

Neglecting the Marginalized: Corporate Valuation Discourses in Environmental Struggles

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Abstract

The unequal distribution of environmental goods and pollution burdens is determined by valuation decisions dependent on the values present in the public sphere. Accordingly, corporations and movements of resistance adopt strategies to influence public value systems to prioritize their interests. However, pre-existing asymmetric relationships of power grant corporations a dominant position over the public sphere, eschewing environmental management towards instrumental and transactional modes of valuation. The hegemonic valuation of the environment is thus a product and source of power, and a key element for the reproduction of systems of oppression. This article will discuss the mechanisms used by extractive corporations to neglect alternative value systems, illustrated with examples from the oil giant TotalEnergies.

Keywords

corporate misconduct – critical theory – environmental justice – power asymmetries – representation injustice – valuation contests

1 Introduction

Environmental conflicts occur between two or more social actors with incompatible interests over the environment, including access to natural “resources” and burdens of pollution (Martínez-Alier and O’Connor 1996). Environmental distribution conflicts are a constant feature in human history, and the relentless expansion of the economy and human activity only adds pressure to

socio-ecological systems generating ever more conflicts (Martínez-Alier 2012a). Current prominent environmental conflicts are related to anthropogenic planetary crises such as biodiversity loss (Redpath et al. 2013), climate change, the scramble to obtain resources for “energy security” (Temper et al. 2020), and the wave of extractivism to provide materials for the “energy transition” (Voskoboynik et al. 2022).

Environmental conflicts were initially defined as distributional since the outcome of the conflict determines how the environmental goods and burdens of pollution are distributed to the different actors (Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996). Pre-existing power asymmetries lead to unequal ecological distribution, which in turn reinforces political-economic class fault lines that divide between the privileged beneficiaries that enjoy the use and control over the environmental “goods and services” and the marginalized that suffer the associated negative impacts of extraction and pollution (Hornborg 1998). Consequently, this unequal distribution establishes relationships of domination and intersects with other existing systems of oppression across gender, racial, and class lines (Malin and Ryder 2018; Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996; Menton et al. 2020). Important characterizations of ecological distributional inequality can be found in Kapp's concept of cost-shifting (explained in Martínez-Alier 2012b), and the concepts of ecological debt (Warlenius et al. 2015) and unequal ecological exchange (Hornborg 1998).

Environmental distributional injustice is compounded by procedural, and recognition injustices (Fraser 2020; Menton et al. 2020; Vallet et al. 2019). Unequal ecological distribution is ultimately defined by sets of decisions on the management of human-nature relations. Decisions over environmental management are in essence valuation processes that “assign importance” to different aspects of the environment (Jacobs et al. 2016:214; Martínez-Alier et al. 1998). Vatn (2009) pointed out the importance of an “open public sphere that facilitates access for different views, experiences and perspectives” to ensure fairness in valuation processes (p. 2213). In fact, the unequal recognition of values in the public sphere holds a great power to influence distributional decisions (Fraser 2020). The choices of which and how questions guide the decision-making process depend on the balance of values expressed by the actors involved, and these are in turn influenced by the debates and ideas present in the public sphere. It then follows that a critical strategy of environmental contention is to influence public value systems (Brulle et al. 2020). Both the dominant and marginalized actors in environmental conflicts adopt strategies to popularize their particular values in order to defend their stakes. But again, existing power asymmetries mean that dominant actors have a disproportionate capacity to establish hegemonic value systems that over-represent their

interests and neglect those of marginalized groups, leading to what is known as recognition injustice or non-recognition (Fraser 2020).

There is a clear research gap to understand the mechanisms by which dominant extractive actors hegemonize the public sphere. Existing literature has highlighted the gap, for instance Martínez-Alier (2009:87) concluded that determining how the power of imposing one particular standard of valuation was exercised in environmental conflicts required further research. Berbés-Blázquez et al. (2016) also found that “there is still insufficient recognition of the way in which institutions and values [...] have been historically forged through power struggles among competing groups of actors defending their vested interests” (p. 139). Such knowledge could inspire targeted counter-hegemonic measures by movements of resistance leading to new avenues towards environmental justice. This article responds to the call to implement a “deep intersectional approach” to environmental justice scholarship by “more directly and critically identify[ing] and analyz[ing] not only powerful actors but systems and processes of power in these dynamics” (Malin and Ryder 2018:3). Finally, inscribing this article in the tradition of action-oriented research invites reflection on the power and associated responsibility academics can have towards “chang[ing] the prevailing culture of how nature is valued and subsequently managed as an essential step towards a more just and sustainable world” (Jacobs et al. 2020:2).

Consequently, this article seeks to unpack the mechanisms by which extractive corporations neglect the value representations of marginalized groups. In the next section, insights from the fields of environmental services valuation and critical social theory are discussed to frame the role of power asymmetries, and offer important context to the discussion of the public value-forming representations of extractive corporations. Then, discursive mechanisms wielded by extractive companies to neglect marginalized value systems are characterized and classified, with practical examples provided by representations of the oil and gas company TotalEnergies. Finally, the conclusion invites reflection on how different movements resist non-recognition, and how movements of resistance can build power through counter-hegemonic valuation systems in the global debate.

2 Neglecting Marginalized Values as a Product of Power Asymmetries

Before proceeding, it is important to theoretically frame the nature of the contested values in environmental justice struggles, for which the literature on environmental services valuation offers important characterizations. Values in

dispute over environmental conflicts have been classified in three main categories which can be defined as “gaining from nature (instrumental), living for nature (intrinsic in the sense of the direct moral consideration of nonhuman subjects of a life), and living in nature (relational)” (Himes and Muraca 2018:3). Hereafter they will be referred to as instrumental, intrinsic, and relational values. Western settler cosmogonies are inclined to value nature instrumentally, while Indigenous and anti-systemic worldviews are more prone to adopt intrinsic and relational values (Himes and Muraca 2018; Martin et al. 2020). In order to assign importance to and mediate between plural values in environmental conflicts, different methods have been proposed. Valuation methods are classified as cost-benefit, multi-criteria, or deliberative (Dendoncker et al. 2013; Martínez-Alier et al. 1998; Vatn 2009; Zafra-Calvo et al. 2020). Each valuation is better suited to represent a certain value category, inclining the balance of power between the actors in conflict.

Under the cost-benefit valuation, all claims and interests in dispute are expressed and weighted in the form of a single value, generally a monetary sum. This approach works well for instrumental values, which are substitutable and more easily match a market logic, but requires all sorts of artifacts to put a price on and simplify irreducible natural, cultural, and spiritual values that are intrinsic or relational and non-substitutable (Himes and Muraca 2018). Monetary valuations essentially put a price on the access to natural resources or to the placement of pollution burdens (Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996). Prices are defined as the willingness to pay or willingness to accept (in case of compensation), which is largely influenced by the wealth of the stakeholder (Maier and Feest 2016). In fact, we can understand market prices of environmental goods as dependent on prevailing power structures rather than cost-efficiency equilibriums (Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996). Monetary valuation gives disproportionate power to wealthy economic actors, and puts marginalized communities under a position of subordination, forcing them to “sell cheap.” Indeed, some companies prioritize paying compensation when this is cheaper than mitigating the impacts (Maier and Feest 2016). This is why many environmental justice organizations refuse negotiating for compensation and focus on their political agency discarding all market logic (Martínez-Alier and O'Connor 1996).

In response to the cost-benefit valuation logic, ecological economists argue that values are incommensurable and contextual and have proposed multi-criteria methods where individual values can be weighted on their own terms and scales (Dendoncker et al. 2013; Martínez-Alier et al. 1998). Recently, even the corporate world is starting to adopt multi-criteria valuation languages. Examples include the triple bottom line theory (Brulle et al. 2020),

Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) standards (Yu et al. 2020), and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in corporate social responsibility strategies (Scheyvens et al. 2016). However, the logic of profit and exponential economic growth continues to be a central totem of business practice, and it is integrated within these multi-criteria valuation scales. Predominant concepts such as sustainable development and green growth are clear examples of such integration of valuation scales. In multi-criteria valuation methods, the question of whether some of the valuation scales prevail over others still remains. To illustrate: in green growth, what is more important, the “green” or the “growth”?

Indeed, some scholars argue that multi-criteria valuations have the problem of how to measure each of the criteria, when some values are impossible to account for, and how to assign priorities for different criteria (Vatn 2009). Instead, a deliberative approach is suggested where the decisions are subject to discussion and agreement between the stakeholders in a forum-like institution to reconcile competing interests (Ibid). In theory, a deliberative approach can offer better recognition to relational and intrinsic values that cannot be articulated, or that stakeholders do not want to articulate in an instrumental framework and market logic (Himes and Muraca 2018; Zafra-Calvo et al. 2020). This approach is especially sensitive to values disproportionately manifested by Indigenous peoples and non-Western languages of valuation including “embeddedness, collective meaning, flourishing, heritage, beauty, self-transformation, sense of place, spirituality, livelihoods, justice, conviviality, care, and kinship” (Himes and Muraca 2018:3).

In summary, the election of a method of valuation holds great power to determine the distributional outcome of the decisions on managing human-nature relations by favoring which typology of values are best represented (Himes and Muraca 2018; Jacobs et al. 2020). Ultimately, non-recognition of values and distributional injustice are inseparable and reinforce one another (Fraser 2020). It follows that the election of the valuation method is determined by the conflict between the pre-existing values best suited to the stakeholders (Zafra-Calvo et al. 2020). If an instrumental view over human-nature relations prevails, cost-benefit monetary valuations will be favored; if a relational view is espoused, a deliberative method will likely be adopted.

At this point it is relevant to highlight that values are socio-cultural constructs, which are influenced by the “historical co-evolution of power relations and environmental change” (Berbés-Blázquez et al. 2016:134) and “by socially shared horizons of meaning that form shared narratives, institutions, norms, and habitualized practices” (Himes and Muraca 2018:2; Jacobs et al. 2020). So, given values are socio-cultural constructs, both dominant and marginalized

actors compete to mainstream their value representations in the public sphere and adopt contentious strategies accordingly. However, existing power asymmetries favor dominant extractive stakeholders in their quest to impose their value systems “and prevent a diversity of values from being included in decision making” (Zafra-Calvo et al. 2020:10). Extractive companies are intricately related with coloniality and use their disproportionate power to wield “information and influence campaigns” (Manheim 2011; cited in Brulle et al. 2020) and devalue non-Western and alternative value systems to favor their instrumental values in environmental decision making (Martin et al. 2020).

One way through which the power asymmetry plays out is through differential access to decision centers. Critical decision-making centers are usually geographically and culturally far away from the frontiers of extraction. In this respect, affected communities face a disproportionately higher barrier to access the public spheres influencing the decision, while transnational extractive companies can afford to address, tailor, and target their messages. In this vein, movements of resistance find power in making visible their experiences and value systems, and side with political actors with access to the public spheres of decision making. Placing politically influential groups on the same side of the unequal distribution equation is crucial for movements of resistance to gain political allies. On the other side of the conflict, dominant actors tend to neglect the impacts endured by the marginalized in order to stem solidarity.

In sum, the non-recognition of the values represented by marginalized communities is both a source and a product of power asymmetries, making it a process of social reproduction of systems of oppression (Fraser 2020). In other words, neglecting marginalized values is a cornerstone of environmental injustice in particular, and all systems of oppression in general. Correspondingly, counter-hegemonic liberation movements strategically turn socially prevailing value systems into a contentious battleground (Ibid). Identifying the mechanisms by which companies and mass media define which values are represented and which are not, what matters and what does not, and how this determines what is an acceptable political-economic decision is key to inform counter-hegemonic strategies. Thus, the next section proposes a typology of different discursive mechanisms, which extractive companies employ to neglect marginalized value systems in the public sphere.

3 Discursive Mechanisms of Neglect

Dominant political and economic actors that benefit from the unequal exchange of environmental goods and services display a range of strategies to

impose their suited valuation system over the values of impacted marginalized communities. They generally employ discourses centering the instrumental value of their investments in terms of economic growth or development and job creation (Anguelovski 2014; Escobar 2014). Often these monetary values are combined with improved well-being and sustainability claims through technological advances (Keary 2016), and ecological valuations justifying projects for their contribution to the “energy transition” and biodiversity conservation, epitomized by the green-growth narratives currently in vogue (Stegemann and Ossewaarde 2018). However, such techno-economic, positivist value representations neglect the impacts suffered by marginalized communities in a number of ways.

The instances of hegemonic discourses neglecting the values of marginalized communities are legion and very diverse. This section seeks to generalize and classify the dominant mechanisms of neglect to systematize our understanding of them. To illustrate the use of the mechanisms in practice, different examples from the French oil and gas giant TotalEnergies are analyzed. The mechanisms are discussed from a climate-justice perspective, but they may well apply to any other extractive corporation. To be sure, the following classification has gray zones and some discourses will encompass more than one or fall outside of the classification. Thus, this systematization serves the analytical purpose of facilitating the discussion and identification of the mechanisms, and by no means seeks to be exhaustive.

3.1 *Neglecting Political Subjects*

Chiefly among all mechanisms is the cancellation of political agency in the public sphere. This mechanism is generally observed in the way many news outlets report on environmental catastrophes, giving voice to experts and NGOs and a right-of-reply to companies, but omitting the testimonials of the directly impacted local communities. To illustrate, an analysis of the reporting of TotalEnergies’ Mozambique LNG project amidst the jihadist uprising in Cabo Delgado by *LeFigaro*, a leading right-wing newspaper in France owned by Dassault Group, is presented. The newspaper’s online site was searched with the key words “Cabo Delgado Total gaz” and 29 pieces were found, including short news and longer reportages. Although *LeFigaro* has captured the views of climate justice organizations in some of their reports (*LeFigaro* 2020), they have only included testimonials by directly impacted local people in two of their articles. In contrast, direct quotes from TotalEnergies or its spokesperson were included in nine of the stories. And in general, the reporting put more emphasis on the economic and energy interests for the company, rather than the livelihoods, social and cultural impacts suffered by the local population

as a consequence of the jihadist uprising and targeting of the LNG facilities. When the local impacts were mentioned, they often focused on the number of killed and displaced, stripping all nuanced language embedded in the views and experiences of the affected communities. Such reporting bias facilitates the society-wide adoption of the financial and energy valuations favored by the extractive companies in detriment and neglect of the values that the local communities prioritize. The relational values of the local population underpin legitimate political views, demands and agency, which are neglected by the media outlets. Their voice does not count.

3.2 *Individualizing Responsibilities*

Privileging a particular political subjectivity constitutes a second dimension of political alienation. In the neoliberal tradition, political agency is deposited on the individual, but in non-Western traditions, right-holders and political subjects do not always take individual form, but collective (Martin et al. 2020). This difference is key to understanding both the unequal distribution of impacts and distribution of responsibilities. In the same vein, breaking down the complexity of responsibility to the individual obscures the responsibility embedded in social systems of oppression, and their history. In this respect TotalEnergies has not come as far as BP, which introduced the concept of the “carbon footprint” to place the onus of climate responsibility on individual consumers (Turner 2014), or Shell, which demanded their audience, “What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions?” (Shell 2020). Beyond Big Oil, the individualization of climate responsibilities is now pervasive in the public sphere, and even has extensive support in academic literature. The epitome is the research article that calculated the individual carbon emissions savings associated with having one less child, while dismissing the socio-cultural basis of such emissions (see Wynes and Nicholas 2017).

TotalEnergies is careful not to blame their individual consumers as ultimate bearers of the responsibility, and even admits the need to take socio-economic considerations in climate policy (Pouyanné 2019). However, the basic tenet of individual consumer responsibility is a central value representation in their proposed actions to mitigate environmental impacts. TotalEnergies proposes the introduction of carbon taxes, which are underscored by market logic relying on independent individual agents. Carbon markets open the door to “techno-fixes” such as afforestation or carbon capture and storage that do nothing to tackle the underlying causes of environmental impacts, and merely expand environmental injustice frontiers with newly created commodities (Lyons and Westoby 2014). Techno-fixes are also present in the solutions TotalEnergies is suggesting to reduce transport emissions. Their solutions boil

down to offering biofuels, hydrogen, LNG, or electricity instead of conventional fuels for road, shipping and aviation transport consumers (TotalEnergies nd[a]). Once again, these technological substitutes merely add new commodities to the market opening up new extraction frontiers and do not remediate environmental injustice.

All these proposed solutions are within the neoliberal market paradigm. They rely on the individualization of responsibility and a theory of change based on transactions between individual agents. The values at the root of the market paradigm are chiefly instrumental, and hegemonic proposals for carbon markets and techno-fixes are neglecting alternative relational and intrinsic value systems. Alternative value systems, often stemming from indigenous traditions, hold different diagnoses of the crisis and offer alternative solutions based on collective and systemic change often guided by spiritual and traditional nature-embedded knowledge. Of course, such alternative solutions would run against corporations ultimate profit imperative, and accordingly, extractive companies seek to dominate the public sphere with the individual transactional paradigm.

3.3 *The Quantification Doctrine*

The transactional focus of Western neoliberal valuations places a strong demand for quantification, for only what can be counted can be traded. The foundations of this valuation system can be traced to a technological modernism that tries to make sense of the world through measurements, models, and physical transformation. This is epitomized by commodity fetishism, or the effort to mediate as many social interactions as possible through trade, as markets theoretically offer efficiency in valuing goods and services (Kosoy and Corbera 2010). However, quantifying the environment opens the possibility for it to be regarded as an instrumental and interchangeable service, bringing it into a Western-inclined market logic (Himes and Muraca 2018). But when value representations are based on numbers, values which cannot be quantified have no meaning. The neoliberal fixation with numbers neglects alternative ways of being, valuing, and relating, which are generally associated with Indigenous and feminist counter-hegemonic traditions.

The latest trend in this direction is quantifying the socioecological behavior of companies through Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indexes and rankings. Rating agencies compile ESG indexes as financial tools to positively screen for companies meeting a specific set of requirements, often quantifiable. Some ESG raters also offer ESG rankings, where they calculate a score for each individual company based on a number of sustainable behavior indicators. The numbers behind ESG ratings obscure a whole plethora of

valuation systems put forward by the communities impacted by the company operation, which in important aspects cannot be accounted for. In essence, ESG indicators are designed to appease a Western, privileged audience. And effectively, many times ESG scores are a measure to judge how “sustainable” an investment is, with the ultimate result of further financializing the environment. In financial literature, ESG ratings are even investigated for their correlation with the maximization of profit (Friede et al. 2015).

TotalEnergies takes pride in its high score in many ESG rankings (TotalEnergies 2022a) and follows the yearly evolution of a set of climate, environmental, health, safety, social, and economic indicators (TotalEnergies 2022b). But the good standing of the oil company in the eyes of ESG rating agencies can equally mean that ESG scores are incapable of capturing corporate misconduct as recounted by the experiences and views of the communities affected by the negative impacts of the company’s operations.¹ Therefore, TotalEnergies portrayal of ESG scores and socioecological indicators in the public sphere has the ultimate impact of creating a perception of a company that does good and respects its environment, while it obscures the unquantifiable impacts that its operations level on marginalized communities.

3.4 *Geographic Dislocation*

Behind a scientific façade, maps highlight and obscure the values attributed to a given location and are critical in discussing any environmental conflict. Graphic representations of the territory are always partial and reflect the valuation language espoused by the author of such maps. A very clear example can be found in the map of Mozambique shown by *LeFigaro* to illustrate its reportage on the jihadist conflict in Cabo Delgado, where TotalEnergies is developing a \$20bn gas project (Dumay 2019). It is a basic map of the country highlighting the main gas deposits and indicating where the jihadist uprising is taking place. In essence it places the value on the gas resources and the jihadist attacks, which threaten the investment. But this representation obscures the valuation embedded in local value systems, for it does not reflect whether there are sacred sites, critical water courses, or which types of economic activities are conducted in the territory, to name just three other valuations. Indeed, there are some value systems that cannot even be represented in maps, so maps should always be interpreted as partial representations and thus prone to bias. In this way, maps become powerful instruments for extractive companies

1 A compilation of conflicts and impacts related to TotalEnergies operations can be found at the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice (<https://ejatlas.org>).

and aligned media outlets to define what matters and what does not. There are endless examples of maps in TotalEnergies Universal Registration Documents and communication materials that influence public valuation of territories by neglecting what is valued by affected communities.

3.5 *Historical Dislocation*

The historical perspective embedded in the value systems propounded by extractive companies is radically different to that of Indigenous and anti-systemic resistances. On one hand, extractive companies have a generally short-sighted valuation of time both past and future. On the other hand, many non-Western cosmovisions characteristically value the legacies of ancestors and give importance to the legacies left to forthcoming generations (McGregor 2019); and anti-systemic resistances tend to put the emphasis on the historical determinants of current social and ecological relations. Narrowing down historical valuations essentially privileges an extractive-oriented value system. For instance, marginalized value systems are neglected when the legacies that condition the present are discounted. Like discourses which underline that colonialism ended with the independence of most colonies in the 70s, and obscure that colonies still exist nowadays. Even in independent states the core regions continue to exert their colonial power and influence to extract economic and environmental resources from lands and bodies (Hickel et al. 2022). And within imperial states Indigenous populations continue to be marginalized and impacted.

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, TotalEnergies CEO seemed to be very well aware of the legacies of slavery (Pouyanné 2020). TotalEnergies is indeed one of the funders of the Fondation Pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage (FPME nd). But while coloniality may have arisen with slavery, it did not end with abolition. TotalEnergies' own historical roots are deeply linked to the French colonial project. Its main predecessor Compagnie Française de Pétroles was allocated 25 percent of the shares of the Turkish Oil Company in 1923 from Deutsche Bank as World War I compensation to the French in the San Remo Oil Agreement (TotalEnergies 2019). TotalEnergies' history started in the middle east colonies to "secure France's energy security" (Ibid: 1min36sec). The other French predecessor of TotalEnergies, Elf, has been associated with the French neocolonial domination of Africa. Five years after he was convicted in the "Elf Affair" its former CEO, Loïc Le Floch-Prigent, declared that "Elf [was] not only an oil company, it [was] a parallel democracy with the objective to keep under control a certain number of African states" (Le Floch-Prigent and Decouly 2001:54). According to him, Elf was created by De Gaulle's government

to maintain French influence in Africa after the independence of its colonies. TotalEnergies current operations in Africa² are too pronounced to neglect the historical link with the French colonialism in the continent.

So TotalEnergies' representation of the legacies of slavery and the professed commitment to "fostering the economic development of the host regions" (TotalEnergies nd[b]) obscures a colonial history in which their predecessors played an important role. The current standing and power of TotalEnergies cannot be dissociated from the historical grievance of the French imperial project stealing wealth and impairing the wellbeing and self-determination of many African societies for generations. The discourse of the company focuses on the short-term jobs and GDP it can bring to African societies, while neglecting the colonial history that conditioned the current economic injustice suffered by the continent.

More so, coloniality continues to expand nowadays, further dispossessing and marginalizing Indigenous communities around the world. The fossil-fuel-extraction frontier pushes with it the colonial frontier. In particular, TotalEnergies is an active player in the expansion of the arctic colonial frontier through its joint venture with Novatek to exploit gas reserves in Yamal peninsula. The project is in collaboration with the Russian oil industry and was initially supported by the French and Russian states. The infrastructure and operations required to extract, liquefy, and send the extracted gas to its consumers in Europe and Asia have disrupted the traditional lives of the Indigenous Nenets people without their consent or participation (Hanaček et al. 2022; Tulaeva et al. 2019).

3.6 *Homogenizing Asymmetric Responsibilities, Benefits, and Impacts*

For environmental justice movements, historical events largely determine the current unequal distribution of responsibilities, benefits, and impacts related to the environment. Social relationships and nuance over the heterogeneity within society are crucial for this way of valuing. Extractive companies' representation of a homogenous society neglects the importance of asymmetric relationships of power between different social groups. To illustrate, TotalEnergies (2022c) puts forward in all their climate communications "the ambition of achieving carbon neutrality (net zero emissions) by 2050, together with society." The key representation stands out in the word "together." It is inferred that the burden of responsibility for climate mitigation is homogeneously distributed across society and "everyone will have to do their part to

2 Twenty-four percent of oil and gas production and 27 percent of petroleum sales in Africa (TotalEnergies 2022c).

limit its impact" (TotalEnergies 2021). In so doing, TotalEnergies neglects the disproportionate responsibility that lies with the fossil-fuel industry to mitigate, repair, and compensate for the loss and damage incurred by vulnerable communities around the world. The discourse has been repeated so insistently in the media it has even transgressed to some uncritical NGOs. For instance, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF nd) fighting the climate crisis "will require action by everyone" without highlighting the disproportionate responsibility of the fossil fuel industry. This heightened responsibility stems from Big Oil's history of emissions, political lobbying, and public disinformation (Frumhoff et al. 2015). Fossil-fuel companies stand as the largest contributor by far to the climate crisis. Between 1965 and 2018, only 20 fossil-fuel companies have been responsible for 35 percent of industrial emissions (CAI 2020; Griffin and Heede 2017).

But the mechanism of homogenization is also used to homogenize the distribution of benefits across social actors. One of the mission statements of TotalEnergies is "to provide people around the world with the energy they need to support their socio-economic development in a sustainable world and ensure their well-being" (TotalEnergies nd[c]); with its CEO Patrick Pouyanné (2019) dismissing demands to stop fossil-fuel production and consumption since it would "neglect billions of people who need energy to lift themselves out of poverty and achieve a better life." This representation is blind and obscures the reality of the unequal global distribution of oil and gas consumption. Most of the oil and gas commercialized by the company is consumed in the Global North,³ where it partly meets the basic needs of the general population, but it is also used in wasteful ways. This unequal distribution is part and parcel of the global system of oppression under unequal ecological exchange, and reproduces existing inequalities.

The injustice is made worse by the homogenization of the social and economic costs of the climate crisis. To begin with, TotalEnergies does not mention the impacts that the climate crisis has had, is having, and will have on people in their latest Universal Registration Document (TotalEnergies 2022c), Climate Strategy (TotalEnergies 2020), and Sustainability & Climate 2022 Progress Report (TotalEnergies 2022d). In the latter document, "climate change" is mentioned 12 times, but only in relation to the negative effects it has on biodiversity and their own infrastructure. They leave out all mention of the climate impacts felt by society, let alone the disproportionate impacts inflicted on already marginalized populations around the world. The climate-change

3 See distribution of petroleum products sold (TotalEnergies 2022c): 55 percent of sales are in Europe for 27 percent in Africa.

discourse of TotalEnergies, and the fossil-fuel industry in general (OGCI 2015), has evolved from silence on the question, to sowing uncertainty about the science, to accepting the science while delaying political change (Bonneuil et al. 2021). Now, possibly pressured to elude legal compensation claims, the fossil-fuel industry neglects how climate impacts and responsibilities are unequally distributed in society, dismiss their disproportionate responsibility, and refuse to acknowledge their activities are impacting already marginalized communities the most. What once were climate science deniers are now climate justice deniers.

3.7 *Distraction*

The environmental and climate justice movements have had great success in the last decade in establishing ecological valuation systems in the public sphere. The general corporate response has been to deploy a counter-discourse that distracts the attention of the debate away from the material impacts of economic activities, and into superfluous sustainability plans, voluntary standards, and certifications. This strategy serves Big Oil companies to deflect all claims to their responsibility over the climate crisis by arguing they are necessary in the energy transition. TotalEnergies is probably the Big Oil company which is most ambitious in their portrayal as being “part of the solution” (Pouyanné 2016). Around half of their advertisements on Facebook portray a picture of a company committed to renewable energies (TotalEnergies nd[d]), in line with reports that 60 percent of the overall spending for advertisements highlight their climate action credentials (InfluenceMap 2022). The most notorious example of such strategy is the 2021 rebranding of the company from Total to TotalEnergies in which they claimed they were “becoming a multi-energy company” (De Monicault 2021) expanding into renewable electricity and low carbon fuels. However, as of 2021 renewable energy only constitutes 0.87 percent of total energy production for the company (TotalEnergies 2022c).⁴

So, the latest addition to the contentious valuation repertoire is an attempt at co-opting ecological valuation languages, stripping them of their original meaning, and filling them with neoliberal content. This strategy avoids direct valuation confrontation, but distorts the public ecological valuation by redefining the meaning of ecological values and thus neglecting the primary significance that was attributed to them by the environmental justice movement. This valuation struggle explains why TotalEnergies’ rebranding is currently

4 39.96 PJ/year of hydro, wind, solar and biogas versus 8,735 PJ/year of total energy production. Source: TotalEnergies Universal Registration Document 2021: p.48, 51, 53, 71. Conversion factors: Electricity and biogas: 1 TWh = 3.6 PJ, Liquids: 1kb/d = 2.19 PJ/y, Gas: 1 Mcf/d = 0.28 PJ/y.

under legal dispute by environmental justice groups, which accuse the company of “green washing” and “hiding reality” (Notre Affaire à Tous 2022).

4 Conclusions

This article has sought to expand the scholarly work on valuation by characterizing the discursive mechanisms by which extractive corporations neglect marginalized values. In doing so, this work contributes towards a political ecology that theorizes corporate behavior in alignment with the emerging subfield of business ecological economics.

Most of the knowledge contained in the proposed typology of mechanisms originates from the movements of resistance organizing against extractive projects. For these movements, the valuation of corporations is an important lever of oppression and opposing it is an indispensable part of their action. Affirmatively, movements of resistance find power and serve justice when they redefine what matters in the public sphere. And this is partially what our collective project around the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice attempts to do (Temper et al. 2018). From an environmental justice perspective, it is particularly important and timely to challenge these corporate mechanisms as they are becoming central in solidifying a plethora of “false solutions” to the environmental crisis by prioritizing market valuations that commodify human-nature relations.

Future work will have to consider which institutional channels do corporations use to access and influence public valuation systems. Finally, further analysis should also focus on the different strategies and tactics used by movements of resistance to reclaim public valuation systems. Such work can help provide a common repertoire to inspire and support environmental justice campaigns taking effective action to combat the valuation-forming discourses of extractive corporations.

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