

Water: frontier markets and cosmopolitan activism

Bronwen Morgan

Bronwen Morgan argues that the nature of water as a basic human need gives it a special significance in struggles over privatisation. This creates opportunities for interesting new forms of international solidarity.

Water is for many people an intuitive 'last bastion' against privatisation. The notion of profiting from the distribution of something so vital raises political hackles and upbraids moral sensitivities. Thus activists describe new technological devices such as restriction valves as weapons of mass destruction (these are inserted into the systems of those whose water bills are unpaid, making it take twenty minutes to fill a glass of water). Yet we also know that this sense of outrage changes over time. The degree of private sector involvement in water services also waxes and wanes: in both the UK and the US the private sector was extensively involved in the nineteenth century, then public sector provision dominated for most of the twentieth century, with the UK turning back to privatisation again in recent years. However, while private sector involvement in water supply is currently relatively accepted in the UK, it remains an issue of

intense controversy in the international context.

At one level, arguments about the acceptability of private sector involvement in the provision of water services are simply another example in the well-trod debate about the appropriate threshold between market and state. However a new dimension is added to this debate in a globalised world, for a politics of north-south distributional justice now overlays traditional issues of efficiency and distribution as they might arise in a national context. Given that market relations between North and South are already conducted on a very unequal basis, bringing water into this system draw attention to the inequities in a particularly compelling way. Such a politics is explicitly acknowledged by many international institutions: the provision of clean water and sanitation to the billions of individuals who currently lack them has become a major focus of international co-ordinating efforts.

Britain and France host the three largest water companies in the world - Thames, Suez and Vivendi (as they are most popularly known). In their drive to expand, these companies now provide water services to more than 300 million individuals in over 200 different countries. While this still leaves some 85 per cent of the world's population unaffected by their operations, the proportion is nonetheless significant. And all three companies are part of an emerging trajectory that might be termed 'global water welfarism'.

Global water welfarism envisages a regime where public aid supplements the private investment of multinational corporations to solve the social and environmental problems of global water provision. The hope is that corporate social responsibility, alongside the probing eye of government and civil society monitors, will be able to produce the necessary services. In this vision, the mass provision of social services across state boundaries is an opportunity to extend global capitalism while simultaneously softening its harsher effects. Any notion of the benign nature of corporate welfarism is, of course, a bitterly contested one. But it has an added bite in the global context. For the separation between regulation and operation that has come to dominate conventional wisdom about state-market relations in a national context in western neoliberal economies is now being applied to the very different context of multinational companies operating in third world countries, and this has had a major impact on the ability of governments to regulate.

Even in national contexts in the west, the regulatory role assigned to the

state has often come to mean supporting a market framework rather than modulating it or softening its harsher effects. For example in the UK in the mid-1990s the regulator Ofwat refused to alter the policy of prepaid meters imposed on poor consumers by the water companies. In that case, a lawsuit and a related political battle ultimately resulted, with the help of a change of government, in legislative prohibition of disconnection. But in a situation where a foreign company is supplying services, such battles are more difficult. Furthermore, when a multinational company is operating in a third world country, the power imbalance is exacerbated. Attempting to address these issues at a global level is also difficult, because lines of accountability become more complex.

When a national company is taken to task within a national political arena, there is a sense of existing within a bounded community, with a clear sense of the scope of those to whom obligations of social justice are owed. That the impact of UK private company actions on poor UK consumers is an appropriate issue for resolution by a UK regulator or the UK parliament is not controversial. By contrast, citizens in countries where water supply is in the hands of a foreign owner have much less leverage over its operations, while nationals of the company's country of origin may identify less with their needs. One reason why the institutional resolution of such issues is difficult to achieve on an international level is that it becomes more difficult to articulate the bounded communities to whom obligations are owed and from whom entitlements can be claimed in this context. As a result, the market-state relationship in the international context tends to be premised on 'partnerships' where the public regulatory role is limited to the provision of market-strengthening support, and where it is difficult and controversial to expand that role, even where the political will exists.

The result of all this has been that over time multiple legislative reforms in many countries have combined to create a web of institutional support for an increasingly integrated global market in water provision. A small number of large companies are able to invest in multiple locations using roughly the same template, but there is little in the template for addressing issues of social justice. Furthermore, the public regulatory support system for this market framework often results in a substantial proportion of any benefits from investment flowing *out* of the state providing the regulatory support rather than

to its own constituents (and in some cases, e.g. where concession contracts are pegged to the dollar, practically all of the benefit). It is often argued that the side-benefits of such ventures for the local citizens (upgraded infrastructure, expanded access, improved water quality) are compensation for profit repatriation beyond borders, but much of the political conflict over private sector participation revolves around arguments about whether such side-benefits actually accrue.

Thus there are currently political struggles going on in many parts of the world over questions of water provision and its institutional arrangements. Such struggles may be based in rich or poor countries, or may involve co-operation across borders. In the rest of this article I will discuss some of the questions that such struggles raise. I particularly want to focus on bringing to the surface some of the questions of identity and membership that tacitly underpin such assessments.

The involvement of transnational companies is changing the way water provision is perceived, by both consumers and producers. Shared identities, linking producers and consumers across national boundaries, have emerged. New ways of imaginatively constituting communities of interest, and new forms of solidarity, have arisen - not only in relation to networks of transnational producers but also amongst the many consumers on the receiving end of their services, a core portion of whom are activists protesting the emerging shape of transnational provision of water services.

Such struggles are often conducted along traditional lines, in terms of securing fairer economic distribution of a particular good. However, when the good in question is water supply, it highlights a range of issues about the imaginative limitations of strictly economically-focused struggles (though such struggles are of course important). Social protest against privatisation needs to establish a *social imaginary* for cosmopolitan citizenship and transnational solidarity that goes beyond a utilitarian concern with the supply of a particular human need, to forge links and establish practices that build social relations based on common experience. The aim should be to generate a narrative that, while embedded in concrete practices, tries to make sense of them in ways that go beyond immediate goals, so that dispersed actors can join together on grounds other than a promise of access to the fruits of increased economic growth. Presently this only happens at a rhetorical and symbolic level. The

potential for shared cosmopolitan identities emerging from practices of social protest against private sector participation is thus limited. Yet the potential is still real, and it has much to contribute to future possible trajectories of state-market relations, perhaps not only in relation to water. There is an opportunity here to lay the ground for developing an institutional imagination, one that infuses technocratic management with an expressive dimension that enables a meaningful and practical dialogue between protestors, workers, consumers and producers. In the case of water supply, because water is such a basic human need - and indeed water is seen as having sacred properties in most cultures - the possibilities for affective alliances are that much greater. Before looking at ways of developing these potentialities, we must first understand some of the tensions that limit this cosmopolitan promise.

A crucial tension

The social protest generated around private sector participation in water services simmers in a particular kind of crucible, one shaped by an important tension between the symbolic resonance of water and the techno-bureaucratic rationality of its delivery in the context of modern urban infrastructure. In the sprawling mega-cities of the future, this is the context in which private sector participation is most salient. Especially - but not only - in the mega-cities of the newly industrialising parts of the world, the urban margins are continuously swelled by influxes of rural peoples, whose relationship to water has historically been the cashless nexus of a subsistence existence, where water is integrated into livelihoods rather than bundled up as a commercial service. Thus it is here that the tension is most highly strung. In such contexts, images of water as a communal natural resource held in common, as a human right and fundamental need, even as a sacred fluid and physical mystery, are brutally confronted with the legal and regulatory frameworks that ensure the sustainability and efficiency of massive capital investments into the physical infrastructure that makes access to water the effortless turn of a tap.

A particularly vivid illustration of this can be drawn from an ill-fated concession contract signed in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1999 with International Water, a multinational consortium including both the USA's Bechtel and the UK's United Utilities. The conflict arising from this has become a leitmotif in the narratives unfolding around this issue. (Here I am concerned only to

highlight the tension I have been outlining, rather than to tell the full story.) Under the concession, collecting rainwater, a practice carried out for centuries by indigenous people in the semi-rural areas at the margins of Cochabamba, became subject to a (paid) permit system, with exclusive authority granted to International Water to operate the concession in a pre-determined geographical area. What seems intuitively an absurdity can be better comprehended when it is understood that it results from the operation of two competing frameworks that shape what counts as common sense. The notion that rainwater is a freely available natural resource, even a gift from God, makes sense when the relationship between the recipient and the natural resource is unmediated and direct. But once water becomes a service, provided by a third party and mediated by larger technical infrastructure, which is in fact essential to the universality of provision in a particular spatial area, then at least from the perspective of the service provider, requiring a permit for rainwater collection may seem a normal part of an exclusivity clause in the regulatory framework. From the service provider point of view, such clauses are seen as a legitimate part of long-term infrastructure concessions in order to ensure the predictability of the cost flows on which tender prices are based.

Now there are of course potential points of intersection between these two views of what is 'common sense' about water provision. For example, the ability of the villagers to pay for the rainwater permits can and should be integrated into the cost structure of the concession contract. More of these intersections in due course: what is important for now is the implication of this tension. It is this: water is *rhetorically and symbolically* powerful as a frontier issue, a threshold to defend against ever-encroaching commodification and the spread of economic rationality. This makes possible a powerful politics of challenge, one which is manifesting itself through webs of protest that make common claim to defending water as a human right and a public trust, at a level of urgency that justifies civil disobedience. But transforming that politics of challenge into implementation faces significant hurdles. In particular, the modalities built by the webs of social protest seem to be relatively ineffective in building alternative models of managing water.

To see this, consider what happened in Cochabamba after the 'water war' that ejected the multinational water operator and led to the government's rescinding of the concession contract. The city's municipal council took back

responsibility for the provision of water services and created a 'social model' of management, with as many as six members of civil society on the board elected directly from the community. But in the process of implementing the changes, there have been many setbacks. Internal disagreements in the original civil society coalition opposing International Water led to the number of elected members being halved; voting turnout in two of the three remaining zones has been exceptionally low; and attempts to co-ordinate international technical assistance for a 'public sector social approach' have fallen through. Many of the most energised activists have since turned their attention to the conflicts over gas now salient in Bolivia. While the issues underlying both gas and water are importantly related, the links between them do not facilitate day-to-day problem-solving in particular sectors. And thus the problem of access to water languishes.

Human right or commodity?

One way of putting this challenge is to complicate the slogan that animates so much of the social protest around private sector participation in water services: 'water is a human right and not a commodity'. The clarity of this dichotomy is muddied (albeit not erased) when the practical implications of the notion of a human right to water are fleshed out. Socio-economic rights, which would include a right for every individual to access 'sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water', as the UN Committee on Economic and Social Human Rights words it, by their nature make direct claims of entitlement on finite resources. In practice the resource allocation dilemmas that result are necessarily implemented by regulatory norms that protect consumer (public) interests by establishing minimum standards of provision. These kinds of human rights, then, have an inevitable regulatory aspect, and strategies to implement them will centre on the articulation of substantive regulatory standards, benchmarking and monitoring. Nor is a human right to water necessarily incompatible with private provision. Even imposed as a mandatory obligation on national state governments, it can be given technical and practical flesh via the entrepreneurial initiative of well-resourced private actors such as multinational water companies in combination with a regulatory framework controlled by public actors. In short, the rhetoric of a human right to water once implemented and fleshed out in practice has a tendency to dissolve into a series of strategies eerily resembling consumer rights - an important

dimension of a market state but hardly a frontier against its expansion.

I do not wish to overstate the degree to which consumer rights and human rights in this domain can be conflated. The urgency of the rights claim is not necessarily stifled by the web of a complex regulatory framework. Distributive justice and universal access, to take two core dimensions of socio-economic rights, can be and are fleshed out through rules on cross-subsidies, or through detailed codes of procedure governing disconnection practices by companies - neither of which is a typical core part of consumer rights agendas. Moreover, the challenge of what a human right to water might mean on the ground is being taken up by NGOs. Two recent NGO publications have elaborated the practical, legislative and regulatory dimensions of a human right to water in new and useful ways.¹ The debate they are generating may well help to modify the regulatory expectations and hopes of commercial providers in ways that begin to build a bridge between the aspirations of struggle generated by protest and the routine of instantiating those aspirations.

That said, important limits remain. For the *texture* and *tone* of discussion on water provision may be unhelpful for the underpinning of a social imaginary capable of fostering cosmopolitan identities that offer alternatives to global economism. For example, though the compatibility of human rights-mandated cross-subsidies with the disciplines of the General Agreement on Trade in Services may well be the welfare state redistributive policy issue of the global economy, it is hardly the stuff of cosmopolitan citizenship. In other words, while the increasing interpenetration of regulatory issues, human rights and consumer entitlements may *instrumentally* appear more and more a part of a single coherent (fairly technocratic) conversation, such a trajectory sits uneasily with that deeper, more elusive level that I have referred to as the symbolic and rhetorical power of water as an ultimate frontier of privatisation. That power is far more than 'mere' rhetoric: it gives the call for a human right to water a clarion quality because of its *identity-conferring dimensions*. It suggests that, at least potentially, struggles around water may help diffusely related, territorially dispersed citizen-consumers, who share little but the need

1. World Conservation Union, *Water as a Human Right?*, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No 51, 2004; Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE), *Legal Resources for the Right to Water: National and International Standards*, January 2004. See also the right to water section on WaterAid's website: www.wateraid.co.uk.

for water, to construct a series of practices that might build identity across borders. If such practices are possible, something akin to class consciousness could emerge, adding an expressive dimension and praxis of action to the rhetorical appeal of water's frontier nature.

Unruly consumers

The question of whether the rhetorical promise of water can be substantiated is thus a question of whether some of the more unruly practices of social protest against the commodification of water could generate solidarities of an identity-conferring type. Are such practices capable of generating stories that link communities in ways other than through the promise of economic growth through intensified market competition? Can they forge links between otherwise disparate individuals? Are they practices that can build social relations based on common experience, and functionally integrate activities of mutual support? There are examples where this does indeed happen. In both South Africa and New Zealand, activist groups have mobilised to engage in deliberate strategies of mass non-payment, followed by mutual support in assisting those who are disconnected as a result to illegally reconnect to the network. In New Zealand consumer activists have sought ways to disrupt business-as-usual routine both locally (sending cheques written on bricks to a local company whose corporatisation they oppose, having ascertained that this counts as legal tender) and internationally (hosing the Bolivian embassy down with a fire-engine owned by one of the activist groups to express solidarity with Bolivian activists in Cochabamba). Bolivian and Canadian water activists have met face-to-face to share strategies and tactics: in one instance the North Americans conveyed to the Bolivians news of a prior similar struggle over water privatisation in Tucuman, Argentina, that was said to inspire the Bolivian activists to persist with the mass blockades they had imposed on their town. All of these practices, particularly those that throw their participants into conflict with the law, have some potential to foster a collective sense of shared purpose, and to link the narrower issues of water to larger structural issues of the appropriate limits of capitalism. Activists speak with passion about the energy and sense of purpose that they acquire from these experiences and links, and the possibilities for building coalitions across different areas of essential services, so that health, education, transport,

electricity and so on can all become linked sites of alternative communities.

There are also important limits, though, to this apparent community-building, and it is water that shows them up most vividly. The kinds of coalitions I have just described are at their most powerful when they are saying a clear and unnuanced 'no'. The issue which most unites the multiplicity of groups engaged in these protest circles is opposition to the General Agreement on Trade in Services, which imposes a generalised framework of market-strengthening rules across borders. But in some fields there are also positive alternatives being put forward - in health, and in education, even in information technology, there are possibilities of alternative provisioning that provide outlets for co-operative creativity of a more routinised, yet positively life-changing kind. Guerilla schools can be established, alternative health networks built, wireless networks expanded. Yet for water activists there is often only the unappealing choice between going back to the well or venturing into large-scale infrastructural construction. With water, more sharply than with any other shared good or service, we are face to face with a fiercely asymmetrical set of producer-consumer relations in a globalised world. In such a context, it is imperative to face up to the divide between the turbulent struggle of articulating a social imaginary that goes beyond utilitarianism and the routine of its instantiation. Struggle easily acquires a greater lure than routine, and the transition from one to the other in the context of the current debates over water is complicated by the intervention of scale and the bureaucratic rationality of modern industrial solutions to the problem of access to water. Scale really matters - teamwork with one's colleagues and neighbours to provide water from springs and wells can have positive identity-conferring potential that simply dissolves when large-scale pipe networks and treatment systems are built and must be managed with all their attendant risks and complexities. That 'social' models of participatory management lose their appeal when 'scaling up' is not necessarily an indication of flagging commitment to the building of collective identity. It may be simply that the time freed by the luxury of an onsite tap sparkles with an array of alternative uses that pose stiff competition to the prospect, say, of representing consumers on the Customer Committee of UK regulator Ofwat.

It is in this sense that there is a limited truth to the comments often made by water company executives that local citizens in different countries do not care who manages their water, but rather only care that something clean, safe and affordable comes out of the tap. For where routine is at issue rather than struggle or turbulence, the capacity to enact what Rogers Smith calls new 'stories of peoplehood' will be crucially dependent on local context. Robert Putnam's oft-cited argument about the social capital of Northern Italy depends on a four-century trajectory of repeated routine practices. Closer to the water sector, the equally oft-cited example of the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting process, a remarkable example of routine technocratic practices infused with a sense of deliberative community, cannot easily if at all be replicated. Porto Alegre's resilience and energy are embedded in culturally and historically specific trajectories of Brazilian labour union history, regional characteristics and the emergence of the Workers' Party. The same could be said of the southern zone of Cochabamba, where the multiplication of water user committees at grass-roots level is both enhancing local identities and at the same time building bridges between the remunicipalised water company and local communities. That this co-exists with the more dispiriting facets of the Cochabamba story earlier mentioned is itself proof of the contingency of building lasting shared identities from struggle.

In short, it is difficult to find ways to *routinise* the building of transnational communities of shared identities, at least in ways that could transcend incompletely specified ideals or temporarily overlapping interests. Only existing embedded communities tend to sustain and enliven routine to a point where they build shared identity. In the absence of such communities, or of any history of their involvement in water management, the bureaucratisation of the details of water service delivery render the 'stuff' delivered from taps into the H²O that Ivan Illich distinguishes so carefully from the 'water of dreams'. H²O is homogenous, substitutable, industrial and calibrated according to cost. The nature of its provision alienates those who drink it from the daily routine practices of that delivery and provision, and enacts the very separation that causes nothing but the end-product to matter. Those routine practices are so familiar to us in the industrialised world that it may seem churlish to question their worth: after all, who would choose to go back to collecting water from the river? (as Conservative MP Dr Arthur Shadwell once suggested to nineteenth-

century activists demanding an entitlement to water in London²). Yet the *cumulative* effect of separating consumption from production, regulation from operation, collective choices from individual goals, can be corrosive. What Illich's maddeningly vague phrase the 'water of dreams' captures is the largely unconscious or imperfectly articulated need for a sense of collective identity to underpin and stabilise the dispersed and disaggregated activities that combine to produce a hoped-for common good. If this dimension of assumed identity is inaccessible, a residual undertow is created, a falling away of taken-for-granted stability. It is this that energises the patterns of conflict we see around water privatisation. That energy must, if there is to be a way forward, be harnessed in ways that bridge the tension between struggle and routine.

Forward to where?

The way forward must be one that respects the deep challenge posed by social movement opposition to bureaucratisation of the lifeworld. This will necessitate going beyond received 'solutions' which rely too heavily on institutional reproduction from radically different contexts. The depoliticised split between regulation and operation that characterises institutional solutions offered in the national contexts of industrialised states is an example of just such an unreflective solution. We need rather to infuse technocratic citizenship with an affective dimension. This requires that we recognise the routine challenges of implementing ideals (hence there is a necessarily technocratic element), but that we embed those routines in practices which confer identity, establish a social imaginary, and make new citizens out of us, in unexpected ways. There are two routes forward here, the first institutional and the second expressive. Both demand repeat work - work that builds the glue that holds networks together, and that makes people relate to faraway situations and understand themselves relationally in newly connected ways.

I want only to gesture here to the kinds of institutional imagination and expressive creativity that can do this kind of work. What would it mean to give institutional form to the idea of transnational solidarity? One partnership initiative coming out of the UN Sustainable Development Conference in

2. Vanessa Taylor and Frank Trentmann, *Liquid Politics: Water Politics in Victorian England and the Formation of the Consumer*, p44.

Johannesburg 2002 has proposed that every citizen in the industrialised world should pay an extra cent per cubic metre on their water bill, with the funds collected as a result being channelled to a third world country's water and sanitation needs. The mechanics of this would be challenging but not impossible. After all, Australian city consumers are in the process of adding 5 per cent to their water bills to compensate the country's farmers for cutting back their irrigation usage in order to provide an ecological reserve for the country's river systems. This kind of creative amalgam of mutually painful and admirably transparent compromises across whole sectors of society could be 'scaled up': it would provoke contentious conversations about lines of accountability and who should benefit, but such conversations would be constitutive of just the kinds of identities I am gesturing towards.

Another idea is that local governments in the industrialised world should bottle some of the clean, safe tap water their citizens enjoy and sell it at something more than cost as a 'social venture', in order to fund public-public partnerships with a paired municipality in a developing country. The process of building relationships to establish such partnerships would require people to acquire a knowledge and understanding of each other's contexts and conditions, which could underpin a far more sustainable link than the fleeting high generated by the colour and clash of anti-globalisation politics. 'Fair trade' water might catalyse 'socially responsible development' North-South partnerships; and these in turn could facilitate cross-certification of sustainable local water systems, according to benchmarks already developed in rural Chile, thereby inverting the 'learning' so often assumed to flow from North to South.

These ideas could be thought of the 'technical assistance' dimension of alternative social imaginaries. Just as the bureaucracy of privatisation arguably plays a crucial role in building the hegemonic version of globalisation,³ so a more subaltern sense of integrated identity and shared understandings could develop around routine collaborations of the kind I am indicating - not a straightforward opposition identity, but one premised on challenging overlaps, trajectories that are 'modern but different'. And here the analogy with the

3. David Hall, 'Investing in the bureaucracy of privatisation - a critique of the EU water initiative papers', unpublished PSIRU working paper (available at request from PSIRU: Public Services International Research Unit, University of Greenwich, www.psiru.org).

bureaucracy of privatisation has a second productive echo. Marketing and communication strategies are of growing importance for hegemonic globalisation. The stories and images generated around the perceived benefits of this trajectory of development may be unconvincing for many, but they speak sense to just as many more. What is important is the cultivation of a *positive* narrative or expressive dimension to the arguments for equal access - one that is not a platitudinous 'humanitarian' spin on technocratic solutions and does not rely on a rigid split between efficiency and solidarity.

The European constitutional process illustrates how difficult this can be. The Nice Charter of Rights makes some effort to bring colour to the grey thicket of its all too numerous pages, but like the claim that water is a human right, it is vulnerable to that core tension between struggle and routine. And bridging that tension can have strange effects. Another initiative emerging from the sustainability conference in Johannesburg was a Draft Declaration on the Right to Access Essential Services, a document intended for submission to the UN. This strange document blends together visions of market efficiency, ecological purity, democratic process and social justice to produce an address to the 'user-consumers of the planet'. This seems a limited vision of cosmopolitan citizenship. An effort is needed to bring the carnivalesque dimension of protest, the expressive creativity of documentaries like *Thirst*, to the work of building alternatives. That of course is one of the aims of the annual World and European Social Forums, as also of the provocatively long Universal Forum of Cultures that took place this year over five months in Barcelona.

In the narrower context of water, the enormity - and perhaps undesirability - of alternative provisioning makes the integration of these expressive facets with routine institution-building and day-to-day governance very difficult. But as currently detached from the structures of power as the Social Forums and the Barcelona Conversation might be, they are at least spaces where conversations can take place about *the overall trade-offs* between the costs and benefits of developments in many policy sectors. And here, beyond sector-specific transnational politics, active deliberation and participation can transcend the devolved and disaggregated spaces that tend to be in operation at the routine level (certainly to consumers) in a global yet interconnected world. These are places in which to build a cosmopolitan citizenship that is more than simply technocratic.

Conclusion

The story of water is an exemplar of key forces shaping the struggle to put a 'human face' on globalisation. In twentieth-century West European societies, the welfare state represented a particular settlement between human needs and business, embedded in the nation-state, whereby some of the more inhuman aspects of capitalism were ameliorated. But a planet of user-consumers is one where 'community' is a market stripped even of the nation-building aspiration of forebears such as the Bismarckian welfare state. The assumption that global water 'welfarism', in its technocratic corporate capitalist form, is an appropriate route to social citizenship is challenged by the practices of social protest around the privatisation of water. Water is thus a potential frontier of what freedom and collective self-realisation might mean in the twenty-first century. While liberal democratic citizenship may well be impossible to reproduce on a global level, its aspirations remain vital as motivation and inspiration. They can spur us to dream, not of democratic world government, nor of elaborate global regulatory networks providing social benefits, but of new forms of local experiments that link together to become larger than the sum of their parts. The intertwining of institutional imagination and expressive creativity that I have been gesturing towards here could be thought of as a search for regulatory justice. The environmental justice movement, after all, has brought a new and important dimension to the often highly technocratic dialogues around environmental regulation. For the debates on privatisation in a global context, regulatory justice may be the building block of cosmopolitan identities that link communities in ways other than the promise of economic growth through intensified market competition. If so, fleshing out what it means is an important task, a vital step towards enabling the politics of protest to flower into new stories instead of morphing into stones.