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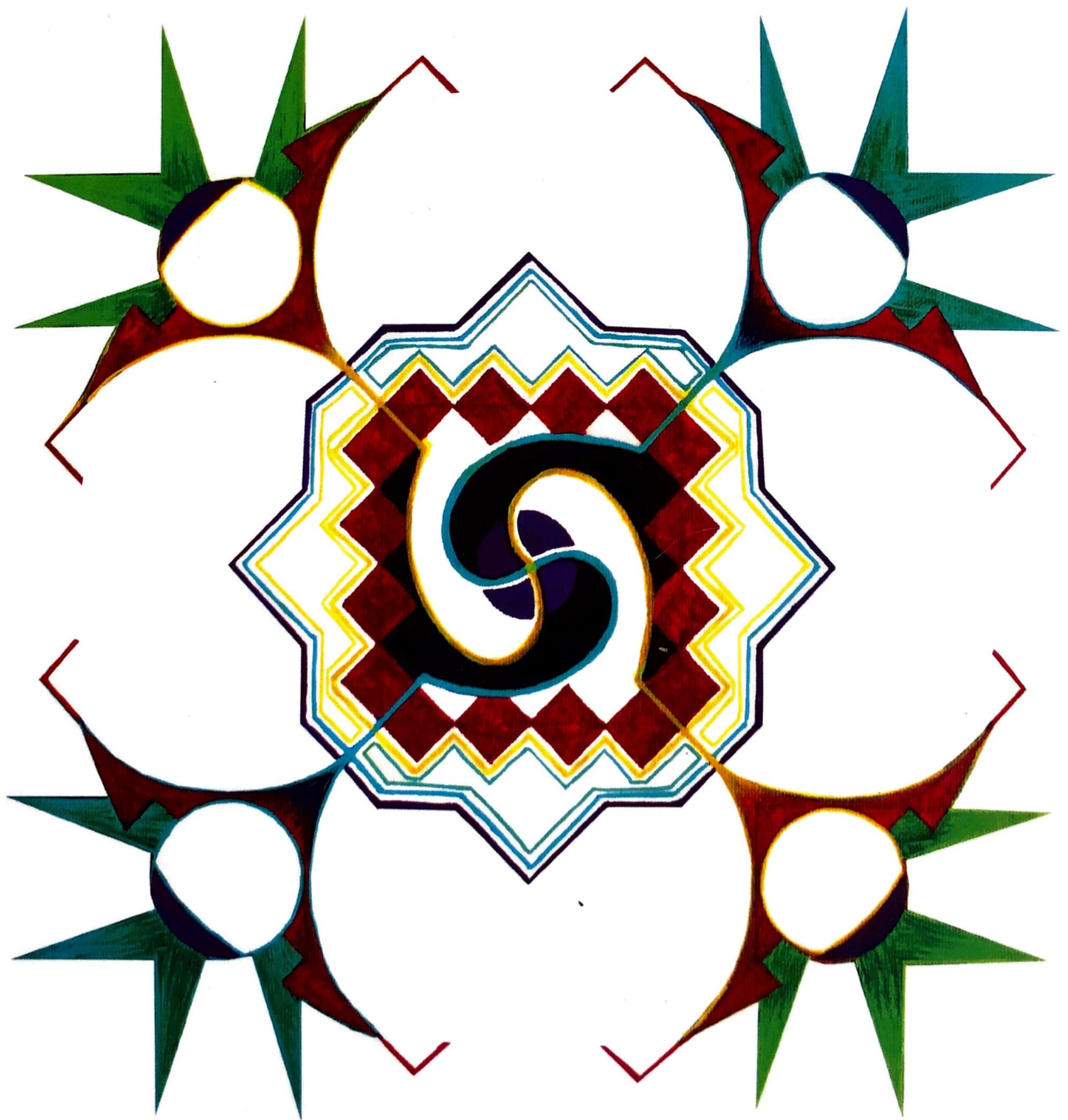


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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Worlds of Difference

EDITED BY ARLENE B. TICKNER AND KAREN SMITH



Worlding Beyond the West

ROUTLEDGE

16 Socio-environmentalism

Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue and Matías Franchini

Introduction

December 22, 2018 was the 30th anniversary of the murder of Chico Mendes, recognized around the world as one of the greatest defenders of the Brazilian Amazon forest. What is less known is that Mendes was also a rural workers' leader, and one of the key figures in the creation of the National Council of Rubber Tappers (CNS) in 1985. In his efforts to satisfy both environmental and social goals – thus reflecting the conviction that rural communities were people of the forest with rights to the land and the opportunity to improve their lot – Mendes proposed the idea of extractive reserves (Resex), whereby rubber tappers could live sustainably from the Amazon.

Around the same time, in another part of the Amazon, a group of scientists, scholars, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), bilateral cooperation agencies and the local population developed a project to protect an area of flooded forest extremely rich in biodiversity, while also improving life conditions. The result was the creation of the Mamirauá Institute (IDSIM) in 1999 and the first sustainable development reserve of the same name. Both Chico Mendes and Mamirauá can be seen as instances of socio-environmentalism, a largely Brazilian enterprise that might contribute to “greening” International Relations (IR) (see Box 16.1)

BOX 16.1 THE MAMIRAUÁ RESERVE

The creation of Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve (RDS) in 1991 stemmed from the work of a coalition drawing together the conservation movement (conservation biology) and local communities (Movimento de Preservação de Lagos) (Inoue and Lima 2007). The project aimed at integrating research, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Mamirauá was the first sustainable development reserve established in Brazil. It was considered innovative at the time of its creation not only because it recognized the rights of the local population that remained within and around it, but also due to their role as actors in the elaboration and implementation of its management plan.

Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve and Institute's existence is in part the result of a transnational network of primatologists and other Amazonian-oriented researchers that shared similar views about biodiversity conservation and the need to include local populations in the process. The network contributed to their emergence

by attracting financial support from its partner institutions and generating acceptance among conservationists worldwide. While the project underscored the difficulties of including human populations in protected areas and of balancing standard of living issues with environmental protection, it was also innovative in its attempts to overcome top-down and fenced-off approaches of biodiversity conservation.

Mamirauá illustrates the productive convergence of diverse values related to ecological sustainability, social justice and cultural diversity, and the importance of encouraging local participation in decision-making. Local ownership of conservation efforts makes sense not only on the grounds of fairness, but due to considerable knowledge that communities have of flora and fauna, and their sustainable management and use. Traditional and indigenous populations have been using natural resources in sustainable ways for centuries, and their knowledges and ways of being are said to be non-dichotomous with regards to the society/nature divide, allowing them to perceive other dimensions of reality beyond Western rationality (Narby 1999; Ramos 2013; see too, Chapter 17).

Exponential growth of human activities has caused an environmental crisis. Increasing pressures on ecosystems, soil and water, climate and the atmosphere have the potential to trigger sudden or irreparable environmental changes that can harm human and non-human lives on earth (Rockström et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015). As we enter the Anthropocene,¹ almost all environmental problems demand greater cooperation among societies to avoid free-riding and the tragedy of the commons (Hardin 1968). Moreover, the poor in emerging and poor countries are likely to be the most affected.

The magnitude of the socio-ecological crisis and the concrete changes needed at all levels (from the global to the local) to address it highlight the inadequacies of prevailing behaviors, policies and ultimately, IR theories. Globally, both individuals and social structures operate within short-term and egotistical considerations² that are largely encouraged by almost all development models and political regimes – from right to left, from democracy to autocracy – and the international system itself, whereas the construction of a safe operating space for humanity demands cooperative action (Earth System Governance 2018; Viola et al. 2013). Traditional IR responses to sustainability challenges have been problematic, as the environment has been considered a marginal area of thematic concern. Indeed, only recently has a body of green theory been developed within the field (Eckersley 2010).

Based upon the Brazilian experience in the Amazon, we argue that the concept of socio-environmentalism can nurture green IR thinking by highlighting two movements – or dialogues – that are neglected in conventional IR approaches. We call the first movement a vertical dialogue. It rearticulates different levels of analysis and scales, from the local to the global, and transcends dichotomies such as the public and the private. As we show empirically, there are cases in which developments at the global level of governance can be helpful for geographically located socio-political structures. In this sense, the global-local antithesis has to be abandoned as an a priori assumption. The Mamirauá story is a good example (see Box 16.1 and subsequent discussion). The second movement consists of horizontal dialogue. It suggests constructing dialogues and synergies between different epistemologies and worldviews. We need to move beyond cognitive and epistemological dichotomies, especially those of nature-society, global-local and even North-South, to understand socio-environmental problems and struggles that are taking place around the planet. To do so, we ultimately need to go beyond modernity.

Complexity, trans-disciplinarity and holistic knowledge paradigms seek to overcome borders that separate the sciences, philosophy, art and spiritual traditions (D'Ambrosio et al. 1993; Morin 1998; Leis 1999), and to integrate reason, sensation, emotion and intuition; that is, different ways in which we perceive, know and understand reality (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997; Leis 1999; Marcuse 1975). Moreover, local populations, especially indigenous and aboriginal peoples, practice knowledge(s) of and relations with "nature" that customarily transcend the dichotomy of rationalism and the anthropocentrism of modernity (Narby 1999; Ramos 2013; Santos 2006). This chapter aims not so much to establish local knowledges as a general framework for analyzing global problems but for these to help us bridge existing gaps between different knowledge systems.

The chapter begins with a brief problematization of the way in which conventional IR theory has dealt with the environment (or not). We focus on three relevant traditions, including realism, liberal institutionalism and global governance. We argue that in terms of vertical integration, all three approaches exhibit serious deficits, mostly related to their well-known state-centrism. However, literature on governance, rooted largely in the liberal institutional tradition, has been able to integrate different levels of analysis, becoming a strong conceptual framework to assess global environmental politics that transcend simplistic dichotomies such as global/local and North/South. Regarding horizontal integration, however, neither theory offers significant progress. Both realism and liberal institutionalism are almost ontologically incapable of assimilating non-modern worldviews due to their rationalist structure of agent incentives. The governance approach, which is more constructivist with regards to social processes, is epistemologically capable of incorporating other forms of knowledge, but as far as we know, it has not yet done so. The furthest this literature has gone is a multi-disciplinary approach – earth system governance – that continues to operate under a modernist umbrella.

Following our discussion of the theoretical literature, we explore socio-environmentalism as a potential contribution to "green" IR. We not only define this concept but show how it entails dialogues among different actors, as well as between distinct worldviews. Thus, we argue that socio-environmentalism contributes to greening the field of International Relations by bridging the vertical and horizontal gaps found in mainstream IR theories. We also illustrate the concept with a brief description of the process that led to the creation of the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve, located in the Brazilian state of Amazonas. We focus on the Amazon as a locus of global environmental politics as this region exemplifies some of the contradictions of modernity; namely, multiple governance experiments conducted in the Amazon since the 1980s underscore the need for epistemological changes in how we conceive of reality and how we conduct social life in such a way that we might overcome the society/nature dichotomy.

IR literature and the environment

The vertical gap

In spite of the impressive growth in international environmental treaties, activism and policies in the last decades, environmental politics is still marginal in International Relations scholarship, as environmental problems have never been a main concern in the

discipline (Eckersley 2010; Green and Hale 2017; Pereira 2017). Besides this disinterest, conventional IR theories do not consider properly the diversity of actors, levels of analysis and scales in global environmental affairs, leading to a vacuum that we call the “vertical gap.” Vertical dialogue is the capacity of a theoretical framework to apprehend international relations as a complex social field that integrates different actors with a wide definition of ideas, interests and incentive structures. Those agents are located on a double continuum: from local to global and from public to private. They are also involved in causal and constitutive relations among themselves, and between them and social structures. In this sense, individual citizens, nation-states, NGOs, epistemic communities and others, are capable of shaping the social outcome at the international level, depending of course, on their agency level (Biermann et al. 2009).

The absence of vertical dialogue has been especially intense in the realist tradition. Accordingly, many scholars (Haas 1992; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Keohane and Nye 2011) have highlighted the limitation of this theoretical perspective to consider actors other than the nation-state as relevant players in world politics. In this tradition, the basic dynamic of the international system is conflict between states arising from anarchy (see Chapters 5, 7 and 8). Consequently, even international regimes – which have been the main instrument of environmental international politics – are only epiphenomena of state behavior (Strange 1982).

The liberal tradition in IR has been more willing to accept environmental issues as a key part of the international agenda. Accordingly, from the 1970s onward a sub-field concerned with environmental cooperation emerged. Since then, the role of regimes within institutional liberalism has been the predominant analytical lens for studying international environmental issues. However, this tradition too contains important shortcomings in terms of vertical integration (Eckersley 2010; Okereke et al. 2009; Paterson 1996). For example, the concept of international regime has been related to interstate relations and to national responses to a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures agreed among states (Krasner 1983). Even though the definition put forward by Krasner makes it possible to consider other actors and their expectations, the way the regime concept has been used in the literature mainly concerns state decisions and actions (Porter et al. 2000). Thus, as among realist scholars, liberal institutionalists have focused primarily on state behavior to assess global environmental issues. In this tradition, the state is also a rational actor, guided by economic gains and engaging in cooperation as a more productive way to address international problems.

It is important to notice that, even though environmental concerns are marginal within mainstream IR, global environmental politics (GEP) has emerged as a sub-field, as evidenced by the growth of the Environment Studies Section in the International Studies Association (ISA) and the existence of publication venues such as *Global Environmental Politics*, *International Environment Agreements* and the recently launched *Earth System Governance*, as well as several student and professor handbooks (Betsill et al. 2014; Chasek et al. 2013; Dauvergne 2005; Elliott 2004; Stevis 2014).

The GEP research agenda covers myriad topics and perspectives, including global environmental change and governance (multilevel transnational, private); the national and the local within a global perspective (e.g., how global norms impinge/impact or diffuse to the local level (Acharya and Buzan 2009; Frank et al. 2000); global environmental change and security; and how global economic processes (production and consumption) relate to environmental change (Conca and Dabelko 2014; Park et al.

2008). There is also an emerging attempt to look at environmental politics comparatively (Franchini 2016; Steinberg and VanDeveer 2012). Moreover, awareness that we have entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, has also fostered innovative reflection on the new earth politics, as suggested by a recently edited book on this subject (Nicholson and Jinnah 2016).

Many scholars have looked at global environmental politics as a sub-field of IR with an eye to tracing its trajectory (Stevis 2014), theoretical underpinnings (Eckersley 2010; Paterson 2014) and themes and research agenda (Betsill et al. 2014; Chasek et al. 2013; Dauvergne 2005; Elliott 2004). From these works, we view a field that is apparently diverse in terms of research themes, theoretical perspectives and to a certain extent the researchers' geographical locations and institutional affiliations. As a byproduct of the field, GEP has grown and acquired a life of its own, perhaps more diverse and interdisciplinary than IR itself. The sub-field covers a variety of themes linked to state/political, economics/market, societal and ecological dynamics from the global to the local. Liberalism and liberal constructivism seem to dominate theoretically in such research (Stevis 2014). Environmental security, in turn, is viewed largely through a realist lens, while critical environmental studies are rooted in eco-socialism, critical and post-structural IR, and feminism, as well as an emerging green political theory (Eckersley 2010; Paterson 1996, 2014; Stevis 2014). Notwithstanding apparent diversity, a closer look reveals that liberalism and liberal constructivism continue to prevail as theoretical frames and governance/institutions as the broad themes (Inoue and Moreira 2016; Stevis 2014).

As an analytical framework, governance seems more suitable for assessing the role of non-state actors in the international system and, hence, more convergent with the idea of vertical dialogue. However, this tradition too suffers several limits. First, the very concept of global governance is somewhat vague (Finkelstein 1995), with which the research and analysis inspired in this concept can be quite heterogeneous. Second, part of the global governance literature overlaps with liberal regime analysis in terms of their focus on the state and formal international regimes, although other strands assess global environmental politics beyond state/society, global/local and North/South dichotomies (De Búrca et al. 2014; Okereke et al. 2009; Ostrom 2009; Rosenau 1995). In particular, the notion of an earth's system of governance is a valuable tool. Biermann et al. (2009: 4) define earth system governance as:

the interrelated and increasingly integrated system of formal and informal rules, rule-making systems, and actor-networks at all levels of human society (from local to global) that are set up to steer societies towards preventing, mitigating and adapting to global and local environmental change, and in particular, earth system transformation, within the normative context of sustainable development.

This body of literature produces a more complex and layered picture of global environmental governance (Eckersley 2010) than conventional IR theories.

The horizontal gap

By conceiving knowledge exclusively in terms of positive science – grounded in a modernist view of the world and social processes – mainstream IR theories also lack

the capacity to incorporate other worldviews as well as other forms of knowledge. We call horizontal dialogue the capacity for a conceptual framework to assimilate different types of knowledge and world visions; that is, different kinds of ontologies and epistemologies. In environmental studies, the heritage of modernity reinforces a nature/society division that constitutes an epistemological obstacle to assimilating the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Leis (1999) argues that modernity is unsustainable, meaning that anthropocentrism, instrumental rationality, modern dualities, the organization of knowledge into disciplines and fields, and the consequent separation between nature and human societies are the roots that underlie the drivers of all the environmental problems we face. The domination of nature is seen to emerge from the ways in which the relation between societies and nature has been constructed. The quest for eco-development, sustainable development, green economy, low carbon economy and other blueprints has not taken us much further, and the predominant development paradigm has remained largely unchanged. Leis (1999) claims that the means to overcome the crisis would be to go beyond modernity – a universal model of rationality, science and knowledge – by incorporating pre- and post-modern ways of thinking and finding solutions, as shown in the next section. According to the author, modernity has transpired on a material plane, entailing broad scientific and technological transformations and expansion of the market. Consciousness about the ecological limits of economic growth does not depend on the free market, but on the actions of environmentalism. The author calls this project realist-utopian because it can only take place through the bridging and approximation of opposite phenomena, or the harmonization of spiritual and material experiences, and reconciliation of the transcendent and immanent plans.

In this vein, Leis (1999) argues that the society/nature, one of the main characteristics of Western culture in the modern era, has structured the ways in which societies have organized economies, political and social systems across the globe (see too Chapter 17). Socio-political life happens within nation-states with their territories organized around the idea of national and subnational boundaries that do not coincide with ecosystems or river basins. Democracies are arranged around voters and candidates that represent only present generations, whereas future generations and nature are not represented. Economics is structured in markets, profits, production and consumption, and the idea of exploitation of nature in the present, so that the pace of extracting resources and disposing of solid, liquid and gas residuals is much faster than nature's recovery capacity. Future generations do not vote or consume. There are human rights, but no rights of nature, although this has begun to change, as suggested by recent decisions in countries as diverse as Colombia, India and New Zealand that recognize the rights of rivers and other natural bodies.

In sum, the social sciences in general, and International Relations in particular, have been structured around anthropocentric cultures and epistemologies that fail to consider complex interactions and inter-relations between nature and society. Moreover, predominant Western modern views of (positivist) science tend to ignore other forms of knowledge that fail to conform to its standards. Horizontal dialogues could bring other worldviews and knowledges to the debate, with an eye to transcending anthropocentrism and the dualisms of modernity, particularly the nature/society divide. For example, in the context of India, the Tagore affords a distinct approach to human relations with nature (Behera 2009). Behera argues that modern Western belief systems premised on the

separation between human beings (subject) and nature (object) are the basis for an instrumental relationship of domination. Ling (2013) too highlights other traditions that reveal ways of looking at the world beyond dichotomies. She draws on Advaita monism and Daoist dialectics to portray world politics as constantly connected and inter-related (see too, Chapter 17). Through lenses such as these, it is impossible to see North/South, environment/development or nature/society as opposite poles.

Filling the gaps

Green politics, IR and socio-environmentalism

In his critique of mainstream IR's focus on environmental regimes, Paterson (1996) argues the need to develop what he calls "green politics," a tradition that rejects the idea that the states-system and other structures of world politics can provide an adequate response to the environmental crisis. Accordingly, the author identifies two sets of literature – "green political theory" and "global ecology" – that might nurture a green position on IR and global politics. While the first body of literature rejects the anthropocentric worldview and highlights the "limits to growth" argument, the second builds on green principles and provides an analysis of the environmental crisis rooted in development as its root cause and the need to protect and reclaim the "commons."

Since the 2000s, a growing body of like-minded green IR theory has appeared. Eckersley (2010) states that a green position has emerged that draws on more radical green discourses from outside the discipline of International Relations and has helped expose what she calls the ecological blindness of IR theory. According to the author, green IR theory emerged primarily out of a critique of mainstream rationalist approaches (neorealism and neoliberalism), and has simultaneously drawn upon, and critically revised and extended, neo-Marxist-inspired International Political Economy (IPE) and normative international relations theories of cosmopolitan orientation, bringing new discourses of ecological security, sustainable development (and reflexive modernization) and environmental justice.

Eckersley (2010) subdivides green IR theory into an IPE wing and a normative or "green cosmopolitan" wing. The first offers an alternative analysis of global ecological problems to regime theory, while the second articulates new norms of environmental justice and green democracy at all levels of governance. She locates green IR theory on the critical/constructivist side of the rationalism versus constructivism debate, arguing that:

green IR scholars seek to articulate the concerns of many voices traditionally at the margins of international relations, ranging from environmental non-government organizations, green consumers, ecological scientists, ecological economists, green political parties, indigenous peoples, and broadly, all those seeking to transform patterns of global trade, aid, and debt to promote more sustainable patterns of development in the North and South.

(Eckersley 2010: 265)

In the next section, we suggest that the concept of socio-environmentalism can be considered a continuation and extension of this tradition, given the struggles that are taking place at the local level on all continents of the globe, no matter if North or South.³ We

turn to the definition and discussion of this concept within the context of the Brazilian Amazon now.

Defining socio-environmentalism

In Brazil, socio-environmentalism emerged in the Amazon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The murder of Chico Mendes in Acre in 1988, as he struggled to keep land, the forest and the way of life of rubber tappers, is identified by Hochstetler and Keck (2007) as a key source of its emergence.⁴ Mendes' death generated widespread discussion about the links between the livelihood struggles of traditional forest peoples and the protection of the Amazon.

Socio-environmentalism encompasses three main ideas (Santilli 2005). First, a new development paradigm is needed that promotes the sustainability of ecological processes, attention to species, ecosystems and all processes involved in sustaining life on earth (for example, the hydrologic, geologic and climatic cycles). Second, the social and economic needs of the present generation must be attended while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (just social-economic sustainability). Accordingly, ideas of justice and fairness, such as reduction of poverty and social inequality, are intrinsic to socio-environmentalism. Third, cultural diversity should be promoted and valued, as well as the consolidation of the democratic process, understood as broad social participation in managing the environment. Although this concept evolved in the Brazilian Amazon, it can be applied to the struggles for land, rivers, mountains, ways of living and knowing that do not separate society from nature.

Santilli (2005) considers socio-environmentalism a Brazilian "invention," even though movements that link social and environmental struggles, including access to land (justice) and protection of forests (or other natural resources) have taken place throughout the world. Indeed, Jacobs (2002: 59) asserts that grassroots organizations in many places have pursued an ecologically as well as socially just society. However, within the context of Brazil, *socioambientalismo* has acted as a political ploy to bring together social and environmental movements, organizations and local populations (traditional and indigenous peoples). According to Jacobs (2002: 64–65), the specific framing of this concept between the late 1980s and early 1990s created shared awareness of the importance of both environmental preservation and social struggles. As the socio-environmental movement grew, activists, jurists and social scientists attempted to expand its meaning to encompass not only sustainability, both ecological and social, both also justice, cultural diversity and participation. In addition to offering a broad framework within which to mobilize diverse constituencies, socio-environmentalism was also a reaction to the predominant view that environmental concerns were something foreign to Brazil. During the 1970s, for example, reactions to environmentalism were negative, as the military regime tended to dismiss environmental critiques as an international attempt to prevent Brazilian development or to threaten the country's sovereignty in the Amazon region, a reaction conceptualized as "Amazon paranoia" by Viola and Franchini (2018). This vision has experienced a comeback under the right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro.

Mamirauá and other experiences throughout the Brazilian Amazon are expressions of socio-environmentalism. For instance, the rubber tappers in Acre, who took the

lead in establishing a link between their struggle and ecological concerns, also spearheaded the creation of a coalition to protect the Amazonian rainforest named “Forest Peoples Alliance,” and that brought together both rubber tappers and indigenous groups. We will return to this alliance soon. The Altamira Gathering, a five-day event in 1989 led by the Kayapo people against the projected Xingu Dam, similarly illustrates the struggle for territory combined with explicit environmental concerns (Da Cunha and Almeida 2002).

Clearly, similar developments throughout the world that link local populations to nature conservation illustrate how traditional and indigenous peoples often turn from culprits (of environmental degradations) to victims (of land dispossession and inequality), and from victims to active protagonists of environmental politics (Bodmer et al. 1997; Burch et al. 2019; Jeanrenaud 2002). In the specific case of Brazil, until the 1980s the poor were largely seen as a source of pressure over natural resources. As the impacts of development projects were increasingly more visible, Da Cunha and Almeida (2002: 81) assert that it became partially accepted that the disadvantaged were not always the culprits of environmental disaster, but rather victims of tragedies associated with ill-conceived development plans that disrupted lifestyles as well as water and forest environments. In the late 1980s, increasingly, traditional and indigenous peoples became more directly linked to environmental issues. The authors argue that such groups began to appear in public discourse on world environmental problems as legitimate stakeholders, and actors endowed with significant knowledge of the natural environment, with which they were converted into agents and authors of environmental protection measures (Da Cunha and Almeida 2002).

Filling the vertical gap

As mentioned previously, conventional IR theories are hard-pressed to address environmental issues, mainly due to the sharp separation they establish between domestic and international politics, and state and non-state actors. Socio-environmentalism offers a more complex and layered picture, linking the global and the local by crossing state jurisdictional boundaries. In this sense, it dialogues with the idea of transnational governance that is part of the earth system governance agenda. Empirically too, socio-environmentalism operates as a transnational movement that has led to non-state forms of deterritorialized governance by non-state and state actors.

The notion of earth system governance converges with socio-environmentalism in three other ways. First, it considers both natural and social factors in environmental studies. Similar to what Leis (1999) argues, the idea of earth system governance is “as much about environmental parameters as about social practices and processes” (Biermann et al. 2009: 22). Second, as a research program, earth system governance transcends IR’s traditional focus on the state and regimes, since the problem is wider than “the regulation of global commons through global agreements and conventions” (23). Finally, as a research network, it integrates a variety of disciplinary knowledges: “the analysis of earth system governance thus covers the full range of social science disciplines across the scales, from anthropology to international law” (23).

Socio-environmentalism also offers a more nuanced lens through which to discuss global environmental norms (Hochstetler and Keck 2007), as it attempts to bridge the social and environmental dimensions of political struggles that gained force with Brazil’s democratization in the 1990s, and is grounded in local contexts and dynamics. In this

sense, socio-environmentalism does not simply reflect a norm diffusion process from the global to the local (Frank et al. 2000), as we will now see.

Socio-environmentalism: principles and norms in context

Theories of international norms diffusion account for the spread of environmental protection measures over a comparatively short period of time (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Hochstetler and Keck 2007). However, they ignore key dimensions of environmental politics by failing to consider the local context (Hochstetler and Keck 2007). The emergence of socio-environmentalism in Brazil reflects particular local developments, even though the global environmental movement of the 1980s and 1990s acted to reinforce this process (Hochstetler and Keck 2007; Pádua 2002; Santilli 2005). Not surprisingly, Hochstetler and Keck (2007) argue that more *nuanced* discussions of global struggle over norms are needed, given that the process of norm diffusion is much more complex than this body of literature assumes.

Even though global environmental norms have tended to diffuse from North to South, they have been significantly modified in the different contexts where they “landed.” In Brazil, social justice is a strong dimension of social movement activity, including environmental activism. Hence, as already argued, socio-environmentalism displays the underlying assumption that one cannot separate ecological from social sustainability. In the Amazon, most of the struggles over land and natural resources involve protection of nature and a fight for justice and well-being of local populations. For instance, rubber tappers in Acre needed the conservation of the forest to keep their livelihoods while at the same time, they wanted access to land in opposition to farmers who were land grabbing and deforesting to establish cattle ranching or large-scale agriculture. Thus, a transnational coalition emerged between them and Northern environmentalists in which social and ecological sustainability were intrinsic to shared struggle.

Socio-environmentalism and transnational networks in the Amazon: global–local governance

In addition to redefining norms, socio-environmentalism has also established new forms of governance. Socio-environmental movements and the resulting transnational networks they have helped build, have resulted in deterritorialized governance arrangements involving governmental and non-governmental actors, and cross-scale interactions from the global to local levels, across national jurisdictions. In the Brazilian Amazon, as mentioned previously, interactions between indigenous and traditional groups⁵ resulted in the creation of the Alliance of Forest Peoples in 1989 (see Box 16.2). The Alliance sought to support collaborations between indigenous people and rubber gatherers in conflict with land grabbers and timber dealers in Acre, and also to enable coordination between their organizations at a national level to claim rights and protections. The Alliance fought for the traditional populations’ livelihood – both physical and cultural – which largely depended on conservation of the forest but was threatened by deforestation and depletion of natural resources (Santilli 2005). The drivers of this predatory mode of nature exploitation were the construction of big highways, forest slash-and-burn for cattle raising and farming, and the migration of thousands of settlers and farmers to the Amazon region.

BOX 16.2 PEOPLES OF THE FORESTS

In Brazil, many indigenous peoples and traditional populations (local populations that base their way of life on the extraction of natural resources such as rubber, chestnut, balata tree, vegetable oils, hunting and/or non-predatory fishing and subsistence agriculture) have become mobilized since the late 1980s. They call themselves “forest peoples” because they need forests and rivers to survive, and they claim to know how to protect and use these sustainably. According to Ailton Krenak, an indigenous leader, indigenous peoples are the original inhabitants of the forests, be it the great forest, such as the Amazon, or other forests, because their ancestral culture is based on what nature offers them. However, other Brazilian populations that have built their economy and culture on natural extractivism and the exploitation of forest resources, have learned from indigenous practices. In the specific case of rubber tappers, such learning led to an alliance in defense of the forest (Cohn 2015).

The Alliance of Forest Peoples was first established between indigenous peoples’ organizations and the Rubber Tapper’s National Council in the 1980s to defend the right to their lands and the protection of the forests on which they depend for their livelihoods. It was conceptualized by Chico Mendes and created under his leadership, along with Krenak and other figures. The Alliance was active during the 1990s and met again in September 2007 for the II National Meeting of the Peoples of the Forests, 21 years after the first meeting and in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the death of Chico Mendes.

More recently, in 2019, the campaign #PovosDaFloresta was launched by the Instituto Socioambiental in partnership with indigenous peoples, extractivists, *quilombolas* (descendants of slaves) and riverine populations. The campaign seeks to support the struggle for the protection of the environment and the rights of indigenous and traditional populations. The #PovosDaFloresta is led by 25 leaders representing nine indigenous groups from the Amazon, *quilombolas* from the Vale do Ribeira in the state of São Paulo, and women from Terra do Meio in the state of Pará. The campaign upholds the diversity that characterizes the people who live and protect the forests, and also seeks to remind all Brazilians (if not the world) that the forests regulate the climate, produce rain and harbor biodiversity, which is a potential source of new medicines and cures for many diseases.

The Alliance also built coalitions with transnational networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The majority of ecological partnerships started in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lima 1999), consolidating around new theoretical concepts like conservation biology. Inoue (2007) cites evidence of an epistemic community centered on conservation biology, a global biodiversity regime and local practices in Brazil. Two social movements subsequently converged, including a grassroots movement to defend natural resources essential to Amazonian livelihoods, and environmental NGOs (Lima 1999). In several cases, these socio-environmental movements have succeeded in putting political pressure on governments to legalize their proposals.

Socio-environmental organizations have promoted many programs, projects and initiatives in the Amazon, rooted in global principles such as biodiversity conservation and

sustainable use, but conceived across both global and local values, including the protection of biological diversity while promoting sustainable development (WWF-Brazil and ISER 2001). In this sense, such efforts can be considered the result of international, transnational and transgovernmental collaboration among different actors, ranging from international and national NGOs, bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies and governmental organs, to researchers and scientists, grassroots organizations and local populations. In sum, the emergence of socio-environmentalism as a discourse and practice has been intrinsically related to processes of redefining norms and concepts as well as to the emergence of new forms of governance. These bring together state and non-state actors across national jurisdictions from the global to the local.

Filling the horizontal gap

As mentioned earlier, mainstream IR environmental studies have also fallen short of incorporating other worldviews and knowledge systems, what we referred to previously as the horizontal dialogue. Socio-environmentalism brings together principles related to ecological, socio-economic sustainability, social justice and cultural diversity, and adheres to participatory approaches to decision-making. In doing so, the socio-environmental debates have brought to light issues related to worldviews, cultures and other forms of knowledge, thus moving beyond cognitive and epistemological dichotomies in IR, especially those of nature/society, global/local and even North/South. In this sense, socio-environmentalism can be considered a more robust lens to view struggles around the globe, in which the defense of land, rivers, living and non-living beings and ways of life, and social and environmental demands, are largely intertwined and inseparable.

Socio-environmentalism and socio-biodiversity: beyond modernity?

Historically, socio-environmentalism is part of a broader context of environmental thinking (Pádua 2002). Its critique of social exclusion and environmental degradation is neither European nor colonial and has largely developed out of questions regarding modernity. As a concept, socio-environmentalism can bridge the society/nature dichotomy and bring other forms of knowledge into the debate, given the participation of indigenous and traditional peoples. Its origins in the convergence between social movements in the Amazon and international environmental NGOs also bridges the divide between North and South.

During Brazil's democratic transition, social movements began to demand more participation in development projects, while global conservationists also started to change their methods. The shift in global conservationism was based on an instrumental approach to human populations, which were still seen as resources to achieve globally identified conservation objectives (Jeanrenaud, cited in Inoue and Lima 2007). In consequence, alternative perspectives started to emerge in the 1990s. While not ignoring Western science, these alternatives proposed that science should not try to produce a single, definitive set of objective laws about the environment, nor how to define environmental problems and solutions. Two key results of this dialogue have been the deconstruction (or deglobalization) of existing ideas about nature, environmental problems and their solutions, and the expansion of the number of participants in decision-making, thereby making room for a wider range of values and interests, including the promotion of human rights. The strengthening of participatory approaches has led to the development of local definitions for environmental problems and solutions, and the promotion of

traditional knowledges and resource management for local needs (Inoue and Lima 2007). One example of such a local definition is socio-biodiversity, which expresses the idea that biodiversity emerges from the interaction between society and nature.⁶ In this sense, socio-environmentalism has linked social-cultural diversity to biodiversity.

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity speaks of indigenous populations and local communities but treats each monolithically, ignoring the enormous social diversity encompassed by each category. In contrast, the term “local communities” in Brazil refers to rubber tappers, extractivists, riverine peoples, seaside peoples, *andiro-beiras* (andiroba collectors), fishers, coconut collectors (Babaçu coconut) and so on (Kaingang 2006). Indigenous populations in Brazil comprise a universe of 230 peoples with their own cultures, languages, social organizations and legal systems, as recognized by the Brazilian Federal Constitution. This represents an infinite socio-diversity that, in Kaingang’s (2006) perspective, should not be conflated into a single concept. Socio-diversity accounts for mega-biodiversity (Kaingang 2006), which is well captured by the aforementioned concept of socio-biodiversity.

When addressing indigenous and traditional knowledge systems, socio-environmentalism also seeks to value them on their own terms. As a movement, it has asserted the importance of diverse knowledges and ways of being, and the participation of indigenous and traditional peoples in decision-making to shape environmental policies. Kaingang (2006) underscores the potential obstacles to such dialogues, given that indigenous knowledge is rooted primarily in oral traditions, is changing and dynamic, and cannot be divided or “categorized.” However, for Santos (2006), a common understanding between “traditional” and “modern” knowledge is possible because both kinds of knowledge maintain some type of conversation with nature, however distinct, in search for solutions to shared problems. So, the question is why only one kind of knowledge, rooted in Western modern rationality, has value? The problem lies in the incapacity to recognize the worth of other ways of knowing that may not be recognized as “scientific,” but that nevertheless offer interesting insights into discussion of science and technology. Thus, bringing local traditional populations and indigenous peoples into the debate means recognizing that “science” may well be rooted in a variety of different knowledge systems and worldviews.

Socio-environmentalism and modernity: a step beyond

Recognizing the legitimacy of diverse worldviews and knowledge systems may also offer a means to overcome the growing distance between the magnitude of the environmental crisis in the Anthropocene and the concrete changes needed across the global to local levels. For instance, as suggested above, shamans and scientists both dialogue with nature, albeit in different ways (Santos 2006). However, in order to make effective use of distinct kinds of knowledge, we must first recognize and transcend the power imbalances that exist in the relation between modern Western science and other knowledge systems. Doing so entails moving beyond modernity and its dichotomies (see Chapter 17).

Given the centrality of cultural diversity and the participation of indigenous and traditional peoples in environmental politics in Brazil, socio-environmentalism can also contribute to bridging the society/nature dichotomy and to bringing other forms of knowledge into the debate. We identify two dimensions in which socio-environmentalism encompasses other knowledge systems and other worldviews. One is more pragmatic and recognizes that local/traditional populations and indigenous peoples hold practical knowledge and construct local institutions that are ecologically more sustainable. The other

dimension values traditional and indigenous knowledge and other worldviews per se. These are non-modern views about nature, social life, the future and so on that are simply different and should be valued as such.

In sum, socio-environmentalism represents a critique of the limits of modernity through its attempt to go beyond dichotomies (nature/society, North/South, global/local), to change the way in which development is viewed and to promote diversity in worldviews and knowledge systems. In this sense, it can contribute to the view that local peoples' struggles around the planet are more than demands for rights over land or natural "resources" but are also struggles for ways of knowing and living, in which nature and society are not separate but deeply intertwined. In IR, it may well be that socio-environmentalism could more precisely be seen as a plea to "move outside of the standpoints allowed by academic practice and institutions as a prerequisite for building knowledge more meaningful and more relevant to make the world a better place" (Tickner and Blaney 2013: 15).

Conclusion

The idea of the Anthropocene alludes to a planet in which there is no "nature" in the sense of a pristine faraway place untouched by humans. As mentioned by Rudy and White (2013: 129), humans are now a geological force on the planet which has been transformed to such an extent that there is no nature that is in any way straightforwardly "natural." Accordingly, humanity has become the main driver for the equilibrium of the earth system, with which modernity's dichotomy between nature and society no longer makes any sense. Following Leis (1999), we argue that in order to truly incorporate the environmental challenge of the Anthropocene, the social sciences, including IR, need to change their modern premises and acknowledge that: the biosphere is the basis of social life and the human species is only one of many species that live interdependently there; social action frequently produces unexpected results on the environment; and as nature and its resources are finite, there are physical and biological limits for economic growth and human society expansion (Leis 1999: 92–93).

Socio-environmentalism is a lens that can help us to go beyond modernity by providing a framework for new transnational or deterritorialized governance arrangements that gather state and non-state actors from the global and local levels; and for local struggles for lands, rivers, living and non-living beings, ways of knowing and living, or the existence of many worlds (Escobar 2016; Inoue and Moreira 2016). In brief, it can contribute to greening IR by challenging Western modernity's assumption that human beings and societies can be considered apart from nature. As Leis (1999: 141) asserts, "the relation of society to nature cannot be transformed into something passive to be controlled by science; forgetting its wild, unpredictable, and non-rational side, and, as such, uncontrollable." Today, the notions of planetary boundaries and the demands of sustainability underscore the fact that seeking to "conquer" nature is obsolete. Instead, relations between society and nature should be reconstructed and re-organized in the way we produce, consume and relate to each other as groups and individuals. Epistemologically and theoretically, this means looking for other ways of conceiving or broadening our notion of knowledge.

As Tickner and Blaney (2012: 12) have argued, we should look for how concepts get rearticulated in different parts of the world as "everything gets inflected locally." In a world that is in environmental distress, there is a growing need for efficient and equitable responses. This is the great challenge for 21st-century social science: the governance of the Anthropocene. We have claimed throughout this chapter that Amazonian socio-

environmentalism has evolved as a potential bridge between global and local governance, as well as different worldviews. In the Amazon, socio-biodiversity has enabled participatory approaches that seek local definitions for environmental problems and solutions, and promotion of the role of traditional knowledge and resource management for local needs (Jeanrenaud 2002). At the local level, the programs, projects and initiatives led by a myriad of actors have evidenced this socio-environmental character and have the potential to contribute with innovative ways to re-construct relations between society and nature.

In relation to earth system governance, such experiences can also be viewed as transnational and multi-actor ways to (re)construct governance from local to global that go beyond the North–South divide that dominates the multilateral negotiation arenas and that has hampered advances among nation-states. As the global–local initiatives in the field have shown, there is room for learning and re-conceptualizing. Perhaps, also, there is room to bridge the gaps between traditional and contemporary knowledge systems.

In sum, the vertical dialogue in socio-environmentalism is evidenced by an active and status quo defiant social movement that has resulted in new global–local governance arrangements with different actors from global to local around norms that have been reframed locally. The horizontal dialogue in socio-environmentalism has brought to the floor the idea of constructing bridges and synergies between different epistemologies and worldviews. Moreover, socio-environmentalism has been conceptualized as a frame that brings together principles related to ecological, social-economic sustainability, social justice and cultural diversity, implying participatory approaches to decision-making. Thus, socio-environmentalism is a concept intrinsically about nature and about society. As such, it can contribute to our search to move outside of the conventional standpoints to find alternatives for meeting the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Questions for discussion

1. Why is the Anthropocene a major challenge for global cooperation and the field of International Relations?
2. What are the vertical and horizontal dialogues that are neglected in contemporary IR regarding the environment? Which are the major shortcomings of traditional IR theories in this regard?
3. How do the dichotomies of modernity, particularly the dualism of the nature–society divide, underlie many of the global environmental problems that humanity face?
4. What are the three major ideas encompassed by the concept and practice of socio-environmentalism?
5. Why is the Amazon region a key locus to assess the relevance of socio-environmentalism as a concept and practice?
6. How can the concept of socio-environmentalism help in the construction of a green IR?
7. How does socio-environmentalism as a concept and a practice contribute to fill the vertical and horizontal gaps in IR regarding the environment?

Notes

- 1 According to Rockström et al. (2009: 2), “the Earth has entered a new epoch, the Anthropocene, where humans constitute the dominant driver of change to the Earth System” and could “trigger abrupt or irreversible environmental changes that would be deleterious or even catastrophic for human well-being.”

- 2 Egoistical considerations refer to the inclination of most actors in the political, economic and social realm to guide their behavior towards the maximization of individual interest, with little regard for other members of their society, both present and future.
- 3 For example, see the fight to protect the Peace Valley by the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations. See www.amnesty.ca/get-involved/take-action-now/site-c-bc-government-must-do-right-thing.
- 4 Besides Chico Mendes' murder, Hochstetler and Keck (2007) offer two other explanations for the emergence of socio-environmentalism in Brazil: the democratic transition and the end of military dictatorship; and the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, that brought together environmental organizations, women's organizations, urban and rural trade unions, and other social movements.
- 5 Traditional communities and peoples are, according to Brazilian legislation, groups that are culturally differentiated and that self-identify as such. Such groups practice their own ways of social organization and occupy and use territory and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, economic and ancestral reproduction. They also use knowledge, innovations and practices that are generated and transmitted by tradition (Art 3rd of Decree 6040 of February 7, 2007). Indigenous people, by contrast, are original or native populations from the Americas, named as such because the colonizers believed they had landed in India.
- 6 More recent debates around the world have focused on the idea of "biocultural diversity." Ethnobiologists introduced this concept to inextricably link the variations within ecological systems to cultural and linguistic differences (Martin et al. 2012).

Further reading

- Dauvergne, Peter (2018) *Environmentalism of the Rich*, Cambridge: MIT Press. A reflection on the consequences of environmentalism when based primarily on the concerns of the most affluent sectors of society.
- Dryzek, John S. and Jonathan Pickering (2019) *The Politics of the Anthropocene*, First edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press. The book analyzes how humanity's institutions and political practices must change to meet the challenges of the new epoch of the Anthropocene.
- Inoue, Cristina Yumie Aoki (2018) "Worlding the Study of Global Environmental Politics: Indigenous Voices from the Amazon," *Global Environmental Politics* 18(4): 25–42. doi:https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00479. This article calls for recognition of indigenous ways of knowing and being in studies of global environmental politics through creative listening and speaking.
- Jinnah, Sikina and Simon Nicholson (eds) (2016) *New Earth Politics Essays from the Anthropocene*, Cambridge: The MIT Press. The book offers a reflection on the limitations of governance structures to manage the impact of human activity on the earth system.
- Viola, Eduardo and Matías Franchini (2018) *Brazil and Climate Change: Beyond the Amazon*, New York: Routledge. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315101651>. This book offers an assessment of Brazil's role in the global political economy of climate change and provides an accessible introduction to all those studying the challenges of the international system in the Anthropocene.
- Wapner, Paul Kevin and Hilal Elver (eds) (2017) *Reimagining Climate Change*, New York: Routledge. This book problematizes the most accepted responses to the climate crisis and offers alternatives.

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