

The Disastrous and Politically Debased Subject of Resilience

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'There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds.'

Gregory Bateson

In recent years development and security have come to be conceived in the words of the former British Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn, as something of a 'shared challenge' (Benn 2004). Development is said to make 'a critical contribution to global security by reducing poverty, inequality and the root causes of conflict' while 'global prosperity, everyone's prosperity, depends on security against threats to human development' (Benn 2004). 'The truth is', as Benn declared in a now classic speech, that 'development without security is not possible; security without development is only temporary' (Benn 2004). At least three different axioms can be found embedded in Benn's formulation of the interrelation between development and security; what is now referred to in International Relations as the 'development-security nexus' (Duffield 2008; Duffield 2001; Chandler 2007). Firstly, the development of the developing world is now said to depend on its security; security is conceived as a prerequisite of development. Secondly, development of the developing world is conceptualised itself as a means towards the security of developing societies; security conceived also, therefore, as the end towards which development is aimed. And thirdly no security of the developed world is said to be possible without increasing the development of undeveloped states and societies; thus the ultimate subject of both development and security is not the developing world at all, but the developed. This trinity of axioms underlies not just British development policy, but those of most western national governments as well as international organizations concerned with development, significantly the United Nations, as well as a wide range of NGOs, and their academic proxies. In the United States, Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recently called for development to 'rank alongside defense at the heart of America's foreign policy' (Staats 2009).

While the development-security nexus would appear to be becoming only more tightly woven in international relations, semantic shifts in the conceptualisation of both development and security are occurring. Demands for development are increasingly tied not simply to demands for 'security' but to a discursively new object of 'resilience'. And this shift from security to resilience is tied likewise to a reconceptualisation of development as 'sustainable development.' The axioms that flow from this discursive shift in the development-security nexus obey the same trinitarian structure as those noted above. Firstly the sustainable development of the developing world is said to depend on the developing world achieving resilience; resilience conceived thus as a prerequisite of sustainable development. Secondly sustainable development must be aimed, it is said, at increasing the resilience of the developing world; resilience conceived thus as the end to which sustainable development is driven. And thirdly the resilience of the developed world is said to be inextricably intertwined with the task of making developing peoples

into resilient ones; the subject of both sustainable development and resilience is thus revealed in actuality as the developed world. Are these, then, merely semantic shifts, or do they signify changes in the rationalities that have shaped both development and security policies during the post-Cold War period? Are the rationalities that distinguish resilience different to those underpinning demands for security? And are those of 'sustainable development' different to what was once known simply as 'development'? Does the weaving of a nexus of relations between 'sustainable development' and 'resilience' represent a departure from the 'development-security nexus' in some way? And, if so, what explains that shift and what are its political implications?

Choosing Life over Economy?

Sustainable development is proclaimed by its proponents to offer a more progressive way of framing the development problematic to that propagated previously by Western governments and international organizations. In contestation of the economic rationalities that shaped the development policies of the West during much of the Cold War, and especially in protest at the implications of the reification of the economic development of societies for their environments, sustainable development seeks to secure the 'life-support systems' which peoples otherwise require in order to live well and prosper (Khagram et al 2003; Gladwin et al 1991; Barbier and Markandya 1990; Folke and Kautsky 1989). By privileging the security of the biosphere over and against the imperative to secure economies, 'life' is thus offered as an obstacle to 'economy' by the doctrine of sustainable development. Sustainable development was always vulnerable to a re-appropriation by the economic rationalities of Western governments, I argue however, because of the interface between its 'alternative' rationality of security and that of specifically neoliberal doctrines of economy. While sustainable development deploys ecological reason to argue for the need to secure the life of the biosphere, neoliberalism prescribes economy as the very means of that security. Economic reason is conceived within neoliberalism as a servant of ecological reason; claiming paradoxically to secure life from economy through a promotion of the capacities of life for economy. This is the paradoxical foundation on which neoliberalism constructs its appropriation of sustainable development. Sustainable development and neoliberalism are not the same, nor is the former simply a proxy of the latter, but they do come into contact powerfully on the terrains of their rationalities of security. This surface of contact ought to make for a tense and political field of contestation, but has instead made largely for a strategically manipulable relation between the two doctrines.

In recent years we can see, at the very least, how vulnerable the ecological reasoning that underpins sustainable development has been to the economic reasoning of neoliberalism. Indeed I argue that the ongoing disarticulation of the concept of security in development doctrine and correlate emergence of the concept of resilience is an expression of this. Neoliberalism is able to appropriate the doctrine of sustainable development on account of its claims not to the 'security' but 'resilience' of specifically neoliberal institutions (significantly markets), systems of governance and conditions of subjectivity. Resilience is defined by the United Nations as 'the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazard, to adapt by resisting or changing in order to reach and

maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure' (UN 2004: Ch.1, S.1,17). Academics concerned with correlating the promotion of 'sustainable development' with that of resilience define it as 'the capacity to buffer change, learn and develop— as a framework for understanding how to sustain and enhance adaptive capacity in a complex world of rapid transformations' (Folke et al 2002: 437). The concept of resilience arose not as a direct product of neoliberal doctrines but as an element of the critique of neoliberalism which sustainable development itself pertained to be at its origin. This shouldn't surprise us. Neoliberalism is not a homogeneous doctrine, nor are its particular forms of dogmatism homeostatic. Its powers of persuasion and discursive prosperity depends on its own capacity to adapt to the hazards of critique. It is, you might well say, a paragon of the resilience that sustainable development demands of its subjects. The current prosperity of the doctrine of sustainable development is also a vexed expression of the resilience of neoliberalism. It is on account of this power to absorb and align itself with the very sources of its critique that what I call the 'sustainable-development-resilience nexus' is becoming to 21st century liberal governance what the development-security nexus was to its earlier post-Cold War forms. If 'security' has functioned during the first two decades of post-Cold War international relations as a rationality for the subjection of development to Western states, their governance practices, institutions and conditions for subjectivity, then the rationality which governs that subjection is increasingly going to be 'resilience'. Voices from within International Relations calling for the dismantling of the sign of security because it is 'the supreme concept of bourgeois society and the fundamental thematic of liberalism' (Neocleous 2008: 186) miss the point. Calling for a new politics to take us 'beyond security' does little to solve the problem; indeed it obfuscates the very nature of the problem, which is that liberalism itself is outgrowing its long-standing correlation with security, and locating new discursive foundations; principally that of resilience.

Beyond showing how the discourse of resilience legitimates neoliberal systems of governance and institutions, it is also necessary to attend to the forms of subjectivity it attempts to bring into being. The account of the world envisaged and constituted by development agencies concerned with building resilient subjects is one that presupposes the disastrousness of the world, and likewise one which interpellates a subject that is permanently called upon to bear the disaster. A subject for whom bearing the disaster is a required practice without which he or she cannot grow and prosper in the world. This may be what is most at stake in the discourse of resilience. The resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world. Not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility. But a subject which accepts the disastrousness of the world it lives in as a condition for partaking of that world and which accepts the necessity of the injunction to change itself in correspondence with the threats and dangers now presupposed as endemic. Building resilient subjects involves the deliberate disabling of the political habits, tendencies and capacities of peoples and replacing them with adaptive ones. Resilient subjects are subjects that have accepted the imperative not to resist or secure themselves from the difficulties they are faced with but instead adapt to its enabling conditions via the embrace of neoliberalism. Resisting neoliberalism in the present may thus require rejecting the seductive claims to 'alternative futures' offered by seemingly

contrary doctrines of sustainable development and their political promises of resilience. A reinvestment in an account of political subjectivity is needed, and a rearticulation of the more classical concept of security may be useful for such a purpose.

The Political Genealogy of Sustainable Development

The ideas that shaped the doctrine of 'sustainable development' became influential in the 1970s but they only took concrete form with the 1987 publication of the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987). On the surface of things sustainable development appeared to operate as the foundation for a powerful indictment of hitherto dominant theories and practices of development. Development policies were classically aimed at increasing the production, consumption and wealth of societies. What 'sustainable development' did was to pose the problem of the implications of such economy-centered policies for the 'life support systems' on which societies otherwise depend for their welfare (Khagram et al 2003: 296-7). The doctrine of sustainable development that emerged from *Our Common Future* and which culminated in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg was based upon the seemingly contrary axiom that economic development had to be subordinated to the need to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, healthy environments, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Here, the utility and value of 'life' in all of its complexities was offered by the doctrine of sustainable development as an obstacle to economy. Committed to securing life from the dangers posed at it by unfettered economic reason, the doctrine of sustainable development appeared to emerge in direct conflict with the governmental doctrine of neoliberalism which, during the 1980s, had become increasingly hegemonic, and which would have the opportunity to go global with the end of the Cold War in 1989. The kinds of 'pure liberalism' championed by Thatcherites and Reaganites, said to reify the economy at all costs as both means and ends of development, was subject to an apparently new line of questioning, not on account of its equally questionable implications for the economic welfare of peoples, but on account of the threats it posed to something outside of the order of economy: life. Proponents of sustainable development did not claim to question the value of economic development in and of itself, but they did aspire to offer a framework for the re-regulation of the economy in alignment with the needs and interests of the biosphere. And indeed its effects were palpable during the 1990s, a decade in which a Senior Vice President of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, was to be heard making savage indictments of the implications of liberal policy prescriptions, and in which the advice of environmentalists was increasingly taken into account by governments and international economic institutions (O'Brien et al 2000: 109-58).

But the relationship between the emergence of sustainable development and the crisis in liberal reason which began to trouble governments in the 1980s and 1990s is highly complex. Mark Duffield has shown how the shift from strategies of development preaching modernization to sustainable development owed much to a specifically neoliberal framing of the problematic of development. (Duffield 2008: 67-70). As Duffield argues, sustainable development emerged as part of a neoliberal counter-critique of modernization strategies of development which, rather than undermining the authority of liberal reason, gave it a new and even more powerful footing. While recognizing the

function of ecological reason in shaping the doctrine of sustainable development and its critique of modernization strategies, Duffield draws attention to the neoliberal rationalities which have nevertheless defined it. For one the strength of its challenge to traditional models of development owed much to its alignment with the neoliberal critique of the state (Duffield 2008: 67). Preaching that sustainable development would only follow once peoples gave up on state-led modernization strategies and learnt to practice the virtue of 'community-based self-reliance', so sustainable development reflected a neoliberal political agenda that shifts the burden of security from states to people (Duffield 2008: 69). Sustainable development functions in extension of neoliberal principles of economy, Duffield argues, by disciplining poor and underdeveloped peoples to give up on states as sources for the protection and improvement of their well-being, and instead practice the virtue of securing themselves. Thus does sustainable development engage in the active promotion of a neoliberal model of society and subjectivity in which everyone is demanded to 'prove themselves by bettering their individual and collective self reliance' (Duffield 2008: 69). In African states such as Mozambique, for example, it has provided 'a virtually free social security system offering the possibilities of adaptation and strengthening in order to manage the risks of market integration' (Duffield 2008: 93).

Revealing the convergences between sustainable development and the neoliberal critique of the state, the model of society and subjectivity it proposes as solutions to the problem of the state, and the economic pay-offs that follow, Duffield offers a powerful riposte to those narrative accounts of sustainable development as arising simply from the empowerment of ecological over economic reason. But how then should we understand the nature of the relation between sustainable development and neoliberalism? Is ecological reason just a proxy of the neoliberal rationalities which Duffield argues has shaped the agenda of sustainable development? If we understand sustainable development as a servant of neoliberalism then what should we make of those voices arising from environmental movements, and the many other ways in which ecological reason has been mobilized, to critique economy-based strategies of development in the interests of sustaining life? Answering these questions requires grappling further with the fundamental and complex correlations of economy, politics and security with life in neoliberal doctrine; what Duffield rightly names its biopolitics (2008: 4-8). Neoliberalism is widely understood as a 'theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2007: 22). Less understood, however, is how its claims to be able to increase wealth and freedom are correlated with ways to increase the prosperity and security of life itself. Its capacities to correlate practices for the increase of economic profit and prosperity with those dedicated to increasing the profitability and prosperity of the biosphere are precisely why the doctrine of sustainable development is so compatible with it.

In the first instance this is a problem of the neglect of the complexities of economic doctrines *per se*. If we examine the origins of economics we find that it was from its earliest usage conceptualised as a domain of knowledge concerned with the prosperity

not just of human communities, families, and subjects, but a knowledge which seeks to increase that prosperity in alignment with the needs of nature in its entirety. For Aristotle, economics, it was said, 'must conform to nature...in as much as nature has already distributed roles and duties within the species themselves' (Mondzain 2005: 19) 'Implicit', therefore, 'within the economy is the notion of an organic objective and functional harmony...a providential and natural order to be respected while acting in the service of the greatest cohesion of utility and well-being' (Mondzain 2005: 19). As Michel Foucault's historical analyses have shown, with the birth of the modern discipline of political economy so 'nature' lost its status as the major correlate of economy and thus did 'life' began to play that role (Foucault 1997). For political economists of the modern age, however, the life which economy had to respect was specifically that of the human species; the question of the prosperity and security of human populations became conceived as limiting conditions for the exercise of economic reason and practices. Neoliberalism breaks from earlier liberalisms and traditions of political economy in so far as its legitimacy rests on its capacities to correlate practices for the increase of economic profitability and prosperity not just with practices for the securing of the human species, but with the life of the biosphere. These correlations of economy, well-being, freedom, security and biospheric life in and among neoliberal regimes of practice and representation comprise some of the foundations of what have been named its biopolitics (Dillon and Reid 2009; Duffield 2008; Cooper 2008; Reid 2006). And if there is anything 'fundamental' to liberalism then it is this; one cannot understand how liberalism functions, most especially how it has gained the global hegemony that it has, without addressing how systematically the category of life has organized the correlation of its various practices of governance, as well as how important the shift in the very understanding of life, from the human to the biospheric, has been for changes in those practices.

Examining neoliberalism biopolitically means we can understand better how it is that ecological reasoning has enabled the growth of strategies for the promotion of market-based entrepreneurial capitalism in and among developing societies. Of particular importance here are the ways in which the very account of security deployed by neoliberal states and their development agencies has began to alter through its correlation with ecological reason. Crucial to this story is the relatively recent emergence of the discourse of resilience. When neoliberals preach the necessity of peoples becoming 'resilient' they are, as I will show, arguing in effect for the entrepreneurial practices of self and subjectivity which Duffield calls 'self reliance'. 'Resilient' peoples do not look to states or other entities to secure and improve their well being because they have been disciplined into believing in the necessity to secure and improve it for themselves. Indeed so convinced are they are of the worth of such capabilities that they proclaim it to be a fundamental 'freedom' (UNEP 2004). But the emergence of this discourse of resilience within the doctrine of neoliberalism owes massively, I argue, to the power of ecological reason in shaping the very rationality of security which otherwise defines it. In other words comprehending how a neoliberal rationality of security functions in shaping the agenda of sustainable development requires us to examine the constitutive function of ecological reason in shaping both. Far from being a proxy of the neoliberal rationalities shaping sustainable development, ecological reason has been formative of them.

From Security to Resilience

The strategic function of sustainable development in the global expansion of neoliberalism has been to naturalize neoliberal frameworks of governance; the institutions, practices and forms of subjectivity which it demands are brought into being on account of the desire for increase of the economic profitability and prosperity of human communities. But how is it that neoliberal ways of governing came to be conceived as an answer to the problem of sustainability? Some of the answer to this question can be given, I believe, by looking closely at the emergence and discursive expansion of the concept of 'resilience'. Because that is the concept against which all such institutions, practices and subjectivities are increasingly legitimized. It is no accident that the concept of resilience derives directly from ecology, referring to the 'buffer capacities' of living systems; their ability to 'absorb perturbations' or the 'magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before a living system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behaviour' (Adger 2000: 349). Living systems are said by ecologists to develop not on account of their ability to secure themselves prophylactically from threats, but through their adaptation to them. Exposure to threats is a constitutive process in the development of living systems, and thus the problem for them is never simply how to secure themselves but how to adapt to them. Such capacities for adaptation to threats are precisely what ecologists argue determines the 'resilience' of any living system. Sustainable development started out by preaching that the economic development of societies must be regulated so that it contributes not just to the security of states and their human populations, but so that it increases the resilience of all living systems; shifting the object of concern from that of human life to that of the biosphere, incorporating every known species, as well as habitats of all kinds, vulnerable to the destructions wrought by economic development. Life not economy, it said, must provide the rationalities according to which peoples are entitled to increasing their prosperity. The emergence of such a doctrine had to have significant implications for the ways in which not only the problem but the very nature of security was conceived in developmental circles. Once the referent object of development became the life of the biosphere rather than simply states and their human populations so the account of security to which development is allied was required to transform. Security, with its connotations of state and governmental reason, territoriality, military capacities, economic prosperity, human resources and population assets became less fashionable and gradually gave way to the new concept and value of 'resilience'. Resilience is a useful concept, the proponents of sustainable development argued, precisely because it is not a capacity of states, nor merely of human populations and their various political, social and economic practices, but a capacity of life itself. Thus did resilience emerge within the doctrine of sustainable development as a way of positing a different kind of policy problematic to those formulated in the security doctrines of neoliberal states and their more conventional development agencies. One which would privilege the life of the biosphere in all its dimensions over and against the human focus which shaped the 'development-security nexus'. If one aspect of the subordination of rationalities of economy to rationalities of life in developmental discourse has been the shift from

doctrines of economic development to sustainable development then a correlate shift has been that from security to resilience.

Allied to this shift, then, the doctrine of sustainable development brought into being a new guiding axiom, one which created a surface of friction with the rationalities of economic development pursued by western states and development agencies up until the 1980s. And this in turn, during the 1990s, gradually brought into being a 'sustainable development-resilience nexus' to rival the development-security nexus woven by previous regimes. By the time of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, however, a summit which is widely recognized as the coming of age party of 'sustainable development', new ways of thinking about resilience were coming into view. A major report prepared on behalf of the Environmental Advisory Council to the Swedish Government as input to the process of the World Summit described how resilience is a property associated not just with the diversity 'of species', but also 'of human opportunity', and especially 'of economic options - that maintain and encourage both adaptation and learning' among human populations (Folkes et al 2002: 438). In an adroit reformulation of the problematic, neoliberal economic development, in which the function of markets as generators of economic diversity is basic, became itself a core constituent of the resilience which sustainable development had to be aimed at increasing. Thus was it that, post-Johannesburg, the correlation of sustainable development with resilience started to produce explicitly neoliberal prescriptions for institutional reform. 'Ecological ignorance' began to be conceptualised as a threat, not just to the resilience of the biosphere, but to humanity (Folkes 2002: 438). Resilience began to be conceived not simply as an inherent property of the biosphere, in need of protection from the economic development of humanity, but a property within human populations which now needed promoting through the increase of their 'economic options.' As remarkably, the biosphere itself began to be conceived not as an extra-economic domain, distinct from and vulnerable to the economic practices of human populations, but an economy of 'services' which 'humanity receives' (Folkes et al 2002: 437).

There is a double and correlated shift at work, here, then, in the elaboration of the sustainable-development-resilience nexus post-Johannesburg. In one move 'resilience' has shifted from being a property of the biosphere to being a property of humanity, while in a second move 'service' has shifted from being an element of economy to being a capacity of the biosphere. Crucified on the cross that this double shift carves are 'the poor'. For they are the segment of population of which resilience is now demanded and simultaneously the population said to threaten the degradation of 'ecosystem services.' Increasing the 'resiliency' of the poor has become a defining goal, for example, of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the years post-Johannesburg (UNEP 2004: 39). Alleviating threats to the biosphere requires improving the resilience of the poor, especially, because it is precisely the poor that are most 'ecologically ignorant' and thus most prone to using 'ecosystem services' in non-sustainable ways. Thus does ensuring the resilience of the biosphere require making the poor into more resilient kinds of subjects, and making the poor into more resilient subjects requires relieving them of their ecological ignorance, and the means to that removal is argued to reside in building neoliberal frameworks of economy, governance, and subjectivity. Developing the

resilience of the poor is said to require, for example, a social context of 'flexible and open institutions and multi-level governance systems' (Folke et al 2002: 439). 'The absence of markets and price signals' in ecological services is a major threat to resilience, UNEP argues, because it means that 'changes in their conditions have gone unnoticed' (UNEP 2004: 13). Property rights regimes have to be extended so that they incorporate ecosystem services and so that markets can function in them (UNEP 2004: 15). 'Markets' it is argued 'have proven to be among the most resilient institutions, being able to recover quickly and to function in the absence of government' (Pingali et al 2005: S18). When and where the market fails to recover, development policies for increasing resilience have to be aimed at 'ensuring access to markets' (Pingali et al 2005: 518). Ensuring the resilience of the poor also requires the building of neoliberal systems of governance which will monitor their use of ecological services to ensure they are sustainably managed (UNEP 2004: 39). The poor, in order to be the agents of their own change, have to be subjectivized so that they are 'able to make sustainable management decisions that respect natural resources and enable the achievement of a sustainable income stream' (UNEP 2004: 5). 'Over-harvesting, over-use, misuse or excessive conversion of ecosystems into human or artificial systems damages the regulation service which in turn reduces the flow of the provisioning service provided by ecosystems' (UNEP 2004: 20). Within 'the poor' itself women are the principal target population. 'I will transform my lifestyle in the way I farm and think' has become the mantra that poor women farmers in the Caribbean region are demanded, for example, to repeat like Orwellian farm animals in order to receive European Union funding (Tandon 2007: 12-14).

This double shift is integral, I argue, to the strategy by which neoliberalism has absorbed the critique of sustainable development. Whereas resilience was originally conceived by proponents of sustainable development as a property that distinguishes the extra-economic 'life-support systems' which humans require to live well, it has become reconceived post-Johannesburg as a property which humanity intrinsically possesses, is capable of developing further, and which it can never have too much of. As a property of human populations it is dependent moreover on their interpellation within markets, their diversity as economic subjects, and their subjection to systems of governance able to ensure that they continue to use natural resources in sustainable ways. Thus did a doctrine which started out as a critique of neoliberal policy prescriptions for development transform into a doctrine which legitimates a neoliberal model of development based upon the constitution of markets and the interpellation of subjects within markets.

The Disastrous and Politically Debased Subject of Resilience

Having established how sustainable development, via its propagation of the concept of resilience, naturalizes neoliberal systems of governance and institutions, I want to consider how it functions to constitute subjects amenable to neoliberal governance. Every regime of governance invokes its own particular subject of governance. Producing subjects the liberal way has long since been a game of producing self-securing subjects. Subjects that are capable of securing themselves are less of a threat to themselves and in being so are not a threat to the governance capacities of their states nor to the governance

of the global order either. And in this sense the correlation of development with security feeds upon the political imaginary of liberalism predicated as it became upon the belief that a global order of self-securing subjects would in turn deliver a more secure form of world order (Rosenau 2008: Rosenau 2002; Rosenau 1991). What, then, does the shift in the correlation of development with security to resilience tell us about the nature of the subject which development is now aimed at producing? What differences are entailed in being a resilient subject as opposed to a merely secure subject? Is the emergence of this new object of development just an extension of the liberal rationalities of governance that feed upon what is otherwise described as the development-security nexus?

There is, in fact, a considerable shift here. The major condition of possibility for the subject of sustainable development is that it sacrifices its capacity and desire for security. Security, here, is less that which liberalism demands of its subjects than what it forbids them. The resilient subject of sustainable development is, by definition, not a secure but an adaptive subject; adaptive in so far as it is capable of making those adjustments to itself which enable it to survive the hazards encountered in its exposure to the world. In this sense the resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world. Not a political subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility, with a view to securing itself from the world. But a subject which accepts the disastrousness of the world it lives in as a condition for partaking of that world and which accepts the necessity of the injunction to change itself in correspondence with the threats and dangers now presupposed as endemic. One can see readily how this plays out in relation to debates, for example, over climate change. One enthusiast for resilience as an answer to the problem writes:

What is vital to understand is not the degree of climate change that we should expect, nor necessarily the impact that we might anticipate on water resource management, coastal defence, food security, species survival, etc. What is important to grasp is that we do have the abilities to adapt and adjust to the changes that climate change will bring (Tandon 2007: 12).

Sustainable development is no longer conceived, thus, as a state of being on account of which a human is capable of securing itself from the world, and via which he or she becomes a subject in the world. Once development is said to follow ecological laws of change and transformation, and thus once exposure to hazard becomes a condition of possibility for development, so the question which sustainable development poses for the communities and individuals subject to it is; can you survive in the world without securing yourself from the world?

This is precisely why resilience has become so intimately tied in the policy, practice and theory of sustainable development not just to neoliberalism but to disaster management. Indeed the latter is also crucial in legitimating the former. The ability to manage exposure to hazard in and among developing societies is dependent the UN says on their maintenance of a healthy and diverse ecological system that is productive and life sustaining, but it also demands a healthy and diverse economy that adapts to change and recognizes social and ecological limits (UN 2004: Ch.1, S.2,18). It requires 'capturing

opportunities for social change during the “window of opportunity” following disasters, for example by utilizing the skills of women and men equally during reconstruction’ (UN 2004: Ch.1, S.2, 20). As fundamentally it requires making societies ‘aware of the importance of disaster reduction for their own well-being’ (UN 2004: Ch.3, S.4, 1), because ‘it is crucial for people to understand that they have a responsibility towards their own survival and not simply wait for governments to find and provide solutions’ (2004: Ch.3, S.4, 20). Disasters, thus construed, are not threats to the development of human beings from which they might aspire to secure themselves. They are events of profound ‘opportunity’ for societies to transform themselves economically and politically. They are events which do not merely expose communities to dangers from which they must be saved in order that they might be set back onto the path of development. But, rather, where communities, in their exposure, are able to undergo novel processes of developmental change in reconstitution of themselves as neoliberal societies. Exposure to disaster, in this context, is conceptualized in positive terms as constitutive of the possibility for the development of neoliberal systems of governance. But the working of this rationality depends on a subject that will submit to it. Sustainable development requires subjects, the UN report insists in a remarkable passage, to understand the ‘nature’ of hazards. The passage of societies to such knowledge must in turn involve, it states

a consideration of almost every physical phenomenon on the planet. The slow movements in the earth’s mantle – the convection cells that drive the movement of continents and the manufacture of ocean floors – are the starting and also the sticking point. They lift mountains and shape landscapes. They also build volcanoes and trigger potentially catastrophic earthquakes. Like those other invisible movements that take place on a vast scale through the atmospheric medium – the carbon cycle and the water cycle and the nitrogen cycle – volcanoes and earthquakes, along with technological advancements, provide the bedrock of strong nations, rich industries and great cities. They do, of course, also have the potential to destroy them (2004: Ch.2., S.1: 4).

The account of the world envisaged and constituted by development agencies concerned with building resilient societies is one that presupposes the disastrousness of the world, and likewise one which interpellates a subject that is permanently called upon to bear the disaster. A subject for whom bearing the disaster is a required practice without which he or she cannot grow and prosper in the world. This is precisely what is at stake in the discourse of resilience. The resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world. Not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility. But a subject which accepts the disastrousness of the world it lives in as a condition for partaking of that world, which will not question the reasons why he or she suffers, but which accepts the necessity of the injunction to change itself in correspondence with the suffering now presupposed as endemic.

The human here is conceived as resilient in so far as it adapts to rather than resists the conditions of its suffering in the world. To be resilient is to forego the very power of

resistance. 'The imperative of adaptation rather than resistance to change will increase inexorably' two ideologues of sustainable development claim (Handmer and Dovers 1996). In their enthusiasm for the 'inexorable increase' of this 'imperative' theorists of sustainable development engage in some vivid discursive representations of the human. 'As a species, humanity is immensely adaptable - a weed species. We are also capable of considerable adaptability as individuals, and also as households (variously defined)-the latter being the perennial and universal human social unit' (Handmer and Dovers 1996). The combination of the imperative of humanity to adapt with the representation of humanity as a 'weed species' recalls the discursive currency of similar combinations within the concentration camps of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Those camps were, as Barrington Moore has demonstrated in a still brilliant and wide ranging historical study, sites for the constitution of precisely such resilient subjects and the honing of precisely such adaptive capacities. The inhabitants of such extreme spaces of suffering often failed to exhibit any sign of resistance, seeking to survive through the development of complex and ultimately failed strategies of 'adaptation' to the conditions of their suffering (Moore 1978: 66). The 'conquest' of the perception of inevitability and necessity of circumstances is 'essential', Moore argues on the other hand, 'to the development of politically effective moral outrage' (1978: 459). The making of resilient subjects and societies fit for neoliberalism by agencies of sustainable development is based upon a degradation of the political capacities of human beings far more subtle than that achieved in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. But the enthusiasm with which ideologues of sustainable development are turning resilience into an 'imperative' is nevertheless comparable with that of the SS guards who also aimed 'to speed up the processes of adaptive learning' among those Jews and other populations in their charge by convincing them of the futility of resistance (Moore 1978: 66).

Development contra Neoliberalism?

Can the doctrine of sustainable development be retrieved from the grip which neoliberalism seems to have achieved on it? My intention here has not been to argue against claims as to the necessity of concern for the state of the biosphere, but to raise the problem of the surface of contact between such an ecological mode of reasoning and a mode of economic reason complicit with the degradation of the biosphere. While sustainable development deploys ecological reason to argue for the need to secure the life of the biosphere, neoliberalism prescribes economy as the very means of that security. Economic reason is conceived within neoliberalism as a servant of ecological reason; claiming paradoxically to secure life from economy through a promotion of the capacities of life for economy. If, then, sustainable development is to escape its appropriation it would seem imperative that it contest the nexus of relations on which claims as to the necessity of neoliberal frameworks for the sustainability of life are based. For a start this has to mean rethinking the ways in which it engages with the concept of resilience. The problem here is less the demands to improve the resilience of ecosystems which distinguished the agenda of sustainable development in its early years than it is the post-Johannesburg shift to propagating resilience as a fundamental property and capacity of the human. The ecological imaginary is colonizing the social and political imaginaries of theorists and practitioners of development in ways that are providing fertile ground for

the application of neoliberalism as a solution to the problem of sustainability. Understanding how that is possible requires understanding the biopolitics of neoliberalism; how its claims to be able to increase wealth and freedom are correlated with ways to increase the prosperity and security of life itself. For its capacities to correlate practices for the increase of economic profit and prosperity with those dedicated to increasing the profitability and prosperity of the biosphere are precisely why the doctrine of sustainable development is so compatible with it.

What is needed is a policy and practice of sustainable development reflexive enough to provide space for a 'speaking back' to the forms of neoliberalism that are currently being pushed by Western states and international organizations as answers to the problem of sustainability. A policy and practice that will cut the poor and underdeveloped some slack when it comes to issues of environmental degradation, climate change, and struggles for and over natural resources. A policy and practice that will, while taking into account the grave nature of these problems, take seriously the degradations of capacities for the development of political subjectivity that occur when adaptation rather than resistance to the conditions of worldly suffering becomes a governing imperative. We have enough voices, now, calling within the chorus of development for the saving of the planet. But where are the voices that will call for the saving of the political? For sustainable development to reinvent itself it needs to master the ecological reason from out which it emerged and forge newly political paradigms of thought and practice. Why is it that the conception of ecology at work in sustainable development is so limited that it permits neoliberalism to proliferate, like a poison species, taking over entire states and societies in the wake of their disasters, utilizing their suffering, as conditions for its spread, installing markets, commodifying anything it can lay its hands on, monetizing the value of everything, driving peoples from countryside into cities, generating displacement, homelessness, and deprivation? Isn't this an ecological problematique? Why is this death and suffering producing machine tolerated in the name of sustainability? It is not only living species and habitats that are today threatened with extinction, and for which we ought to mobilize our care, but the words and gestures of human solidarity on which resistance to such biopolitical regimes of governance depends (Guattari 1995). A sense of responsibility for the survival of the life of the biosphere is not a sufficient condition for the development of a political subject capable of speaking back to neoliberalism. Nor a sense of responsibility for the life of humanity. What is required is a subject responsible for securing incorporeal species, chiefly that of the political, currently threatened with extinction, on account of the overwrought fascination with life that has colonized the developmental as well as every other biopoliticized imaginary of the modern age.

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