2010) offers a powerful distillation of pro-environmental Islamic values. Among others, it builds on the deeply significant work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr on Islamic cosmology, and the environmental crisis being a spiritual crisis (Nasr, 1968, 1996). *The Green Deen* is a contemporary source seeking to pull on the classical wisdom for applicable political EJ orientations and actions, as Abdul-Matin's (2010) role in the EJ movement was working on green jobs in both New York and the Obama administration. The foundation of his list is orientation to the Earth as a mosque. It highlights the following:

- the oneness of God (*tawhid*),
- seeing signs of God everywhere (*ayat*),
- being a steward (*khalifah*),
- covenant to be protectors of the planet (*amana*),
- moving toward justice (*adl*), and
- living in balance with nature (*mizan*) (Abdul-Matin, 2010).

The 17 Principles of EJ, principles that aim to reduce environmental hazards, ensure fair enforcement of laws and policies, and safeguard the environment for all, inspired Abdul-Matin (2010) as he developed how a Muslim could bring their values into EJ action. The quest for justice, *adl*, is the purpose of the EJ Principles document. Next, the idea of *tawhid* corresponds with that idea noting "the earth is a mosque and everything in it is sacred" unified in its oneness from the smallest particles to the furthest star (2010: 1ff). *Khalifah* corresponds with Principle 3, which relates to ethical use of resources by stewards (rather than dominators), as well as Principle 7 regarding any decisions made about those resources being inclusive of all stewards throughout the decision-making process. *Amana* reflects Principle 4; both use the term protection as the central verb. *Mizan* resonates with Principles 1, 12, and 17 that explicitly talk about balance among human communities, as well as balance between human communities and the earth.

Deen means the religious way of life that Muslims follow to obey divine law, and Abdul-Matin (2010) writes some examples of a "green deen" in practice. This includes thinking about these values in connection to the water involved in cleansing before prayer (*wudu*), meat preparation practices and restrictions (*zabiha-halal*), and paying attention to the rhythms of the sun, moon, day, and night to inform prayer times (*salat*) rather than basing prayer rhythms on mechanical clocks.

Part of moral suasion is the persuasive communication of concepts, such as contrasting "energy from Heaven" and "energy from Hell" (Abdul-Matin, 2010: 41). Energy gained from forcibly extracting from earth (mining and fossil fuels) can be conceptualized as coming from hell, and energy that is freely offered from above (solar and wind) comes from heaven. He highlights the impacts that extractive industries have on communities in the U.S., including Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (especially Alaska and the Gulf Coast), and the devastating effects of the petroleum-based wars on other members of the *ummah* (worldwide Islamic community). These examples of moral suasion have directly inspired groups such as Green Muslims, which have chapters across the country and in Washington, D.C., that do EJ work (Khalid, 2002). It has further expanded the number of people in the *ummah*, such as Sami Al-Daghistani who are developing an Islamic framework of environmentalism and EJ movement involvement that is not dependent on Western (that is, Christian hegemonic) ontology, epistemology, or ethics.[1]

Hinduism

Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR) is an activist group that promotes democracy, social justice, and EJ. They advocate for pluralism, civil rights, and human rights in South Asia and North America. Their materials underscore that Hinduism is a life-giving force, with multidimensional and manifold beauty and power that is both personal and global. They make connections *between the social and the ecological* in Hinduism throughout time, centering the cognitive pluralism and diversity that exist within culture(s), and which, like the sovereignty and self-determination of EJ Principle 11, must be respected. Their website states:

> Our advocacy is rooted in the values of our faith: *shanti* (peace), *nyaya* (justice), and *satya* (truth). We provide a Hindu voice of resistance to caste, Hindu nationalism, racism, and all forms of bigotry and oppression. Our vision is a world defined by *lokasangraha* (the universal common good), where there is peace among all people and our planet is honored and protected (HfHR, 2024).

This statement resonates with EJ Principle 2, which speaks to freedom from all forms of discrimination, and their anti-caste activism embodies Principle 7 regarding the necessity of equal participation in environmental decisions. Through their stance on refusing military occupation, exploitation of land, and repression from Kashmir to Palestine to the Americas, HfHR aligns with EJ Principle 15 (HfHR, 2024). Leaning into the "eco-social creativity that has been renewed and replenished over millennia," HfHR is one of the top contributors to Hindu scholarship and activism related to ecojustice in the U.S. (HfHR FAQ, 2019; Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, 2023).

HfHR draws inspiration from spiritual activists such as Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi, and the massive anti-imperialist movement of which he was a leader. Gandhi mobilized people to participate in nonviolent experiments with truth (*satyagraha*) using Hindu principles (Gardner, 2006). In efforts such as the salt march, the struggle of the people and the struggle of the earth were one struggle (ibid.). Gandhi held independence (from colonial power) and interdependence (with all of life) together, similar to how EJ Principle 1, concerning interdependence, and Principle 11, concerning sovereignty and self-determination, hold together. Gandhi's commentary on the Christian seven deadly sins is used by HfHR (2024) in interfaith spaces to catalyze their societal critique:

- wealth without work,
- pleasure without conscience,
- science without humanity,
- knowledge without character,
- politics without principle,
- commerce without morality, and
- worship without sacrifice.

Science without humanity resonates with EJ principles 4 and 13 in challenging the disproportionate human costs of scientific testing on people of color. Politics without principle corresponds with EJ principles 2, 5 and 7 as these principles critique policies made in an exclusive, discriminatory way. Commerce without morality is aligned with EJ principle 17, which addresses unsustainable over-consumption.

If each of Gandhi's pairings shifts to "withs" rather than "withouts" (e.g., knowledge with character and politics with principle), they serve as a moral check on societal and individual excess and oppression. In India, Hindu environmental scientists with concerns for both spiritual purity and access to clean drinking water continue to make these pairings and persuade others to as well (Stille, 1998). In the U.S., Hinduism influenced the hardcore animal rights activism movement of the 1980s-1990s, which was adjacent to and in many ways a part of broader EJ activism of that era. Hare Krishna, a consciousness tradition based on an ancient monotheistic strain of Hinduism, grew during this time and influenced many youth who infused their vegetarian lifestyle and direct action to free animals from farms "with religious meaning and purpose" (Pike, 2017). The area of animal rights is overtly absent from the EJ Principles (though hinted at in Principles 1 and 3). Animal rights and the Rights of Nature movements gained momentum about a decade after the EJ Principles were published. Activists in those movements extend the EJ Principles to explicitly include all beings in the web of life (Coeckelbergh, 2009).

Judaism

The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam*, means doing one's part to repair the world. It is a central teaching in Jewish tradition and a common motivation of Jewish organizations that work for EJ and social justice in the U.S. and globally. As a whole, the idea of *tikkun olam* resonates with the impulse of the 17 EJ Principles, which brought leaders, who were all *doing their part in different parts* of the world, together to build power, articulate their values, and publicize the collective initiative. The gathering sought to create even more *tikkun olam*, at a greater scale than participants had yet seen, and, if possible, prevent further harm from happening (Berndt, 2021). Combined with the teaching of *tzedek*, which means justice and fairness, these EJ-aligned values have inspired many Jewish people to join EJ movements in the areas where they are also involved in environmental sustainability, economic justice, and/or stewardship work (Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, 2024; Urban Adamah, 2024).

Just as HfHR explicitly challenges Hindu nationalism in India, Linke Fligl is a Jewish diaspora organization focused on EJ in the U.S. that simultaneously challenges Israeli nationalism (Scandrett, 2011; Pellow, 2017). Meaning "left wing" in Yiddish, Linke Fligl was a queer Jewish chicken farm and cultural organizing project from 2016-2022. The non-Zionist Judaism promoted by founders Margot Seigle and Adin Zuckerman connected with Principles 10, 14, and 15 by opposing genocide, multinational corporations, and military occupation, respectively. They emphasized buying local, promoting fair wages,

and labor rights, central to which was adequate rest.[2] The value of rest comes from the theological concept of *shabbat*, a weekly day of rest. Far beyond simply not working one day a week, at Linke Fligl, *shabbat* had a broader meaning that brought in their land and labor politics (Regan Snow, 2010). Drawing from Torah texts that detail how *shabbat* includes rest for animals and people all throughout the economic system, Linke Fligl allowed this concept to effectively transform all of their relationships within an economic system. As anti-Zionist EJ movement participants, these farmers and cultural workers sought to have rooted and accountable land relationships. Throughout its existence, and as it closed, Linke Fligl responded directly to the urgent quest for land access, food justice, prison abolition, and Native sovereignty from leading Black and Indigenous EJ activists (Harris, Harper, 2011; Penniman, 2018).

Rematriation, an "Indigenous feminist paradigm, [is] an embodied praxis of recovery and return, and a sociopolitical mode of resurgence and refusal" (Gray, 2022: 1). It was not an explicit goal in the 1991 EJ principles. Reparations are only explicitly mentioned in Principle 9 regarding "full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care" for victims of environmental injustice, yet they were discussed more broadly at the 1991 Summit (Berndt, 2021). Linke Fligl created avenues for these sacred practices of return. Reparation and rematriation occurred through shared chicken eggs, a documentary, social media posts promoting these ideas, and group-work content in an effort to actualize EJ in this generation.[3] Their dream was:

> A land based community & relational food culture, vibrant & accessible Jewish tradition(s), individual, collective & ancestral healing, and justice & collective liberation for all peoples, all held by queer leadership, family & frameworks (Linke Fligl, 2022).

Given their proximity to Wildseed Community Farm and Healing Village, Rock Steady Farms, Ancestral Heart Temple of the Brooklyn Zen Center, and Watershed Center, Linke Fligl was able to cross-pollinate significantly with other justice movement leaders. They fed into key conversations that formed the Jewish Left at a crucial time when many social movements found themselves at a series of major inflection points (COVID, Black Lives Matter, etc.).[4] Linke Fligl brought spirituality, lifecycle celebrations, grief rituals, and healing workshops to create transcendent experiences for frontline activists who faced burn-out, because if they did not "burn out" they could more effectively continue to create change (Tzedek Lab, 2024).

Earlier dominant EJ expressions can be critiqued for not having as many embodied and trauma-informed practices available to activists while they tackled major policy issues, a gap which activists are now trying hard to address (Camponeschi, 2022; Eisenman, 2023). On the other hand, deep ecologists, who had a lot of those practices, focused on communing with nature and valuing Indigenous wisdom, but did not change the power dynamics or tend to the impact of environmental injustice, and spiritually bypassed the harsh lived realities of oppressed populations (Pepper, 1993/2002). Separated no more, the moral suasion from Jewish groups like Linke Fligl results in the integrated possibilities of EJ Principles aligned with spiritual activism.

Buddhism

When EJ activists bring Buddhist values such as *metta*, (loving kindness for all beings) and *ahimsa* (non-harming) into the political arena, they are seeking to create conditions that alleviate suffering and inequality, not only of humans, but the entire web of life. Sahajayana was a Tantric Buddhist feminine mystery school from the 7th to 12th century India that is being revived today. Like the EJ movement, this religious movement was (and is) socially transgressive, cutting through "religious orthodoxy,

oppressive caste, gender and class systems, and dogmatic philosophies" (Lakshmin Nath, 2024). The moral suasion that liberatory religious efforts can bring to bear to challenge societal norms "upend the established order and forever reshape the contours of collective consciousness" in ways that few other societal forces can (ibid.). As Nasr's and Speth's opening quotes point to, this type of upending and taking upstream responsibility will be required to achieve EJ and address the climate crisis.

The Dalit Buddhist movement followed Sahajayana in directly challenging ongoing structural, communal, ecocidal, and interpersonal harm (Soundararajan, 2022). There is a parallel between the gatherings of Dalits and the People of Color environmental leaders in 1991, in that it is often those who are directly suffering that raise the issue of EJ in broader society (Schreyer, Mattheis, 2018; Taylor, 2017). It is also the case that previous social movements inspire later ones that critique and build on them (Kuumba, 2001; Pellow, 2018). Among others, the Sahajayana and Dalit movements inspired Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh to initiate the Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB) movement, using moral suasion to influence many Buddhists worldwide to "get off the cushion, get out of the house, get out there and start to educate, agitate, and organize" (Queen, 1998).

Being a path of both practical and psychological liberation, SEB practitioners address structural oppression and obtain political gains on behalf of the most vulnerable in their societies (King, 2009). While in Vietnam and the U.S. it was a social crisis that initiated the SEB movement, in Thailand, it was the ecological crisis. Deforestation on a massive scale that severely negatively impacted the agricultural and fishing foundations of the economy inspired monks to take actions such as ordaining trees (King, 2009). "Ordaining a tree is a radical, provocative, and controversial act that challenges people to take responsibility–for themselves, the society, and the natural environment" (Darlington, 2012: 2). Monks aligned with SEB ordained trees to protect them from international logging companies, which epitomizes the environmental injustice of destructive operations of multinational corporations that EJ Principle 14 opposes.

Ouyporn Khuankaew is a socially engaged feminist agroecologist and Buddhist who works her ancestral land surrounded by genetically modified corn crops for export. In 2019, her health was severely impacted by the air quality dips from deforestation fires and agribusiness practices. Though she is someone who simply wanted to be a farmer growing nourishing plants for her community organically, she was forced into frontline activism due to her health condition and proximity to the industrial operations to export corn.[5] I can imagine a story like this would have resonated with many of the People of Color leaders present in 1991. Most attendees likely did not set out to be activists, but in order to obtain a minimum quality of life, they got involved in an EJ struggle. In Thailand, a country that caters to foreign investors and tourists, advocating for oneself and one's home quickly becomes an EJ struggle. Viriyasakultorn's studies based on community organizing showed this is true for members of the majority Thai culture as well as members of a non-dominant autochthonous group.[6]

Khuankaew was scheduled to be a speaker at the eco-dharma spiritual activist retreat for Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) in 2019, but her declining health and worsening air quality kept her from traveling. BPF was founded in a large part to support Thích Nhất Hạnh's first visit to the U.S. in 1978. Originally begun by Western converts to Buddhism, since 2012 BPF sought to re-center antiracism, decolonization, and Asian cultural stewardship of Buddhism in all of its programming (Baroni, 2017; Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 2024). Retreat invitees featured EJ activists such as Khuankaew, B. Anderson of Song of the Spirit, and Corrina Gould of Sogorea Te' Land Trust, among many others, to resource spiritual activists for long-haul revolutionary, nonviolent social change movements.

BPF staff member Katie Loncke developed the Block-Build-Be framework for these retreats.[7] It is a framework that resolves common tensions within social movements about where people should put their energy in order to be most effective. There is often disagreement regarding the best course of action.

Evocative questions reveal strong opinions about where people believe the real and lasting change emerges. For instance, should people work to reform the existing system, focus on developing independent alternatives, first transform the consciousness of the oppressed, or cultivate a culture of resistance? These were the same types of tensions that were present at the first People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Berndt, 2021).

Loncke's Block-Build-Be framework epitomizes the type of support that deep spiritual values can bring to the EJ movement as it responds to devastation. In the SEB tradition it comes out of, Block-Build-Be allows people to combine their "spiritual life with social justice to develop genuinely liberatory solutions" (Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 2020). "Block" is about resisting harm and injustice, "Build" is about cultivating relationships, communities, and new structures, and "Be" is about contemplative practices for resilience and liberation. In this framework, spirituality and social action are not pitted against one another; either practice without the other is insufficient. This echoes Principles 1 and 16 of the EJ Principles, which emphasize interdependence as well as distinct cultural perspectives.

There have been major rifts between those who staunchly advocate to reform existing structures of power, versus those who wish to withdraw from society, versus those who want to focus on overthrowing an oppressive country's structures. A unique example of moral suasion, Loncke (Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 2020) used Buddhist concepts (e.g., interbeing, *anicca* or constantly changing conditions) and practices (e.g., meditation) to thwart resentment in this generation of EJ activists by creating the Block-Build-Be framework. This framework creates space for appreciation of diverse gifts, skills, and approaches in the EJ movement (and other movements too).

Christianity

Land Justice Futures (LJF) is an organization embedded in Christian liberation theology. LJF staff assist Catholic communities of religious women (e.g., sisters), at "this moment of great transition in the world and religious life" to explore how to actualize the EJ movement goals of ecological and racial healing (LJF: Our Values and Principles, 2023). Building on the foundation of sacredness in Principle 1, they also focus on affirming Indigenous sovereignty, and upholding treaties even though these treaties may have been broken by the U.S. (Principle 11). Principle 16, with its focus on education of present and future generations inspires the "cohort-based educational seminars that LJF offers regarding Haudenosaunee Mother Law and refusing complicity in the racist colonial project."[8] In phrases more common now than when the principles were written in 1991, land justice and rematriation are the organization's deepest values (LJF: Our Values and Principles, 2023). The project draws moral suasion from the Christian values of mutuality and righteous action to encourage religious communities who own more land than they can steward to give their land to local Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) groups who wish to steward land-based projects.

To materialize their commitments, LJF helps establish relationships between the parties, then they offer technical assistance related to land transfer. Furthermore, they link the dozen or so groups of sisters working on wealth and land redistribution to each other for peer-learning and strengthening for the "long road" of rematriation and/or reparations (LJF: What We're About, 2024). The values of mutuality and righteous action have been bolstered by Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment *Laudato Si*, giving papal heft to vanguard initiatives such as LJF even as other Catholics resist or ignore the Pope's elevation of EJ and sustainability as a part of Christian discipleship (Wilkins, 2019).

The Carnival de Resistance is another expression of Christian moral suasion inspiring EJ action. From 2013-2018 the Carnival was a month-long experiment in urban re-wilding, that is, bringing back elements of wilderness, embracing natural processes, and restoring ecosystems in the middle of an urban

landscape. The encampment featured skills-sharing, anti-oppression workshops, clowning classes, pollinator and native plant tutorials, and solidarity economy demonstration projects during the day. In the evenings, the Carnival offered grand artistic performances based on biblical and ecological themes (e.g., the story of Noah's ark centering not the human perspective but those of the raven and the dove in the story). The "Carnivalistas" "agreed to live collectively: in tents, off-grid, and as fossil-fuel-free as possible" (Nahar, 2020). Personalism is the faith-based value, an understanding that an individual has choice and agency, and what they do with their time, energy, and talent matters.

This led the Carnival de Resistance to upholding and encouraging their empire-numbed audiences to make an attitude shift towards one that affirmed the EJ principles. The leaders of these anti-oppression workshops consistently introduced audiences to the principles and invited strategizing about how to actualize them in the community where they were (Nahar, 2020). As a pop-up initiative, their impact was limited in scope to those who attended the shows, workshops, or side events. However, the Carnival recruited troupe members from long-standing Christian congregations and organizations, thereby transforming key players in other institutions through participation in the project (East, Beck, 2016; Jorgenson, 2020).

One organization which provided multiple personnel over the years to the Carnival de Resistance was Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an organization birthed by Christian communities that value pacifism (Kern, 2009). Invited by local communities nonviolently resisting U.S. imperialism, CPT sends teams of trained peacemakers to do unarmed civilian accompaniment in areas of lethal conflict (CPT, 2022). This work enacts EJ Principles 10 and 15 in its documenting of international laws and human rights, and military repression especially as they respond to calls from oppressed groups for allies to put their bodies on the line alongside them. CPT draws its moral suasion from a reading of Jesus' life that observes he eschewed violence in all forms. Nonviolence then extends to the Earth in addition to between human communities living on the Earth. Most of the areas where they operate are severely militarized to enable extractive industries to remove resources. This violence against the land and water also becomes violence against the humans who are originally living in non-extractive relationships with the earth in a particular place (Ratcliffe, 2019).

In conclusion, examples of moral suasion, as evident in major world religions, reflect non-material support that puts religious pro-environmental and pro-social values into action. Though there are differences in the existential claims made by Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity, each has sufficient values, examples, and concepts within them to provide support for EJ participation. These are resources for members of religions to deploy for effective EJ action. Nevertheless, beyond moral suasion, religions can also offer material support for the EJ movement, the focus of the next section.

Beyond Moral Suasion: Material Support

Offering material support beyond moral suasion is important for several reasons. Moral suasion is non-material and dependent on individuals and groups manifesting their values. Although significant for enhancing environmental concerns, moral suasion does not move government entities like it used to (Johnson, 2023). Even in Atlanta, Georgia, considered the "headquarters of the Civil Rights movement" where the power of moral suasion hit its zenith in the U.S., government officials were able to pit different Christian preachers and Jewish rabbis against other religious leaders in their respective religions.[9] This greatly reduced efforts to use moral suasion to bolster the EJ effort to Stop Cop City, from 2022-2024 (Duke, 2023). Overall, progressive religious communities (both Christian and otherwise) are not as central to, nor have as much impact on, U.S. American public life (Hawley, 2017; Vanaik, 2017). This does not hold true for conservative forms of religion (Christian and otherwise) which continue to make political

gains and use moral suasion to promote what amounts to environmental *injustice* (Balmer 2021; Martin, 2005; Almog et al., 1998).

An illustration of the potential ineffectiveness of moral suasion is the recent resistance to the Atlanta Police Foundation's Public Training Center. Known as "Cop City" to its opponents, this center would clear out enormous acreage of a city park near impoverished Black and Brown communities. Not only would the community lose an amenity, but it placed them closer to the danger of the police, which had historically antagonized them. The opposition group was a broad coalition that attempted to halt the project using all democratic processes available to them. After exhausting those, they also did several direct actions. They invited clergy to come in their regalia (that is, their collars, stoles, religious headwear, etc.) to be visible to police who routinely hurt protestors occupying the forest or downtown. This was powerful because the media had smeared the protestors as "outside agitator anarchists," but the appearance of "respectable clergy" from a range of religious backgrounds helped shift the image (Unicorn Riot, 2023). They thought the moral suasion was working.

However, after the city discounted 17 continuous hours of public testimony by citizens (including numerous religious clergy), dismissed tens of thousands of petition signatures to put a referendum of Cop City on the ballot, pitted religious leaders against one another, and prosecuted activists on RICO and domestic terrorism charges, activists from the Stop Cop City group declared that moral suasion no longer held any sway.[10] Though devastated, this did not mean that there were no longer ways that religious people could participate. The focus shifted to the material.

The coalition requested that religious communities provide mutual aid, staff time, spaces to meet, money, and to disseminate information about Stop Cop City's next iterations through their audience networks. They also provided spiritual resources to activists in the movement, as many of them felt ostracized by the religious communities they grew up in. Even in a space of reduced power in the public sphere, religious communities found they could still play a vital support role.[11]

The following provides further examples of how religious spaces, organization, built-in audiences, time, money, affinity groups to take direct action, and their mutual aid practices can be of material assistance to the EJ movement. These may appear quite basic. Partially, that is because long before the formal EJ movement began, parts of religious movements were already making pro-environmental claims, claims directly confronting issues of inequality, and mobilizing their resources to change/pressure government entities to shift policy and practice. Though not all stewardship and sustainability initiatives of religious social movements are EJ, some of their efforts would be embraced as such if done in the present (Baugh, 2017).

Spaces

Religious communities often have land, buildings, and meeting spaces. Constructed space in religion is common because of the corporate nature of some religious practices. After the British royal family, the Catholic Church is the largest private owner of land in the world (Olya, 2023). In many cases these spaces are not directly under state surveillance. The common term "sanctuary" comes from the idea that the religious spaces (in this case Christian spaces particularly) are a safe haven from the state. Buildings used for worship or other religious functions have commonly been used to provide emergency or long-term shelter around the world. For example, at a Sikh Gurdwara "visitors of any background can seek shelter, comfort, and food through the institution of *langar*, a free community kitchen open to all" (The Sikh Coalition, 2024). Across the U.S., city-wide cohorts of religious communities have added showers to turn their buildings into safe havens for asylum seekers, even during COVID (Columbus Sanctuary Collective, 2020).

In many places religious spaces can provide low-cost or no-cost locations for training, meetings, rallies, and intentional conversations. Because religious institutions receive generous tax-breaks in the U.S., including property tax exemptions, their buildings have been resilient against gentrification, allowing them to be essential staging areas for actions taking place in wealthy areas or places of power (e.g., downtown city areas) where few EJ organizations could otherwise afford space. Most "houses of worship" have running water, so people can fulfill their basic human rights to water and sanitation in these locales. Even without disturbing regularly scheduled collective religious events, these spaces can function as warming stations when it's freezing outside, cooling stations when temperatures are unbearably hot, and feeding locations. Already many religious institutions run food pantries, supply distribution centers, and soup kitchens out of their buildings; this work could easily expand as climate change creates new needs in the community (Power, 2022; Thompson et al., 2020).

Organization

Communities within world religions are notoriously organized across individual groupings and geographies. This means they can mobilize pre-existing networks and structures in service of EJ. Religious organizations, for better or for worse, tend to be formidable and durable. Most world religions date back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. When people are experiencing something unfamiliar in the environment, to receive succor and/or advocacy from a religious institution regarding it provides credibility (Haynes, 2016). Through their organizing activities and organizations, religious communities have an ongoing base of power from which they can put pressure on public entities (Fox, 2018). In contrast, movements do not necessarily have an organization developed at the incipient point of an EJ struggle. Therefore, if they can utilize the built-in networks of religious communities as a ready-made organizational structure, (for example making the network of educational *pesantrens* of rural Indonesia into eco-*pesantrens*), they gain an advantage in building power (Koehrsen, 2021).

In many traditions, adherents are encouraged to bring their problems to the religious community, sometimes even before bringing them into the U.S. secular spaces of courts or medicine (Benhalim, 2018; Hughes, 2005). When their problems are environmental, the community's support could offer both EJ analysis and amelioration. Due to the climate crisis, more "local issues" to which religious organizations feel it is their duty to respond, will relate to environmental injustices. The Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition is an example of further amplification of the power of religious organization. By linking individual Jewish organizations, they can act together as a network to make a greater difference for EJ and climate questions. They recognize, the "potential power of our community's collective action is immense. By working together, the impacts of individual organizations will be amplified, rippling throughout networks, neighborhoods, and beyond" (Adamah, 2024). The power of organization cannot be underestimated when seeking to build a broad-based campaign. When people hear something from someone they trust within an organization they trust (or are at least familiar with), the chance that they will opt-in is greater than if they are given an invitation by someone who is unknown, not associated with their organization, or not communicating in a way that connects to their values (Lakoff, 2010). This is not to say that unfamiliar associations cannot happen, but EJ activists and seasoned organizers such as Nadine Bloch encourage groups to prevent the sense of "stranger danger" by directly appealing to religious organizations or coalitions, then inviting the organizations to mobilize their own people.[12]

Built-In Audiences

Religious communities tend to create a collective identity, generating relational intragroup and comparative intergroup dynamics between them (Yuki, Takemura, 2013). One aspect of this is that local religious collectives (one audience) may often view themselves as connected to co-religionists across the world (one expanded audience), reinforcing an understanding of dignified belonging that transcends nationalism (Eickelman 2015). Furthermore, to get pertinent information to a religious audience, often no special meeting must be called because, for numerous religions, a periodic meeting is a hallmark (e.g., Islamic Jummah on Fridays, Jewish Torah study on Saturdays, Bahá'í Nineteen Day feasts, or Sundays for Christians). The group already has established rhythms of congregating and expects to receive information, even about co-religionists or other members of their group living in other parts of the world, at those times. The audience is built in (Lakoff, 2010).

A religious audience is often intergenerational and accustomed to caring for one another throughout a lifecycle (Tanner, Mitchell, 2002). Children's programming is common, from participation at Hindu temples to nurseries in the back of churches, to Muslim *madrasas*. Religious institutions are leaders in caring for the elderly as well (Niven, 2021). The ability to appeal to, and have influence on, an audience of people at every stage of life is invaluable for EJ organizing. Further religious institutional communality invites individuals to think beyond themselves and their individual lifetime. The ability to "imagine a livable world" for future generations is crucial because societal change can take a long time (Macy, Brown, 2014). Principles 16 and 17 of the 1991 EJ Principles articulate the importance of taking responsibility to educate present generations, and to think and act with future generations in mind, prioritizing the health of the natural world and appreciation of diversity.

Time

The income of most U.S. adults comes from wage laboring; some of those adults are compensated for their time running religious communities. While aware of the intensity of the demands on paid clergy, having someone(s) with time dedicated to uplift adherents and maintaining religious infrastructure and/or running religious programming means they can either donate time to the EJ movement, or have more flexible schedules than the average U.S. adult to accommodate participation in the EJ movement. The Faith Coalition of Stop Cop City benefitted from clergy, like Tracy Howe of the United Church of Christ (UCC) who had time to help write press releases, news articles, and devotional materials.[13]

The UCC has remained consistent in its direct involvement in the EJ movement since Warren County in 1982. In subsequent decades, they financed and provided non-clergy staff time to facilitate additional convenings that hosted EJ practitioners from across North America. They also generated new trans-local formations and produced retrospective documents about the EJ movement's gains, losses, and goals (Berndt, 2021; Bullard et al., 2008).

In addition to giving staff time to the EJ movement, there exists a spirit of volunteerism among many religious groups. When people are invited to help with a specific task, there is a consistent response (Becker, Dhingra, 2001; Forbes, Zampelli, 2014). Given the wide variety of skills that exist within a community that can offer volunteer time, this becomes a huge gift to movement organizing. Service programs as well can be useful to infuse volunteer time and energy into a specific project. Though they may expose volunteers to an issue they might not otherwise see, they tend not to be long-term mobilization strategies (Cermak et al., 2011; Huang, 2019).

Money

Fundraising can be difficult, yet redistribution of wealth in the U.S. is a crucial aspect of tackling environmental injustice (Principles 9 and 17 both speak to this regarding compensation, reparations, and reducing consumption). Environmental groups need money and religious community members are accustomed to donating personal money on a regular basis. The reasons for money sharing as a religious practice are conceptualized uniquely in each religious community, but in nearly all of them there is a mechanism for redistribution of wealth, compensating leaders, and raising funds for special projects. Examples of this are tithing 10% of one's weekly salary to one's church, offering *zakat* during indicated times in the Islamic year (or philanthropy via the Waqf at any time), freely offered donation (*dana*) in Buddhism, and special collections taken at synagogues for causes beyond annual membership dues. In all these examples, the offering is not necessarily seen as a transactional one (Iannaccone, Bose, 2010).

Religious adherents may feel compelled to give based on the promise of metaphysical benefits (e.g., more merit, better afterlife), benefits on this material plane (e.g., prosperity gospel), or moral suasion (e.g., peer pressure to give because others are giving) (Iannaccone, Bose, 2010). Whatever the reason an individual gives, religious communities have engrained habits of giving which are not always present in the broader society. Similarly, collective wealth created (and accrued) by religious communities has at times been made available for meeting EJ goals that are in alignment with the religious community's values (e.g., policies of divestment of clergy retirement accounts in fossil fuels, weapons, etc., to be reinvested in local efforts for renewable energy and/or peacebuilding) (Gardner, 2006; Lenferna, 2018).

Affinity Groups to Take Direct Action

Effective direct action to counter environmental injustice requires maintaining strategic alignment and tactical agreement among participants. It is not advisable to undertake direct action alone, but with a cohesive structure of care, which is called an affinity group.[14] Affinity groups are small groups who, based on their affinity, prepare, carry out, and depart the action together, interacting with the larger action as a unit (Lakey, 2018). Building such a unit can be difficult as they work best with years of trust built between members of the group. Religious community membership facilitates affinity groups to develop quickly if needed. Adherents already often have years of knowledge and many layers of interaction with others in their group. They have already been in spaces together, some even having shared vulnerable spaces before. The built-in trust of religious communities with each other lends itself to creating an affinity group. Religious communities offer care for their adherents, and this is another useful type of support for those taking direct action to be able to rely on, as after-care for high risk (or even low risk) actions enables people to take greater risk (Sharp 1971).

One example of this is a church and a synagogue that share the same building in San Francisco: First Mennonite Church San Franscisco (FMCSF) and Congregation Sha'ar Zahav. These institutions worked together on an EJ-inspired action that also centered gender and racial justice in early 2017. They blocked the doors of the Uber headquarters and refused to move until arrested (Wong, Levin, 2017). For many of the participants it was their first time getting arrested. This inspired the FMCSF's Outreach Committee's strategies and tactics group to maintain an affinity group ready, in an ongoing way, to join other protests or direct actions (FMCSF, 2017).

Though affinity groups themselves are often small, this type of mobilization when called for by a trusted group can also result in big numbers. An example of this is the New York City-based Muslim American Society (MAS). MAS is a network of mosques that has consistently been able to mobilize thousands of people to publicly protest the current genocidal and ecocidal policies of the U.S. and Israeli

alliance in Gaza since October 2023. Some activists in the movement have noted (with a bit of frustration) that MAS' people will only show up to protest when their affinity group leaders at MAS suggest doing so, and it's not always easy to get them to agree to promote a mobilization through their networks.[15] Selectivity in participation is part of the dynamic of religiously-based EJ material support; religious groups make theological decisions that influence whether they will officially participate.

Mutual aid practices

Mutual aid is a radical practice of offering specific material support in response to specific needs, without state/government mediation (Reese, Johnson, 2022). Mutual aid projects "address survival needs, mobilize large numbers of people to participate in movements actively rather than solely participating online or through voting, and offer spaces to practice new social relations" (Spade, 2020: 131). Religious communities are one of the many diverse groups that have created, sustained, and operationalized their commitment to practical care for others via mutual aid (Midgley, 2011).

Perhaps the most famous and layered religious community example of this in the U.S. is the Amish, a Christian denomination that more or less lives separately from society due to their repulsion to U.S. consumption and individualism. Without aiming to, Amish society fulfills most of the EJ Principles due to their agrarian, non-petroleum based, self-determined, collectivist lifestyle. In order to participate with them one must confess specific religious beliefs. The Amish prefer direct mutual aid over private or public insurance (Schlegel, 1997).

In the case of a fire tragedy, for example, they give their time, building materials, food, and money to the impacted family in a "barn-raising" party. Though some religious groups have a conservative framework around mutual aid and other services they provide, they are known to give essential services that many poor do not have access to due to state fiscal conservatism (Norman, Ganesh, 2006). Communities of people impacted by EJ have been "written out of belonging" by governments, but they don't have to be similarly written out by religious communities (Schein, 2009: 811). Rather "prefigurative mutual aid can transform landscapes—even those nestled inside enclosures of police surveillance" (Reese, Johnson, 2022: 36). Since EJ struggles can often be long-term and complex to resolve, groups that can meet the needs of marginalized people and landscapes, directly, and in the present moment, are invaluable (McKane et al., 2024).

The ability for religious communities to offer mutual aid in some ways builds on other material supports that these communities have: they are organized, mobilize the built-in audiences, and can use their spaces, time, and money to do the direct action of mutual aid. One example is in response to Hurricane Helene. A climate-accelerated natural disaster, Helene made landfall in late September 2024, leaving 600 miles of environmental devastation, and 230 dead across six states, primarily in the Appalachian region of the U.S. (Hassan, Taft, 2024). Despite deep religious conservatism (including climate change denial) in Appalachia, local Christian congregations were some of the most effective responders to community needs during the initial month of disaster response. Appalachian artist Sarah Vekasi noted that religious groups are demonstrating that they can, and will, help people across lines of political persuasion, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion.[16] This is significant as, when not in times of shocking disaster, some of these religious groups have hesitated to get involved in EJ activism, of which there is a long and robust history in Appalachia (Montrie, 2003).

It remains to be seen how the experience of collectively responding to a major disaster in a broad coalition of people across a religiously, politically, and demographically divided U.S. area will have on future formations of the EJ movement in that area, among people who did not expect to be on the frontlines of climate change. Perhaps examples from places that are on global frontlines, such as the

Sundarbans delta in West Bengal, India, can be instructive. Dowler (2022) found that "moral personhood" is constituted there through relationships that people have with the more-than-human world as well as humans. As shifts forced by capitalist modernity and climate change occur, new ethical dilemmas and debates are generated (ibid.). The writers of the EJ Principles anticipated these debates, and the EJ Principles invite communities to embrace "moral personhood" in their relationships with humans and more-than-humans, as planetary flourishing requires both.

Conclusion

Counter to a once-popular belief that secularism would eventually eclipse religious worldviews, religions are not disappearing (Gedicks, 1991). The world is becoming more religious (Sherwood, 2018). As long social movements, religions are continuously changing. Claims that once seemed unchangeable, and strategies and tactics used for decades are now de-centered due to the internet. Alliances between groups, such as pre-teens around the world, are occurring and receiving media attention. Religionists, perhaps in greater numbers than ever before, are using all of their resources to publicly challenge environmental injustices in the U.S. and beyond. Putting their values into action, they bring the power of moral suasion to the EJ movement, coming alongside others to work for a world in which neither social shortfall nor environmental overshoot occurs (Raworth, 2017). A social shortfall happens when a country seeks environmental sustainability by not meeting basic needs of its residents, and an environmental overshoot happens when, in seeking to meet human needs, a country harms the planet. Both social shortfalls and environmental overshoots are currently happening in various places; religious material and non-material support in bringing balance (the spirit of the Islamic *mizan* and EJ Principles 1, 12, and 17 among others) offer significant benefits to the movement.

Each of the case studies from Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity featured in this article draws on interpretations of their religious texts, praxis over time, and experiments in the 21st century that promote nonviolence, co-existence, and reverence for the planet. Phillip P. Arnold, a historian of religion, encourages this:

> If we are to survive together on this Earth, our notion of 'religion' will have to undergo radical changes from that of being transcendent and exclusively superior to becoming more inclusive and realigning with Indigenous Peoples and their ancient values of living in proper relationships (Arnold, 2023: 3).

Indigenous Peoples themselves maintain a wide variety of ceremonies, practices, and socio-cultural technologies that are specific to the Peoples/Places where they are uniquely geographically/geo-cosmically located within the community through which they arose and are maintained (Astor-Aguilera, Harvey, 2018). Since the term religion in application to Indigenous Peoples has been particularly problematic, Indigenous spiritualities and indigenizing spiritualities (e.g., Reclaiming traditions/Paganism) were not analyzed *as religions* here (Arnold, 2023; Newcomb, 2008; Rasmussen, 2024). That's not to say Indigenous and Indigenizing spiritualities have not contributed enormously to the EJ movement. They have, and often much more so than the "world religions" (Chidester, 2018; Cruikshank, 2012). The 17 Principles of Environmental Justice reflect strong themes of Indigenous spirituality, which is not distinct from Indigenous science, technology, or political analysis (Kimmerer, 2013; Nelson, 2008). It is time for trans-local, trans-geographic religious people to live in the EJ vision inspired by Indigenous Peoples; encouraging their communities to contribute meaningfully to making EJ possible wherever they are.

This study of religious moral suasion and material support serves as a window into the spiritual and physical resources that pro-environmental religious adherents bring to the EJ movement. Future research can build on this for how one might communicate based on values with religious practitioners who consider themselves pro-environmental, but who have not yet been morally persuaded to promote the EJ movement or offer material support to it (Lakoff, 2010). In light of climate change, EJ redress claims remain a way of appealing to government, non-profit entities, and corporate actors to assist in meeting the needs of humans and other species in the web of life to thrive. Hopefully, more religious communities will be moved do their part, deepening and enhancing both the EJ movement and the lives of their religious communities as they do. As the climate crisis becomes a central concern for religious groups who are not already involved in EJ, movement advocates will ideally position themselves to articulate meaningful morally persuasive and material contributions that religious practitioners can make, moving this moment from a tipping-point to a turning-point.

Notes

[1] S. Al-Daghistani, personal communication, March, 11, 2021.
[2] M. Seigle, personal communication, June 12, 2024.
[3] M. Seigle, personal communication, November 27, 2016.
[4] H. Bennett, personal communication, October 24, 2022.
[5] O. Khuankaew, personal communication, April 15, 2019.
[6] V. Viriyasakultorn, personal communication, March 18, 2019.
[7] K. Loncke, personal communication, August 1, 2015.
[8] S. Bradley, personal communication, October 25, 2023.
[9] D. Jaret, personal communication, March 4, 2023.
[10] M. Johnson, personal communication, October 23, 2023.
[11] T. Howe, personal communication, February 6, 2023.
[12] N. Bloch, personal communication, September 21, 2020.
[13] T. Howe, personal communication, February 6, 2023.
[14] N. Bloch, personal communication, September 21, 2020.
[15] A. Kawas, personal communication, October 13, 2024.
[16] S. Vekasi, personal communication, October 6, 2024.

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Appendix A

Principles of Environmental Justice (reproduced from https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html)

Principles of Environmental Justice

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24 27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 Principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, *The Principles* have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

1. Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing and the extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11. Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Appendix B

Featured Organizations and Key Thinkers Promoting EJ (in order of appearance in this article):

Moral Suasion: Religious Actors Put Values into Action

Islam

- Ibrahim Abdul-Matin
- Seyyed Hossein Nasr
- Green Muslims
- Sami Al-Daghistani

Hinduism

- Hindus for Human Rights
- Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi
- Hare Krishna animal rights activists

Judaism

- Urban Adamah
- Linke Fligl
- Tzedek Lab
- Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition

Buddhism

- Sahajayana movement
- Dalit Buddhist movement
- Thích Nhất Hạnh
- Ouyporn Khuankaew
- Buddhist Peace Fellowship
- Katie Loncke

Christianity

- Land Justice Futures
- Carnival de Resistance
- Community Peacemaker Teams

Beyond Moral Suasion: Material Support

Spaces

- Christian Sanctuary
- Sikh Gurdwara

Organization

- Eco-pesantrens in Indonesia
- Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition

Built-in audiences

- Islamic Jummah on Fridays
- Jewish Torah study on Saturdays
- Bahá'í Nineteen Day feasts
- Christian worship on Sundays

Time

- Faith Coalition of Stop Cop City
- The United Church of Christ
- Spirit of civic volunteerism

Money

- Christian tithe
- Offering *zakat* and the Islamic Waqf
- Freely offered donation (*dana*) in Buddhism
- Jewish *tzedekah* special collection

Affinity groups to take direct action

- FMCSF and Congregation Sha'ar Zahav
- Muslim American Society

Mutual aid practices

- Amish
- Hurricane Helene religious response
- Hindu, Muslim, and Christian multi-religious communities the Sundarbans delta of West Bengal