
Environmental Imperialism: Theories of Governance and
Resistance

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ABSTRACT

The global environmental agenda, alongside the broad neoliberal agenda, may be viewed by developing states and societies as a neo-imperialist adventure to be resisted. This paper considers the theoretical parameters of resistance to global environmental governance and argues that the idea of 'eco-imperialism' reflects the uncertain location of politics, the ambivalent role of states, and challenges assumptions in the mainstream study of world politics. However, this is an unusual case of imperialism, in so far as it reflects diverse interests and actors which may not be pursuing the same objectives. It appears that eco-imperialism may be both hegemonic force and anti-capitalist movement. In order to explain this apparent contradiction, we must note some of the contradictions in capitalism and globalization, but also how the mix of underlying political orientations create strange bed-fellows of developing country activists and oil company executives. In doing so, some view of the universal dynamics of global environmental policy and the prospects for matching these to particular political contexts may be arrived at. While the exploitative and dominating aspects of environmental policy deserve to be challenged and studied closely, this may have less bearing on environmental governance *per se* than on the globalized world in which it occurs. In recognising the importance of the critique, the paper also notes the mutual constitution of governance and resistance, and concludes that the requirement of bottom-up support for any eco-imperialism implies 'participatory empire' at worst, and challenges should inform rather than create obstacles to necessary if not entirely satisfactory forms of global environmental governance.

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Introduction

What kind of imperialism is it that has the U.S. government and conservative business lobbies arguing against it? For example, the Chief Scientific Advisor to the British government is pursued by lobbyists arguing – unsuccessfully - against the science of global warming, while he gives lectures pointing out that the dangers of global warming exceed those of terrorism (*Guardian*, 27 Jan 2005) and the current U.S. administration is still in denial about global warming in the face of conclusive evidence (*Independent*, 19 Feb 2005). What kind of imperialism is it that finds both free-marketeers and indigenous activists opposing it? For example, Driessen's work finding the roots of eco-imperialism in corporate social responsibility was 'pick of the month' for the Conservative Bookstore, while activist Craven challenges eco-imperialism in the same breath as fascism and racism (Driessen, 2003; Craven, 1999).

It appears that environmental imperialism may be just such a strange beast: both hegemonic force and anti-capitalist movement. In order to explain this apparent contradiction, we must note some of the contradictions in capitalism and globalization, but also how the mix of underlying political orientations create strange bed-fellows of developing country activists and oil company executives. This will be done here by considering the nature of the imperial dynamic implied. In doing so some view of the universalizing dynamics of global environmental policy and the prospects for matching these to particular political contexts may be arrived at. These are not small issues if the aspiration to address global environmental problems through cooperative collective action is to be realised. The motivation here is to test rhetoric about imperialism by accepting that there is substance behind the rhetoric and 'taking empire seriously' in this regard (Dalby, 2004) while considering the extent to which governance and resistance are mutually constituted.

The consequent uncertainty about the location of politics will be explored through perspectives on security, justice and the role of states.

Concepts: Governance and Resistance

The terms governance and resistance are used here as a means of assessing imperialistic characteristics in environmental politics, and are taken to reflect the broad context of inquiry into international relations or world politics in the late-modern (perhaps post-modern) period. Governance is taken to describe something short of government in its state-centric sense, and indicates formal and informal structures and processes, all in aid of (potentially global) political order, with implications for pre-existing forms of

governance (and their alternatives); but it shares with the notion of state-centric government a form 'politics from above' (Maignashca, 2003: 5). In its global manifestation this may well amount to imperialism if 'global environmental governance [is] interpreted as a device for protecting existing power structures rather than changing them - a "globalisation from above" ' (Elliott, 1998: 118).

Resistance is taken to describe the views and activities of individual activists, social movements, civil society non-state actors (and perhaps small state actors), often in coalition, all in aid of transforming (or just surviving) in the existing political order. The implications for corresponding political agency and democracy (self-governance) thus represent a form of 'politics from below' (Maignashca, 2003: 5).

We might be speaking (and usually are) of global governance, but this rather begs the abiding question of whether the global reach is in reference to participation or to policy targets (i.e., bottom-up or top-down). Furthermore, a global reach would be something of a novelty in terms of empire, given the historical problems of imperial over-stretch and the typical origin of empire in metropolitan government policy, notwithstanding collusion or cooperation on parallel imperial policy (such as the great power agreement on division of colonial spoils in the late nineteenth century). Thus those engaged in resistance might be reflecting this historical pattern and understanding of empire in attributing the imperial initiative to one or a few large state powers (e.g. 'American empire'), even if this is disguised by the use of ostensibly more participatory processes and institutions to front the policy (was the Bretton Woods system, and what has followed, the result of a shared policy consensus?; are global environmental agreements and institutions any more consensual?). Naturally governance and resistance are mutually constitutive to some degree, but the interaction raises questions about the location of politics and the role of existing actors, structures and processes in such a location (i.e. physical place in terms of the territorial nation-state or bio-region, and virtual political space in terms of the discourse). Whether from above or below, it seems clear from the various eco-imperialism critiques and diverse points of resistance that the origin and direction of politics does not necessarily correspond to any particular content, even if a general form seems apparent, which of course has implications for determining the pattern of environmental politics.

Concepts: Environmental imperialism; environmental colonialism; eco-imperialism

Crosby uses the term Ecological Imperialism as the title of his book on the biological expansion of Europe to indicate the impact of exported socio-economic and political practices on landscape and ecology, as well as people (Crosby, 1986). This seems to limit the term to a kind of bioinvasion, though with emphasis on economic overtones. We could note other historical accounts of ecologically relevant practice (Ponting, 1991), or more philosophically oriented accounts of the history of humanity's relationship to nature (Oelschlaeger, 1991), and indeed political-historical accounts of the expansion of the interstate system (Bull & Watson, 1984). All of this points to historical patterns that we might hope to live to regret, but now that we have already woken up and smelled the

fair-trade coffee, we may still not quite have grasped what it is about imperialism that would usefully inform our understanding of contemporary governance and resistance in the environmental context. Nor do we yet have a sense of what the charge is against ostensibly innocent attempts at international cooperation for environmental protection, as implied by the derogatory epithet 'environmental imperialism'. Of the various possibilities in circulation, the term eco-imperialism will be used here for convenience.

The critique of eco-imperialism seems to parallel that of neo-imperialism in general but uses examples from global environmental policy or anyway those related to the environment-development nexus to highlight the implications in terms of economic inequality and poverty:

'the poor need more development, more technology, more resource and energy consumption, more choice, and should not be prevented from any of the above by global environmental policy - need maximal growth and development; future generations and low-risk environment must be secondary' (Sustainable Development Network).

This is also be couched in terms emphasising regulatory structures and governance:

'Fundamentally, ecoimperialism undermines the capacity of people to escape poverty. Ecoimperialists impose a set of beliefs on people in poor countries, through environmental regulations, restrictions on trade, and through their fundamental belief that they should make decisions for everyone else. People in poor countries need more development, more technology, more resource consumption, and more energy consumption - and they should reject ecoimperialism, just as they rejected imperialism. People everywhere should be empowered to make choices for their own lives - and not be prevented from so doing by people and governments in wealthy countries' (Sustainable Development Network).

Eco-imperialism also presents itself in more directly political terms, most simply stated as the wealthy/powerful imposing their views on the poor/weak (e.g. Driessen, 2003). It may also arise in a legal/regulatory context, such as restricting the use of DDT for environmental reasons when that may be the only effective way of dealing with Malaria (Desowitz, 1991). The long-term view is easier to take for those not suffering in the short-term.

Some argue that this repeats earlier patterns of missionary zeal and colonial paternalism, note 'the oppressive qualities of environmental goals', and suggest that environmental colonialism may yet be thrown off in the same manner as colonialism was earlier – and indeed should be, given that local populations are displaced or impoverished by conservation goals that don't recognise local practices and problems (Nelson, 2002). Some of these perspectives raise genuinely troubling contradictions, while others are obviously reactionary views from neo-conservative sources, and in some respects both can arise in the same view. There are arguments in defence of indigenous traditional

practices which raise eco-imperialism in the same breath as fascism and racism (Craven, 1999), and arguments in defence of liberal-capitalism expressing concern with the 'legitimate aspirations and needs of people who have not yet shared the dreams and successes of even lower and middle income people in the developed world' and noting that the poor see environmental policy 'not as a mechanism to improve their lives, but as a virulent kind of neo-colonialism that many call eco-imperialism' (Driessen, 2003).

Questions: What is the imperial dynamic?

Any critique of environmental governance invoking imperialism would seem to be broadly economic in orientation, drawing on Lenin's account for example, and the many others in the Marxist historical-materialist tradition. This could readily be extended to a critique of globalization, at least in its economic dimensions (the political, strategic, sociological and cultural aspects perhaps being seen as derivative), as being a historical process of uncertain novelty. It would also offer a critique of neo-liberal notions of interdependence, pointing instead to structural dependency, or at the least to the one-sidedness of relations in a world of concentric socio-economic circles of declining position from the metropolitan centre to the rural periphery (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1982). However important these insights, they would seem to evade the significance of some other possible imperial dynamics, such as simple growth and expansion, security relations and military-strategic projection, the development of legal systems and concepts of justice, the dissemination of political convention and practice, or (perhaps most potent of all) the spread of ideas and ideologies. We might be tempted to dismiss arguments on the grounds of economic determinism, in a context where environmental concern represents post-material orientations - though the mixing of environment and development issues would make such a dismissal difficult.

Economic globalisation and increasing interdependence are commonplace characterizations of the modern world, and not inaccurate so much as sweeping, but still this characterization is not generally expressed or understood as empire-building. Nevertheless, a less sweeping look at a globalized world would observe that globalization is uneven and hierarchical, and perhaps displaying rather more dependence than interdependence or independence. The competitive aspects of international relations remain, and are bolstered by notions of relative gain in a zero-sum situation of scarcity. However, in the context of global environmental change absolute gains are more likely in the long term, even if associated economic costs imply relative gains in the short term. So in this respect the stakes are high for state actors considering political and economic integration. For those inclined to protect their borders and economies from the effects of globalization (and environmental change), sovereignty may come at a high price. What is more, globalization and sovereignty are the issues at the heart of global governance and 'the very idea of globalization is inherently dependent on that of sovereignty' (Clark, 1999: 78).

This certainly suggest a degree of momentum for global political design, but whether that amounts to imperium probably rests more on the degree of 'collateral damage' caused to

vulnerable parts of the world (and hence the breadth of support for the plan) than it does on the apparent necessity of responding to changing global circumstances through global policy. The dangers and uneven benefits of globalization naturally summon opposition, and the forms that this resistance takes are having as profound an effect on modern politics as globalization itself. The opposition no doubt hopes to cause plans for managing globalization to go back to the drawing board, or be scrapped altogether (Buckman, 2004). However, globalization itself isn't something devised or planned in the sense that it could be undone, and it is precisely the 'runaway' nature (deepening and widening) and aggressive consumption of the global capitalist economy that is the issue for both environmental governance and resistance to globalization. And yet, nor is the management of globalization beyond our grasp, or at least not the grasp of developed countries:

'Nations have control of territory, corporations do not; nations establish frameworks of law, corporations do not; nations control military power, corporations do not. As globalization advances, it actually becomes more difficult for the big companies to act irresponsibly, rather than the other way around' (Giddens, 2000: p. xxv).

Imperialism may be simply a question of the necessity for expansion, along the lines of North's 'lateral pressure' argument (North and Lagerstrom, 1971). Increasing population or economic growth and material consumption can drive people and activities to move across natural or political boundaries, and certainly with environmental causes and consequences, but this kind of imperialism is not the dynamic of environmental governance which on the contrary seeks to address just such issues.

If global governance itself is the issue, and the focus of resistance, this raises questions about political formations rather than only or primarily the economic system. Conquest and direct rule in the colonial sense would clearly be objectionable, but this is not the pattern of global environmental governance. Nevertheless, issues of sovereignty and possibly more novel ideas of conditional or pooled sovereignty, are raised by the advance of global governance even if a constitutional settlement on global government is as distant a prospect as it ever was. If we can contemplate global governance then we can contemplate the corresponding political community and civil society, but whether this is or should be a global, world, or international society remains tied up in the cosmopolitan-communitarian debates about identity and the locus of political and ethical life. There doesn't seem to be anything about environmental governance in particular that evades these issues, and so while the problems and promises they entail must be considered in the context of environmental policy, imperialist inclinations seem less obvious in the environmental context than elsewhere on the political map. Hence governance and resistance in respect of global environmental politics is an issue, but possibly appears less pressing than it is elsewhere. The danger remains that various unpalatable aspects of modern political life may find expression through environmental policy whether intended or not: in particular, the scientific and technical basis of much environmental policy may provide a screen for domination by technological elites through apparently 'neutral' or 'apolitical' managerial approaches to governance, such that efforts to regulate environmental change might lead to an authoritarian technocracy (Beck, 1995).

There must be any number of ways to map out eco-imperialism in terms of governance and resistance, but here it will be presented in terms of security, justice, and the uncertain role of states, looking first at the imperial dynamic and returning later to the possible focus of resistance.

Security

Where environmental threats are perceived, the spectre of securitization is not far behind, and this too can display imperialistic tendencies. But the translation of environmental circumstance into security discourse leaves open a range of questions about what kind of security is sought (military or economic/political/social security) for whom or what security is being sought, and who seeks it. Certainly there is a primal concern with physical survival evoked in the idea of environmental security, but the immediacy and urgency of concern so expressed can lead to rash acts, including imperial impulses. The potential for an imperial impulse on environmental grounds arises, as always, within the imperial heartland which sows the seeds of its own illness before venturing abroad in search of the cure: 'the gain in techno-economic progress is being increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks' (Beck, 1992: 13). On the other hand, some environmental threats are broadly shared and non-excludable in the sense that for Beck's 'risk society', the addition of globalizing trends could lead to a world risk society. If 'poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic' (Beck, 1992: 36) works out at the global level, then there may be greater incentive for environmental governance that does not serve the security purposes of empire, even if the management of technical risk could lead to a loss of democratic political control to technocratic elites who are likely to be economic elites as well. Similarly, we may observe an element of de-territorialization in environmental governance where environmental policy is about aggregate effects (e.g., climate change), such that the 'division of the world has ceased to be one of territory and become a division of numbers' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 388), and perhaps even beyond the reach of government decisions.

To illustrate the common condition of humanity in security terms that also echo our ecological location, one can do no better than citing Richard Ashley:

'... Different though they may be, their joining in the security problematique binds them equifinally to a common fate.

To raise such a spectre is perhaps to complete the 'ultimate dialectic' implicit in the lateral pressure argument and carried forward in the modern security problematique. Human beings, ensnared in technical-rational conceits, deny their dependence upon nature as they grow and struggle to technologically subordinate the environment beyond themselves. When finally the limits to their growth are reached, they have only to subjugate one another. In the violence that follows, all that humans have produced in false denial of their environmental dependence is destroyed. In the interdependence of mutual self-destruction, humans realize their oneness and return to a nature that they never really left' (Ashley, 1980: 287)

This flags up the environmental context of security, and the sources of insecurity in our own political designs, where nationally defined differences create security dilemmas. It also alerts us to critical theory's lessons about the hidden effects of life in a modern technological age constrained by particular forms of post-enlightenment rationality. We can see the dangers courted in unlimited economic growth, nuclear holocaust, alienation from nature – but in the end is it 'human nature' or non-human nature that threatens our security?

Aside from some conceptual difficulties in the hybrid of 'environmental security', and associated problems of interest-based *vs* value-based perspectives, there is also an illustrative tension between two different intellectual/political strategies for the deployment of this concept: the association between environmental degradation and conflict (hence insecurity; e.g. Homer-Dixon, 1991), and denial of this association (e.g. Deudney, 1990) since it opens the door to traditional security actors and institutions rather than reflecting the holistic perspective that environmental concern both invokes and promises. The first approach can hitch the environment to existing (and powerful) political actors, structures and processes (e.g. making the most of Post-Cold War opportunities); the second can potentially open up new political spaces for new political actors, structures and processes (equally making the most of historical opportunities). This perhaps reflects the tension between governance and resistance as orientations (or contestations), even where there is quite a lot of common ground in respect of the importance and priority of environmental protection.

If we figure into this concern with security - and all that this term invokes but does specify it terms of who or what is being secured - the idea of empire, then we are engaging not just one but two historical discourses, neither of which may be helpful in addressing environmental problems unless they are carefully and purposefully reconstituted.

We may well accept Lenin's account of imperialism and recognise neo-imperialist forces at work in the modern world, and may still be interested in the strategic interplay of imperial aspirations, but there must remain a question as to how much of these historical interpretations will we wish to carry forward. For example, would reference to either Mackinder's geopolitical notion of a 'heartland' (Mackinder, 1904), or Conolly's 'Great Game' among 19th century European powers (Hopkirk, 2002), for all that they flag up the existence of centres and peripheries, best suit the purposes of understanding modern environmental governance and resistance? Even where natural resources are at issue, which they surely are, in the modern context this is perhaps more to do with secure access via the market rather than ownership and control *per se*, given the costs of empire - which rather points us away from empire as a viable resolution (and hence the intention) even if ownership and control remain the issue for governance and resistance, and the problems intrinsic to markets and sovereignty remain unresolved. Concern with empire may also distract us from the other end of the scale, where access to resources is an issue for individuals and households, and where 'food security' might also be better served by

secure entitlements via equitable markets rather than food aid dropped at the whim of distant government.

Justice

What is the nature of mainstream assumptions being challenged here? What is the prevailing consensus, or dominant social paradigm? Are we operating under a hegemonic ideology, for example neo-liberalism, or more specifically the free market economic liberalism of the 'Washington Consensus'? Is the assumed consensus about the 'limits to growth' and the need for 'distributive justice' (positive freedom), or is it technological optimism and procedural justice (negative freedom)?

This may be the ideological orientation of resistance, in which the emphasis in explaining the absence of distributive environmental justice rests on the invisibility of harm (ecological footprints), the ability of existing wealth and power to buy its way out of harm, and the identification of the problem as 'sustainability' rather than maldistribution.

But there are difficulties, or counter-currents in the orientation of resistance since, for example, a rather traditional 'individual rights' based claim (say from a development or feminist perspective) might be made as an act of resistance to precisely that totalising or universalising ethical discourse used by global civil society actors to resist governance. 'Growing links between international governmental organisations and NGOs/GROs in developing countries pose a moral dilemma as the promotion of effective development may conflict with respect for sovereignty', given that aid agencies may fund civil society organisations directly or use them as intermediaries in order to bypass inefficient or corrupt governments (Kilby, 2000).

Alternatively, the contested ground could remain within the bounds of a broad liberal (Western) consensus and the points of resistance limited to making more effective the liberal promise of market distribution and challenging hypocrisy in that respect.

The tension between these two possibilities is perhaps reflected in the interpretation(s) of 'equity' (e.g. intergenerational equity in respect of sustainable development) as relating to either 'fair shares' of environmental resources which might yet be met by technological alternatives, or to peremptory norms such as 'common heritage' or 'right to environment' or 'duty to conserve' which serve as reference points for redistribution. An example from the most pointed case (climate change - since it goes to core economic issues) would be the notion of 'common but differentiated responsibility' included in the UNFCCC, which could be seen as redistributive but also can be seen as capacity-based and not addressing historical responsibility. Equally, such concepts as 'the common heritage of mankind' remain largely abstract (*pace* the case of seabed minerals), and malleable, and contrary to existing norms of ownership, and thus as open to interpretation and contestation as the ideas of justice and sustainability that they might elucidate.

What sense can be made of the idea of 'environmental justice', where the environment is not a moral/political agent, and justice is an essentially anthropocentric concept? The same question might well be asked of 'environmental imperialism', where the meaning may simply be subsumed by notions of neo-imperialism.

The legal and moral frameworks of empire are typically of metropolitan origin and not sensitive to cultural specificity in the periphery, but contention in this respect raises fundamental issues of justice which are reflected in the environmental context as well. There is a considerable literature on the environmental aspects of justice (e.g Bryant, 1995; Petrikin, 1995; Low and Gleeson, 1998; etc) and a great deal of activity going on under this heading (e.g. the Environmental Justice Foundation is engaged in 'training tomorrow's activists, empowering people to protect their own environment'). The focus may be either on distributional issues (Schnaibert, A., 1986), implying economic rights, or human rights, implying political rights in respect of minorities and racism (Austin and Schill, 1991). So the while issues of justice are pertinent and important in respect of imperial dynamics of environmental policy, these issues remain open. Whether the nature of justice here is essentially substantive, in the sense of distributive justice (fair or equal shares) or natural justice (in the sense of equity), or is procedural justice (in the context of a legal system), such distinction point us to rather different views concerning the imperial characteristic of environmental policy.

The political dimension is highlighted when considering the location of justice within the national (communitarian) or international (cosmopolitan) domain. It must be difficult to formulate environmental justice outside one or the other of these domains in the absence of a global constitution, and even so such broad domains do not provide effective guarantees for the rights of minorities. It is even more awkward to factor the environment itself, it not being a moral or legal agent, into the essentially anthropocentric construct of law and justice (which point can also be made, of course, of economic and social systems), where those speaking for the non-human environment must be speaking for and of themselves – with the possible exception of the Lorax (Dr. Seuss, 1971). Even 'natural justice' is about humans, not nature. In this political context, the sheer distance between the sources of justice and its object clearly suggests a potential empire.

Resistance to an environmental empire of this sort seeks consensus around distributive justice in the context of limits to growth, but confronts another large consensus about the importance of procedural justice in the context of technological optimism. The former consensus might be reflected in agreements on sustainable development, but this must be a watered-down version of distribution in order to achieve apparent consensus, since a radical redistribution has little chance of success where so much environmental harm is invisible and the costs of corrective action are tangible, and action must still originate in liberal politics (even if linked to hegemonic ideology, and however hypocritical it may be in terms of equity).

Still, it is here in the legal and moral arena that many first steps can be taken, not least because this arena may often be ignored in the focus on economics and power relations. It is also the arena in which fundamental ideas are expressed and ideological

commitments are articulated, such that any long-term change in environmental prospects may well originate in (and rest on) moral and legal commitments which are subsequently difficult to ignore or retract – such is the essence of regimes, for example. It remains that these ideas and ideologies may be part of an imperial dynamic, and morality (like truth) tends toward the universal rather than relativistic particulars, but they are perhaps more accessible to the least empowered than global economics and high politics.

The ambivalent role of states

It remains for us to ask how such imperial dynamics destabilise global politics (and sovereign state governance). To begin with, empire seems to be about imposing order, and displacing alternative orders in the process, and whether this is by intent or folly is perhaps unimportant – except in so far as evidence of motive would also point to a culprit. Clearly, if there is global environmental imperialism, then one or more alternative existing orders are being displaced by it. Perhaps the existing orders are ‘development’ (but this means different things to different peoples) and ‘sovereignty’ (but this has always been elusive), and there are those who would be happy to see the end of some versions of either or both of these.

If environmental governance is tethered to broader processes of globalisation (perhaps through ‘conditionality’) and its associated forms of global governance (e.g. institutions), which draw our attention away from state-centric concerns, then the question is, or remains, can economic globalisation be good for the environment? Even if it is, is it also good for people? This may still be an open question, even if the anti-globalisation movement is an obvious case of resistance, since the resistance is focused on exploitation and inequality rather than patterns of global cooperation *per se*.

‘... Globalisation itself broke the American deal of increasing the pie for all through free trade. As globalisation increases the amount of wealth, but systematically and dramatically leaves some without a share, coping with it implies reaching a domestic agreement and establishing an adequate redistribution of the free trade benefits.’ (Molyneux, 2001: 269)

It is worth noting that there may still room for reform in this (i.e. of global institutions), rather than radical reformulation being a strict requirement; and that appears to be at the heart of the ideological and practical debate. For example, there has already been something of a paradigm shift in the practice and study of development when ‘the civil society empowerment model became a popular alternative to the basic needs model’ (Stiles, 1998: 1), indicating an increasing awareness of the need for participatory development practices guided by and for those undergoing development, rather than by and for donors whose agenda intentionally or unintentionally skew or even undermine the development process (Stiles, 2000; Lipschutz with Mayer, 1996). With development so tightly linked to environment, experiences in one aspect of the environment-development nexus can be read across as having direct implications for the other.

In all of this, the role of the state may be only that of a staging-post in a politics of governance and resistance which flows top-down and bottom-up through (perhaps formally legitimized in passing) or past state mechanisms, raising as yet unsettled (and differentiated) issues of sovereignty and the locus of development and environment policy as it passes by.

Questions: what is the focus of resistance?

So what aspects of environmental imperialism are to be resisted, and what are the points of resistance? Is resistance to environmental imperialism in defence of existing orders, or is it to promote alternatives not yet realised? If the latter, then again, the charge of environmental imperialism perhaps needs redirection to capitalism, or hegemonic power – in this sense resistance to environmental policy *per se* may be aiming at the wrong target. If the former, then the charge is more directly against environmental policy, where the existing orders being defended are local ways of being that may serve both human and environmental goals better than blanket policies generated by governance at a distance. As with globalization, the resistance may be to exploitation and inequity buried within policy initiatives rather than to the broader phenomenon of environmental governance, and as with globalization the processes of governance and resistance may be mutually constituted (Held and McGrew, 2002). Even so, it isn't entirely clear that the various voices speaking against environmental governance are all resisting the same thing, and so if we are to make something of this resistance what will it be? What assumptions in environmental governance are to be challenged - distribution, or technological rationality?; anthropocentrism, or ecocentrism?

It isn't clear that we can characterise empire in the very general terms of, as Simon Dalby says of Hart and Negri's book, 'incorporation of many institutions and peoples into an amorphous but powerful arrangement they simply term "Empire"', even if consideration of the material issues of resource flows and consequent inequality brings in the familiar economic characteristics of imperialism (and neo-imperialism), nor can we easily elide anthropogenic environmental changes and their recent acceleration with imperialism *per se* (Dalby, 2004: 2-3). That is, it isn't clear that an eco-imperialist perspective is any less linear a mode of thought than territorial perspectives (if on different lines), given that issues of complexity arise in both (Dalby, 2004: 4). If in practice empire is more complex, then it may also be more difficult to ascribe the intentionality and political design that the charge of imperialism requires, spatial metaphors of ecological 'footprints' aside. If 'empire' offers an appropriately broad perspective, it also brings with it some conceptual and historical baggage that may outweigh the anticipated benefits of a broad sweep.

Dalby is right to call attention to an 'imperial pattern of land appropriation, settlement and displacement related directly to ecological change', which is both historical and contemporary (Dalby, 2004: 6). Such activity often carries with it a specific political objective. However, when this is linked to consumption patterns and commodity chains, the imperial intention and design is more difficult to pick out even if the economic forces

at work are potent. Over-consumption can certainly lead to imperialism as a grab for more resources, but it isn't so clear that the reverse causal direction supports a claim that empire causes and explains consumption (though in this vicious circle, imperial encouragement of over-production may well do).

That is, can we so easily say that capitalism and imperialism (e.g. the latter being the highest stage of the former) are the same thing as opposed to (either) one being a tool of the other? And if a post-territorial perspective on this is invoked, then capitalist elites will be without a territorial context for empire (and so harder to catch) and we would then want to deal simply with capitalism, rather than its handmaiden, empire. We could follow Wallerstein in arguing that a world in which political units are not coterminous with the division of labour is a capitalist world-economy, whereas one in which a political unit is coterminous with the division of labour is a world-empire – but are we anywhere near such a political unit? Perhaps eco-capitalism is the appropriate charge against global environmental governance, rather than eco-imperialism. Even so, assuming the hegemonic aspects of 'primitive accumulation' remains problematic in a world where social transformation is so varied (Shilliam, 2004).

Lipschutz argues that 'it is the relationships between ruler and ruled, and the mechanisms of rule, that are important in contemporary discussions of "empire"', and cites two models of empire: 'neo-liberal institutionalism' and 'new sovereignty' (Lipschutz, 2004). Here again, we may ask if global environmental policy represents a new form of imperial governance to be resisted, or a gradual transformation in the mechanisms of both authority and legitimacy in respect of state actors - that is, something that might be welcomed if not brought about by the increasingly important civil society actors. Stiles takes a pluralist view of the relationship between civil society actors and states and intergovernmental institutions, and argues that 'the interests and identities of major players tend not to change over time, only their strategies and tactics depending on the general distribution of power and resources'. He concludes that 'the overall policy outcome will depend on the concentration of relevant resources and influence of the players at particular moments' and that in the end 'the international economic and political context provide the parameters of the debate and help determine which resources will be most effective (Stiles, 1998).

This pretty much implies that we are where we are, and that's where we have to start from. In current circumstances a moderate state-centric perspective is hard to shake off. Hempel's three models of future environmental governance are a case in point: state environmental law with limited international obligations; transition to a (possibly federal) world government; states exercise sovereignty, but in the context of environmental regimes (Hempel, 1996). This offers two extremes followed by the apparent middle road that we're on now, but which is precisely that facing the charge of eco-imperialism. This charge seems increasingly difficult to evade both in present circumstances and within the scope of plausible future scenarios. We could take, as just one example, the difficult position of the Third World Network, 'among the foremost critics of the current system of global governance, particularly the trading system embodied in organisations such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank.' The Third World Network argues that the lack of

democracy in these bodies allows domination by powerful Western countries, which enforce an agenda suiting their own interest at the expense of developing countries. However, The Third World Network has also been accused of 'a failure to provide a sustained alternative manifesto for the replacement, rather than just the reform, of the institutions of global governance' (Brown, 2003).

Of course alternative thinking abounds, and no doubt informs action. Here's an example: 'The vision we propose might be called ecological network federalism'. This particular vision signals the importance of legitimacy, which is of course often lacking in empire.

'Embedded in the structures of centralisation that subsist on environmental and territorial consumption is the necessity to limit democratic participation and institutional accountability as both are inimical to these structures' current, and anticipated future, character. This contradiction underlies globalisation's crisis of legitimacy' (Ambus, Egan, Mahony, M'Gonigle, 2001: 12).

The nature of the illegitimacy (or political distance) is illustrated when they cite Perkins:

'where the political scale at which production decisions are made (for example, the nation state) does not correspond to the ecological scale at which impacts of production and waste disposal are felt...there is a disjuncture between the environmental impacts of economic activity and the society's ability to address them in a satisfactory democratic way' (Ambus et al, 2001: note 31).

We could substitute global environmental governance for Perkin's example of the nation-state, where the same logic would indicate a case of environmental imperialism on political grounds, without even entering into the socio-economic inequality that would amplify the democratic deficit. Clearly this has implications for global-local connections in environmental governance, even if the 'global-local' raises the issue of hierarchy in that relationship.

Hierarchy is an abiding problem, and one which may remain unresolved in as much as we can not easily do without effective authoritative allocations of value. There are, of course many proposals for evading hierarchy in the anarchist literature, and much of this specifically of an ecological orientation (Bookchin, 1982; Findhorn Foundation, 1996; Naess, 1989). However, all anarchist proposals face the problem of community boundaries, beyond which the anarchist principles may not extend, and outside of which is a world of more familiar political and economic and ecological processes on which anarchistic communities may be dependent. There is also a problem of scale, to the extent that the local context (where hierarchy can be more easily avoided) would always have to be escaped in order even to coordinate (if not dictate) global initiatives on issues that are not simply additive but genuinely global in their logic. We haven't yet worked out how to coordinate on a large scale without some element of hierarchy to give effect to collective choice and action.

Conclusions

All of this suggests some confusion in the traditional map of political, or even human, interests, and in doing so destabilises common points of reference for either ecological concern or politics - or more likely, both. As it happens, this is a disciplinary issue for the study of international relations - which may always have been a mixed bag in any case (lacking the clearer disciplinary foundations of, say, natural sciences). Some have concluded that the global environment is

'...a crucible for the debates, dialogues, and disputes by which people either re-create or transform the social institutions that give form to the future. Given the centrality of issues of power, wealth, legitimacy, and authority to questions of environmental change, we are hopeful that it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the former when discussing the latter' (Lipschutz and Conca, 1993: 342)

Eco-imperialism has been employed here as a device, making use of a well-established discourse in a novel context to throw up contradictions and problems, from which some insight might be gained: for example, the critique (and design) of imperialism and colonialism has always implicated both global and local elites, and so assumptions about both global and local political actors, structures and processes are challenged by such contradictions and problems - perhaps in the rubble of this deconstructive exercise may be found some opportunity for new political spaces, rather than simply the temptation to rebuild the old ones.

The fundamental issue raised by the idea of eco-imperialism is the relative importance of, and emphasis on, economic rights and relationships as opposed to political rights and relationships. This reflects a well known ideological and theoretical distinction between structuralist or historical materialist perspectives on the one hand and liberal or realist perspectives on the other. In terms of governance and resistance relating to the global environment, eco-imperialism is invoked as a critique of liberal-institutionalist designs or the states whose interests are seen to be reflected in them. The initial puzzle about strange alliances in this critique is answered by observing a shared concern about hegemony, respectively economic or political, between those seeking (typically collectivist) economic rights and those seeking (typically individualist) political rights - both may see global environmental governance as antithetical to their aspirations, if for rather different reasons, and both are likely to see some combination of commercial, state and institutional vested interests rather than human interests as motivating such governance adventures. In this sense, for some quite diverse opponents of global environmental governance, the idea of eco-imperialism expresses a view of political hierarchy or even a state-centric view - and this may be precisely their point; a shared fear of distant regulatory bodies. However, the alleged culprit may not match the description: global environmental governance with all its implied constraints on commerce is not quite the empire described by the contemporary critique of capitalism (which might address economic rights), and empires of colonial administration (a challenge to political rights) are already in the dustbin of history.

The world is rife with arrogance, ignorance, corruption, inequality, etc, and environmental policy and practice is not an exception, but all of these need to be tackled directly in concrete terms, while encapsulating all of these in terms of eco-imperialism suggests that they are intrinsic (even the intention of) to the political order promoted by environmental concern – and that doesn't seem quite right. Of course we might still agree that a range of fundamental questions for the social sciences 'can really only be answered in relation to each other, that is, from a world-systems perspective' (Wallerstein, 1997b).

Terms such as governance, globalization and democratization are every bit as open to rhetorical use and abuse as eco-imperialism is, but the rhetorical force of the former seems to hang on the hope for incremental change which enhances human interests and human security, where the force of the latter seems to hang on despair and radical hence unlikely change. Where global environmental governance offers potentially beneficial policy and planning (whatever the reality), resistance to it is bound to be cast in a negative register. Perhaps this just means that governance is easier to talk up, and resistance is by definition marginal to existing power structures – but in politics (and in environmental protection), this also might suggest a winning strategy.

On the one hand it would be in some respects quite handy to have eco-imperialism of a kind which offered hegemonic leadership but with an inversion of the usual economic flows – that is, at a cost to imperial powers without corresponding economic benefits. Even so, it would not be effective without cooperation from those in the developing world whom the empire purports to 'sponsor' in environmental protection, and for whom any form of empire would be viewed with deep suspicion. On the other hand, and given such suspicion, it is not surprising to find eco-imperialism raised as a charge against global environmental policy, even if this might be generalized from particular circumstances, and used rhetorically to draw an audience for grievances and as a rallying cry for resistance. For all that we may need to be alert to the pretensions and conceits of imperialist moves, and for all the hopes for reducing the effects and actuality of inequality that attend to both good governance and democratic resistance, these purposes may not be well served by deploying the idea of eco-imperialism: this totalizing structural perspective leaves too little room for agents in complex processes of structuration. Even the U.S. led Western hegemonic order arguably 'exhibits far more reciprocity and legitimacy than an order based solely on superordinate and subordinate relations. American hegemony has a distinctly liberal cast because it has been more consensual, cooperative and integrative than it has been coercive' (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999: 185). Anyway the prospects for successful empire in respect of environmental governance seem as dim as for any other putative empire in the 21st century - these are not imperial times. If any imperialistic characteristics are to be successfully supported, they will in any case have to be supported from the bottom up, such that eco-imperialism would be that strangest beast of all: a 'participatory empire'. Even this sort of empire could be questioned if 'participation' itself is merely an agenda driven from the top-down which reproduces existing power relations (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), but it increases the potential for legitimacy. As Ikenberry says of American empire, it reflects less an interest in ruling the world than an interest in a world of rules

(Ikenberry, 2004: 630). Of course this leaves the issue of whose rules, and who benefits from them, in the sense that we might observe procedural justice without satisfying claims to distributive justice. So we are left to wonder if grassroots resistance to environmental governance would be sufficiently satisfied by participatory negotiation of the rules, to provide legitimacy to 'imperial' authority in respect of the great global environmental challenges.

The governance aspects of environmental imperialism seems to be less egregious than the uneven economic aspects appending to globalization, such that the points and dynamics of resistance are focussed on the latter rather than the former - in the latter respects the charge of imperialism is both fair and revealing. As with the anti-globalization protest directed at the exploitative aspects of globalization rather than its potentially beneficial or benign aspects, the exploitative and dominating aspects of environmentalism deserve to be challenged and studied closely - but this may have less bearing on environmental governance *per se* than on the economically globalized world in which it evolves. The eco-imperialism critique has merit, but resistance should inform rather than undermine global environmental governance's necessary and still fragile collective initiatives, or risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

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