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Introduction:

The Green Economy in the Global South: experiences, redistributions and resistance

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Abstract

As multiple visions for a Green Economy seek to become real, so are green economic initiatives in the Global South multiplying. These can offer integration into wealth-generating markets – as well as displacement, alienation, conflict and opportunities for green washing. The articles included in this collection bring together a multi-disciplinary team of scholars and a range of case studies, from forestry governance to tourism to carbon finance, to provide nuanced analyses of Green Economy experiences in the Global South – analyzing the opportunities they provide, the redistributions they entail, and the kinds of resistance they face.

The momentum gathering behind the idea and practice of the ‘Green Economy’ is coinciding with financial instability and continued economic woe in the Global North, but generally more positive economic circumstances in the Global South. Green Economy initiatives in the Global South are multiplying, and include carbon payments, ecotourism, community-based wildlife management, sustainability certification initiatives, and offsets by mining companies exploiting new resources. These are all part of a landscape offering new commodities, opportunities for commercialization, and possible integration into wealth-generating markets. But so too are growing incidents of land and water grabbing, displacement and alienation of resources required for wealthy tourists, conflicts over locally-defined rules of access to carbon purchased by wealthy foreigners and instances of ‘green washing’ and other harmful activities. The Green Economy is reallocating resources, reinforcing inequalities and redistributing the fortune and misfortune of its participants and of those excluded from it. The articles included in this special issue bring together a multi-disciplinary team of scholars to provide nuanced analyses of Green Economy experiences in the Global South – analyzing the opportunities they provide, the redistributions they entail, and the kinds of resistance they may face.

Behind the Green Economy lie a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions. The term is both a rallying call for radical change to the organisation of economic activity and social life, and an instrument by which meaningful alterations of either is resisted. It is a nascent idea, a future scenario, and yet projects in its name are transforming rural and urban realities in many locations in the Global South. The Green Economy includes different epistemic communities, who seem to barely know each other, and is a field of vigorously contested interpretations. It demands attention, yet its breadth and multiple meanings make rigorous analysis hard. It is a fecund, sometimes febrile, arena of new scholarship on the Global South.¹

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The growing vigour of the topic is plain. Brown and colleagues trace the rise in writing on the Green Economy from 12 papers in 2004/5 to over 50 times that number eight years later.² These works examine specific sectors in particular countries, advances in new technologies, discursive formations, political battles within international institutions, and blueprints for how to transition to green (or at least greener) economic activity. The addition to this breadth that this collection provides is its focus on the dilemmas the Green Economy throws up in diverse situations in selected economies, societies and political institutions in the Global South.

We are not presuming to generalize across the Global South. Indeed, Carl Death's article specifically seeks to disaggregate the variety of responses to the Green Economy that can be found there. But we do see in these economies a series of different perspectives and patterns of practice that are more rarely encountered in the Global North. For example, in Latin America, more radical versions of the Green Economy are being explored, if only discursively, that entail looking beyond measures of mere GDP to determine prosperity. Elsewhere, and particularly in many African countries, moves towards a Green Economy are more modest and viewed with some distrust, precisely because they are perceived to threaten growth opportunities. As Facer and colleagues³ make clear, economies that are built on extracting natural resources, are developing new coal deposits and producing more energy cheaply, and have large sections of their population seeking employment and ways out of poverty, will be less prone to consider potentially more expensive development trajectories. Yet, at the same time, moves to promote particular forms of the Green Economy – ecotourism, carbon offsets, and community-based natural resource management – find all sorts of new venues to emerge in various countries and communities of the Global South. As the articles in this collection will show, despite governments' scepticism, moves towards a Green Economy have teeth and presence in these locations that are less visible than in the Global North.

One of the reasons of the Green Economy's visibility in the Global South is that tropical deforestation is seen as one of the low hanging fruit that can be targeted rapidly to reduce carbon emissions. Such deforestation is one of the major causes of carbon emissions (it was at the time of the Stern report thought to be the most important), and dealing with it was thought to be relatively cheap, and certainly politically much easier than tackling, for instance, car use in industrialized countries. This would explain the remarkably consistent line that appears in a series of different celebrities' messages on behalf of conservation organisations, with all proclaiming that tropical deforestation causes more carbon emissions than 'all the cars, trucks and planes in the world combined'.⁴ Thus, landscapes and economies in the Global South become vital actors in the defence of lifestyles in the Global North. Another reason for the visibility and tangibility of the Green Economy in the Global South is that practices such as payments for ecosystem services, green finance and ecotourism are materially manifest there. These practices result in new commodities, revenue streams, value chains, financial instruments and governance arrangements that are reshaping resource use and management at the local, and occasionally national and transnational, levels.

In addition to the actual Green Economy activities forming in the Global South, there is also an important history of academic interest in their predecessor activities in this realm. Many of the measures that are now badged as Green Economy have a previous gestation in the form of a series of interactions between environmental affairs and the functioning of capitalism. These have been tackled by scholars writing about the 'neoliberalisation of nature' and neoliberal conservation, and contain many aspects (payments for ecosystem services, the use

of markets to govern natural resources and environmental problems) that are now promoted as part of a Green Economy – this time in the context of growing acceptance of the role of the state in governing economic and environmental affairs. And yet, as is so often the case, authors and locations of this debate have been based mostly in the Global North.

This had been notably the case among the epistemic community that lies behind the present collection, which gathered in 2008 at meetings in Manchester (UK) and Washington, DC (USA), with subsequent gatherings in Lund (Sweden), the Hague (the Netherlands) and Toronto (Canada). These were all lively, vibrant conferences and workshops with vigorous debate and important publications deriving from them.⁵ They became larger with each iteration, and helped to successfully develop critical academic thinking in this area – together with other efforts at the meetings of professional associations of geographers, anthropologists and development studies in the US and UK. But these were not South-based endeavours.

Our point in observing this imbalance is not that intellectual endeavours about the South have to be written from it, or by its residents.⁶ We do not subscribe to simplistic notions of authenticity or authority. The freedoms of international academia mean that we are not bound by the contingencies of location in our research. But international intellectual agendas are likely to work better if they involve different parts of the world more equally. If the limitations of funding and visas constrain intellectual networks, then the communities resulting are stunted. It matters particularly for any scholars who are trying not just to analyse for intellectual audiences, but also to engage and work with the communities about whom they write. Those sorts of interactions are harder if so much of the intellectual activity is in a different hemisphere, and if the academic communities in which they take part are similarly biased.

The articles included in this collection derive from an attempt to at least partially redress this imbalance. Earlier versions of these papers were presented at the ‘Green Economy in the South’ conference, which was held in July 2014 at the University of Dodoma in Tanzania, and hosted by its Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences. Once again, our point is not that this makes the meeting any more authentic or authoritative. Indeed it became plain that there are far more enduring inequalities at work that merely hosting a meeting in Dodoma cannot overcome. It proved too hard to arrange travel and visa documents from applicants based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Applications from North-based scholars were still more numerous than those based in the South, and even if it is closer to many potential participants, Dodoma can still be hard and expensive to get to. To the extent that our goal of hosting a more inclusive conference was achieved, it was only possible because of generous sponsorship. Nevertheless, the result was that over 70 people attended from nearly 30 countries. Because of the high quality of the venue, the strong media coverage the conference attracted, and the measures the hosts took to welcome and cater for delegates’ needs, this meeting did succeed in providing a vigorous and lively international conference with broader geographic participation.

The articles included in this collection are but a fraction of those presented at the conference. They provide a number of critical perspectives – focusing on what kinds of power realignments and redistribution of resources take place under the aegis of the Green Economy, and examining to what extent support and resistance play out in a variety of settings and by whom. They also help to demonstrate some of the existing research gaps and suggest future directions required by the epistemic community that has produced them, which we briefly address at the end of this introduction.

Carl Death's article, 'Four discourses of the Green Economy in the Global South' sets the scene by disaggregating the different discourses of the Green Economy predominant in selected countries in the Global South. Death argues that, while the concept is often deployed in a consensual and win-win manner, we need to understand Green Economy discourses as part of a broader political economy of the 'green state' in the Global South. The first of four discourses he highlights is 'Green Resilience', which seeks ways to strengthen local and national economies to cope with the threats of climate change while delivering economic growth (with Ethiopia as the main example). The second, visible in China and India, is 'Green Growth', in which the transformations required to make economies greener are embraced as potential means of increasing the volume of transactions and economic activity. The third, 'Green Transformation', exemplified by aspects of South Korea's green stimulus policies, refers to states seeking to invest considerable resources into reshaping their economies to make them greener.⁷ The fourth and last, 'Green Revolution', invokes the possibility of more radical change, and possibly even de-growth, that the author observes especially in Brazil. Tracing this variety allows Death to highlight important commonalities: first, that the state is important in shaping and directing discourse and policies – even social movements' radical discourses often seek recognition and support from state institutions; and second, that all these discourses are compatible with perpetuated inequalities.

Three articles included in this collection critically examine the role of tourism in the Green Economy. **Melanie Ströbel**'s article, 'Tourism and the Green Economy: aspiring or averting change?' examines the efforts of the tourist industry to promote green growth. Tourism matters a great deal because it is one of the main ways in which ecosystem services can be paid for – wealthy tourists are prepared to part with significant sums to protect landscapes, water supplies, forests and so on. The industry can provide an effective means of directly transferring resources from richer visitors to poorer residents. Ströbel shows clearly that advocates of the tourist industry do not hesitate to claim those benefits. They also claim that tourism needs to increase in order to provide more and better benefits. And yet these increases, Ströbel argues, normally entail substantial growth in CO₂ emissions. There is optimism in the official documents that she analyses, suggesting that low carbon growth is possible but little reason to put faith in that optimism. In a dispassionate, but depressing analysis, Ströbel shows how supporters of this aspect of the Green Economy seem to have unrealistic expectations.⁸ Tourism is promoted as a strategy of solving problems, but the problems with which it is intricately bound are not mentioned, and more radical possibilities – such as shrinking tourism – simply do not feature. This limits the political space to promote more demanding possibilities of change.

The other two authors examine different tourism and conservation initiatives in South Africa. **Michela Marcatelli**, in her article entitled 'Suspended redistribution: Green Economy and water inequality in the Waterberg, South Africa', shows that conservation initiatives in South Africa interact with local needs not just through providing jobs and tourist revenues, and by claiming land, but also through the water resources that they command materially and discursively. This takes place in the context of a country that has seen insufficient moves to land redistribution and the continued removal of rural populations from once 'white farms' to new (often also white-owned) game reserves.⁹ People, and people's needs, have moved from rural areas to nearby urban centres. But the water (and especially its infrastructure and accessibility) has not flowed with them. Instead, it remains privately accessed, and therefore restricted, behind the fences of commercial and private game farms. 'Green' game farms – land uses that promote both natural environments and economies built on sustainable use of

natural resources – become instrumental in perpetuating unequal social divisions of resources.

Maano Ramutsindela makes a similar argument. His article ‘Extractive philanthropy: strategies for securing labour for private nature reserves’ examines philanthropic management and promotion of tourist businesses on private game farms in South Africa. He argues that post-apartheid South Africa provides conditions under which a seamless connection between philanthropy, labour and land claims in private nature reserves emerges. Philanthropy allows private owners to structure and control labour while directly or indirectly affecting the trajectory of land claims in the area. As a result of this, private game farms have been able to oppose and restrict land restitution in the name of promoting businesses that will benefit neighbours and formerly dispossessed communities. The result is portrayed, no doubt, as a win-win. Some jobs are created and much income is produced from these high-end eco-tourist resorts. But his critique is as much about the road not travelled by these choices. For the major winners are the wealthiest elites who can afford to manage these reserves, or frolic within them. Once again the sustainable green economy built on (this variety of) eco-tourism is riven with inequality.

The next three papers examine how Green Economy principles, policies and discourses are affecting forest policies. In ‘Responding to the Green Economy: how REDD+ and the One Map Initiative are transforming forest governance in Indonesia’, **Rini Astuti** and **Andrew McGregor** examine the ways in which Indonesian forests are becoming more legible for the purpose of mapping and securing carbon offsets. The issue here is that official maps and understandings of who owns what forest and who has concessions to do what are often inconsistent and inaccurate, allowing all sorts of problematic forest development to occur. The One Map Initiative was the government’s response to this messiness to provide a single accurate record. Astuti and McGregor argue this is a technical fix, and as such not necessarily oppressive. It can provide a means of disciplining the powerful. But, as with all official records, one has to ask: What can the state see? And what must local forest users do (to themselves) in order to be seen by the state? Astuti and McGregor show that there are forms of forest, types of forest users and processes of registration of interests, presence and rights in this initiative that are far from equitable. Local groups and NGOs are contesting these measures and making use of them for their own agendas, including attempts to address historical inequalities. The measures necessary to introduce Green Economy commodities (carbon offsets) require rendering forest societies and landscapes legible in ways that could profoundly alter life there, presenting a series of opportunities bundled up with specific risks.

Adrian Nel’s article, ‘The neoliberalisation of forestry governance, market environmentalism and reterritorialization in Uganda’, provides a detailed account of the re-organisation and restructuring of forestry in Uganda to allow space for market environmentalism. The result has been that forestry has become increasingly concerned with expanding plantations, and with criminalized local clearance of trees and forests. Additionally, Nel shows that the re-organisation of forestry is embedded in deeper reorganisations and contests within the Ugandan state itself. This has resulted in different forms of ‘governance beyond the state’ that control, limit and reshape both behaviour and forest cover. As in Rini and McGregor’s account in Indonesia, the advent of these forms of market governance in Uganda is accompanied by profound re-organisations of state governance, the social organisation of forestry, as well as social interactions with forests.

Mette Olwig, Christine Noe, Richard Kangalawe and Emmanuel Luoga examine in detail the case behind the establishment of plantation forests in Mufindi District, Tanzania. In their article ‘Inverting the moral economy: the case of land acquisitions for forest plantations in Tanzania’, they show that these forests were planted by investors over thousands of hectares in two villages and represent significant forms of land use change, and, potentially, restriction of access to residents. The authors argue that discursively the investors seize the high moral ground, because trees are ‘green’ (therefore good), the land underneath them had been idling and thus was not productive, and their investments brought a valued boost to the local economy. This is possible even if the actual links and benefits to existing local economies are not clear, or may even be detrimental to local farmers. These plantation forests create an environment where change is presumed to be good, and where the evidence for that belief becomes less important. They also mean that villagers lose 30 per cent of their land, moving closer to a cash economy, with the moral economy that had sustained them subverted to the demands of a ‘global moral economy’ that needs more trees. Moreover, in a remarkable twist to the story, villagers themselves are planting more trees, sometimes to the apparent detriment of their food security (as they lose cropland) because of the purported benefits trees can bring.

Sarah Bracking’s contribution, ‘Performativity in the Green Economy: how far does climate finance create a fictive economy?’ steps back from the detail of particular projects and re-organisations of resources and considers the means by which supposedly Green Economy projects are financed, and what sort of change this will produce in the structure and performance of economies in the Global South and the global economy at large. In a careful, but chilling, account she shows how the evaluative and calculative devices used to invest in the Green Economy, and mitigate and offset current pollution, can be remarkably divorced from realities on the ground. Indeed, they may even depend on being so. Value is created through diverse performances and appearances of being ‘green’, and not because of material change on the ground. This is not mere superficial behaviour attributable to individual companies, or ‘greenwashing’. It is a far more reaching ‘green cleansing’ that pervades an entire sector.

These are detailed and careful articles examining diverse experiences and trajectories of the Green Economy in the Global South and the redistributions they entail: (1) between different groups of actors accessing specific resources – mostly to the advantage of existing elites and to the detriment of weaker groups; (2) between different kinds of benefits, e.g. when the creation of ‘Green Economy jobs’ justifies land access limitations for local communities; (3) between private and public actors, e.g. when water accessibility for private game farms comes at the cost of marginalised urban communities; (4) between local and global outcomes, e.g. when income and conservation benefits from ecotourism are accompanied by global increases in CO₂ emissions; and (5) between different kinds of benefits, e.g. when environmental and economic benefits accrue to different groups of actors.

These redistributions are justified, normalized and ‘naturalised’ by more or less subtle transformations in moral and normative orders, e.g. when the establishment of forest plantations detrimental to local subsistence supports a global (environmental) moral economy. As Olwig et al in this collection put it, ‘instead of having the upper moral ground, as poor people who have the right to a livelihood that can support their families, the poor are burdened with the moral responsibility to compensate for the excessive consumption of the more well-to-do in the Global South and particularly in the Global North’ (p.2).

These articles show that Green Economy initiatives are often based on technologies and forms spatial knowledge that tend to portray changes in access to resources in win-win and non-confrontational fashion. They bring in investors in the name of providing local benefits, but also establish new venues for philanthropy. They entail specific forms of financing, derivatives trading and financial speculation that are based on valuation performed within a virtual framing of 'care'. These initiatives can be accompanied by profound changes in political institutions and social relations, sometimes resulting in the strengthening of the bureaucratic and coercive capacity of the state (often in coalition with local elites and outside investors) at the expense of disenfranchised communities. And they lead to new patterns of financial, asset and resource accumulation based on green credentials and justifications – paradoxically including accumulation by offshore fossil-fuel and infrastructure funds based on the provision of international public subsidies (e.g. through CDM projects).

While some instances of resistance are reported in the articles included in this collection, these are often thwarted on moral, technological and economic grounds, and on the basis of the primacy of expert solutions and valuations. In only one case in Indonesia a Green Economy initiative was used as an opportunity to attempt addressing historical inequalities in access to resources. In the name of continued growth, the Green Economy becomes a discursive strategy and a moral order backing up concrete practices that often reproduce existing inequalities in global and local political economies – marginalising the possibility for more radical transformations, such as those based on modifying lifestyles and *decreasing* consumption and travel.

These articles were built on many months of intensive doctoral research and analysis, or even longer periods of repeated encounters by more seasoned academics. They are typical of the standards and quality of work presented at the conference. The presenters who came to the conference were highly interested in natural resources, wildlife, water, trees, REDD and conservation. This is focus surprising. It means that at a conference that was meant to be about the Green Economy in the Global South there were no papers on manufacturing or service industries. The call for this conference had been circulated globally. We received over 100 abstracts and invited over 70 speakers. Yet somehow the epistemic communities to which it appealed did not include people working on these relevant issues. For a critical community intent on critically examining capitalism, the economic sectors it chose to examine were limited.

Shore-Ouimet and Kopnina have recently argued that '[m]ost environmental social scientists, for instance, do not study those groups that do the greatest damage (e.g., intensive agriculture, logging companies, chemical manufacturers, etc.), where they could arguably make the greatest difference'.¹⁰ Although this critique is off the mark, as there is a great deal of environmental scholarship which tackles these aspects (see, for example, the articles reviewed in Castree¹¹), the epistemic groups working on the Green Economy in Dodoma were indeed narrow. Our scholarship needs to form better links with critics working in urban and industrial fields. Our point here is not to criticize the work of individual scholars whose focus is on rural areas. The majority of many countries in the Global South remain rural and will do so for years to come, and good scholarship can require that sort of focus on specific sectors. Rather, our closing point is that there need to be better interactions and network building with the broader epistemic community. By collaborating more effectively with scholars working on 'the urban' or with particular industrial sectors, we will be able to analyse the Green Economy more effectively.

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Notes

¹ Bailey and Caprotti, “The green economy”; Bauhardt, “Solutions to the crisis?”; Tienhaara, “Varieties of green capitalism”.

² Brown et al., “Green growth or ecological commodification”.

³ Facer et al., “Interpreting the green economy”.

⁴ For example Harrison Ford (actor): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVBw66t8a9Q> (accessed 29th July 2015); Charles Windsor (the Prince of Wales):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boEDMVNAPk4> (accessed 29th July 2015); Tom Friendman (journalist): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Li3O81uD8> (accessed 29th July 2015).

⁵ Brockington and Duffy, *Capitalism and Conservation*; Arsel and Büscher, “NatureTM Inc”; Büscher et al. *NatureTM Inc*.

⁶ This imbalance has been raised before though not fully settled. See, e.g. Sidaway, “In other worlds”.

⁷ But Death is careful to report the objections that Tienhaara reports to using such investments to dam and dredge rivers.

⁸ Wanner, “The New 'Passive Revolution' of the Green Economy”.

⁹ Connor, “Opportunity and Constraint”.

¹⁰ Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina, “Reconciling ecological and social justice”, 324.

¹¹ Castree, “Neoliberalizing nature: processes, effects and evaluations”, and Castree, “Neoliberalizing nature: the logics of de- and re-regulation”.

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