

Sustaining Hate?

Environmentalism and the right to migrate

by John Mulloy

It is clear that population growth and endless consumerism pose a serious threat both to the planet and the long-term sustainability of humanity. The increasing difficulties of human survival are reflected in the growing volume of human migration. A key problem, however, is the use of environmental concerns by groups involved in anti-immigration and race-hate campaigns.

The basic illogic argues that immigrants are the main cause of overpopulation, and overpopulation in turn causes urban sprawl, the destruction of wilderness, pollution, and so forth. Internationally, it blames expanding populations of peasants and herders for encroaching on pristine nature. In the first instance, the main policy 'solution' is immigration restriction; in the second it is coercive conservation, the violent exclusion of local communities from nature reserves. Both varieties of the greening of hate are about policing borders and criminalising the poor.

Population control is a global issue, not a national or regional one. Migration cannot cause overpopulation for several simple reasons: by definition, migrants are already born, and therefore do not add to the global population. OECD research shows that migrant families from the developing world adapt to the birth rate in the host country, generally having fewer children than if they stayed at home. The majority of migrants are single men, reducing birth rates in the country of origin. The chief impact of migration on population is to relieve pressure on overpopulated areas.

Humans, as hunters and gatherers, evolved as a migratory species. With the rise of nationalism in Europe in the late 18th century, however, Western societies began to regard population movement as abnormal, a threat to stability and a challenge to identity. By contrast, across Africa and South Asia,

movement is the norm, and migration is both a strategy of survival and inseparable from identity.

As Philip Bobbit argues in *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History*, the idea of the culturally homogenous, territorially bound nation-state has been undermined by at least five different developments linked to globalisation:

- 1 The establishment of enforceable international human rights law, superior to national law
- 2 The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, rendering the defence of borders ineffectual
- 3 The proliferation of global and transnational problems, such as environmental disasters, refugee flows, disease, terrorism or famine
- 4 The emergence of the free-market economy and the subsequent weakening of the state's power to intervene in economic affairs
- 5 The development of global communication, which has created new cultural forms beyond the control of the state

Immigration Controls

In response, many Western governments seem to feel that their sovereignty lies in their capacity for exclusion and the defining of citizenship. While a body of explicitly racist legislation developed in the early 20th century (such as the 1924 Immigration Act in the USA), the bulk of immigration controls were introduced very recently, dating largely from the oil crisis of 1973. Prior to this, movement was relatively easy, especially to and within Europe, and there were large resident immigrant populations.

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Immigration control, by definition, creates the illegal immigrant- the creature of popular paranoid fantasy- and simultaneously empowers the traffickers of slaves. As a result, there are now

an estimated 200 million slaves in the world, and the slave-trading ships have returned to Cotonou in Benin, according to a report in the *New Internationalist's*

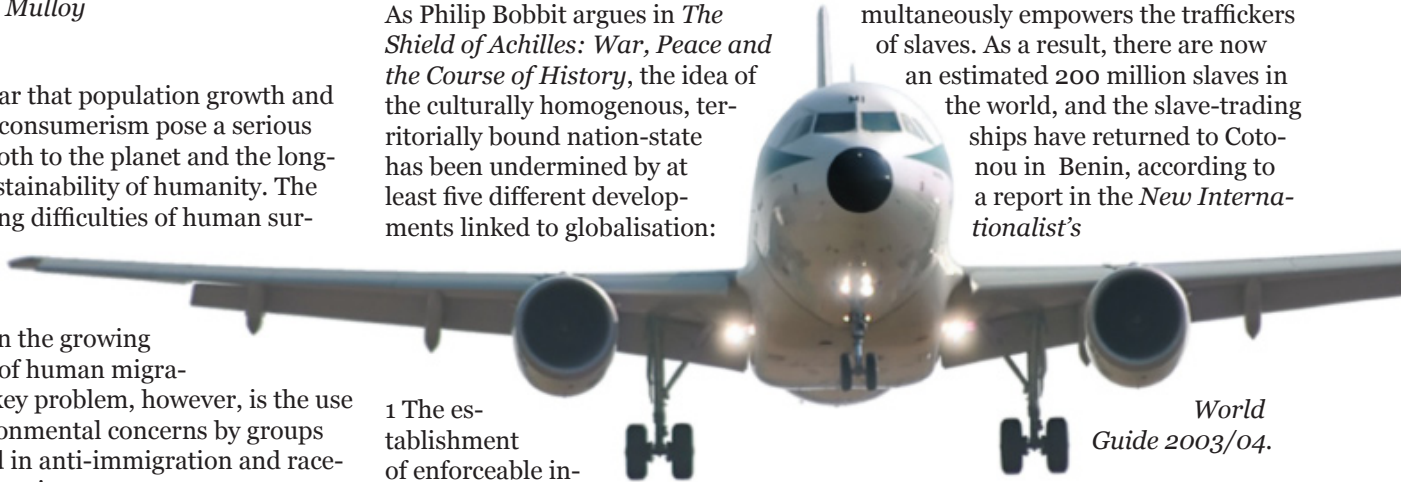
World Guide 2003/04.

The most common argument in favour of immigration to developed countries is economic – immigrants are necessary to sustain an aging population and will carry out the dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs that locals will no longer do. However, it is because of immigration controls that 'illegals' are forced to work for a pittance, pay indirect taxes through their spending but remain unable to claim any benefits or use the services of the state.

The controls ensure that the internationalised work force remains cheap, docile and easily removable when not needed. This is further assisted by the unfettered movement of money and goods and the creation of an environment of competing 'economies' vying to attract the attention of transnational corporations through competitive tax and regulatory regimes and low wage rates.

Immigration controls generate big business for security industry corporations like Wackenhut Correction Corporation, Global Solutions and Group4 Securicor. Their activities range from Guantanamo Bay to running asylum-seeker 'Reception Centres' in Ireland, managing detention and deportation programmes across the EU and the production of environmentally friendly detergents (Ecover)¹.

Newer players looking to profit from immigration controls include the Austrian company Asylum Airlines, which is pitching for the EU deportation market.



Arguments for Abolition

Perhaps the most important economic argument for the abolition of immigration controls is based on the impact of *remittances** (see footnotes) on the developing world. In 2002 Latin America received \$32 billion in remittances, six times what it received in foreign aid, and of far more significance than fair trade initiatives.

Remittances are also free of conditional clauses and are of enormous potential in furthering sustainable development. Research by Robert D. Putnam suggests that despite 'brain drain' costs, increasing annual northward immigration by only three percent might produce net benefits greater than meeting targets for development assistance, plus cancelling all Third World debt, plus abolishing all barriers to Third World trade [combined].

A common argument suggests that unchecked migration will cause cultural homogenisation, resulting in a loss of human biodiversity. This is based on a vision of culture and tradition as static. In fact, the production of culture is dynamic and fluid, with traditions always being reinvented as new responses to local conditions emerge. Migration can therefore be seen as creating more diversity and complexity, not less.

Environmentalism has long focused on ideas of localism, self-sufficiency and community, which can slip very easily into seeing culture and tradition as unchanging. International migration in response to environmental disasters mostly affects those dependent on the environment, generally farmers in poorer countries. Anti-immigration groups, abdicating all responsibility for the victims of Western exploitation, have used this link to develop their so-called 'sustainability ethics'.

Racism and Environmentalism

The strategy of cloaking racism in environmental concerns, openly used by the British National Party (BNP), was perhaps first developed by Groupe-ment de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne, a French New Right group that consciously sought out links with the environmental movement. The BNP outlines the strategy as follows: "The right in Britain cannot proceed without more attention being paid to creating a bandwagon of ideas outside and above direct political campaigning ..." ² This 'bandwagon' includes anti-globalisation, the defence of indigenous rights, environmental protection, and a range of other struggles.

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Essentially, the BNP sought to link migration to economic growth and its threats to the environment. The BNP website includes a 'Land and People' section, with policies advocating organic farming, ending vivisection, promoting biodiesel and so on – but with the reminder "It's not just our environment that's under attack, but our culture and traditions as well."

In the U.S., as long ago as 1986, John Tanton of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) targeted the environmental movement as being susceptible to the anti-immigrant mes-

sage. The greening of hate accelerated in the mid-1990s when FAIR began mobilising within the Sierra Club, America's largest environmental organisation, to get the Club to campaign for a "reduction of net immigration".

By 2003 key anti-immigration figures on the board of the Sierra Club included Ben Zuckerman, board member of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society; Paul Watson, a founder of Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd; and Doug LaFollette, former board member of Friends of the Earth – all of whom have close ties to FAIR, NumbersUSA and other right-wing extremist groups in the Carrying Capacity Network.

Carrying Capacity

Carrying capacity is defined as the number of people that can be supported without degrading the physical, social, and cultural environment – that is, without affecting the ability of the environment to sustain the desired quality of life over the long term. This justification for abandoning the people of the South to their fate originated in Garrett Hardin's *Living on a Lifeboat* (1974), which describes each 'rich nation' as "a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded, lifeboats." Hardin argues that it is unethical for the rich lifeboats to exceed their carrying capacity, regardless of humanitarian need. To do so, he contends, would deprive our posterity of a future.

This picture of the lifeboats is false, as we live in a world of interconnected networks, and it suggests a false dichotomy, a choice between 'other people' and 'our environment'.

The problem is that the real motive for much of this debate stems from white supremacism. Hardin, a keen eugenicist, argues that it "is not simply that there are too many people in the world, but there are too many of the wrong kind of people." He was Chairman of Population-Environment Balance, a grassroots membership organization that wants to stabilize the U.S. population in order to safeguard the country's carrying capacity. Hardin received backing from the Pioneer Fund, which finances research seeking 'proof' of the genetic superiority of the 'white race', and is a major funder of FAIR.

Echoes of his ideas can be seen in organisations like Ecopop, Earth First!, the Human Biodiversity Institute,



Dieoff.org and other deep ecology groups, as well as more mainstream organisations like Friends of the Earth³. Current ideologues for such ‘Eco-Malthusianism’ include John Cairns and Jack Parsons, trying to link the unrelated issues of migration and overpopulation.

Population control is about reducing the numbers of children being born, not increasing the pressure on millions of people currently alive. To suggest, as Eco-Malthusians do, that ‘attrition’ is the most efficient means of reducing overpopulation, is to urge genocide⁴.

By denying people the right to move, they will be trapped by famines and disasters. The attraction is that those who will die are most likely to be

‘Other’ people in far away places, but we needn’t worry, because it’s good for the environment anyway.

This flawed environmental thinking represents a major threat to the human rights of millions of people. It is based on a fundamental misanthropy, seeing people as the problem, rather than part of the solution to the world’s problems. ‘Lifeboat ethics’ envisions a fictional world of disconnected nations, and are utterly inappropriate in a globalised world, where climatic and environmental threats are no respecters of borders.

To followers of Hardin who urge ‘Let them starve’ I would suggest that they should first of all starve their own children. If they cannot do this, then they have no right to enforce it on others.

¹ Ecover was bought by Group 4 in 1993. Embarrassment over human rights abuses saw ownership transfer to Jurgen Phillip Sorensen – who retains a £250 million stake in Group 4. For more on these and similar issues, see www.corpwatch.org, www.labournet.net, and www.corporatetimes.co.uk

² www.thecornerhouse.org

³ For example, see David Topples, Member of Friends of the Earth, letter to The Ecologist, February 2004, complaining about “millions of people of many different races and cultures diluting each other’s identities” and the threat to human biodiversity. Quoted in Nicholas Hildyard, Far Right Moves onto Environmental Ground, online at www.thecornerhouse.org.uk

⁴ Garrett Hardin, Cultural Carrying Capacity: A biological approach to human problems, 1986, online at www.dieoff.org

***Remittances:** money sent home by migrants. Remittances also include cultural impacts and technological changes through the exchange of ideas and are seen as playing an essential role in developing sustainability, way beyond their financial value.

John Mulloy has been active in arts-based community development for about twenty five years, with a primary focus on combating racism and promoting interculturalism. In 2006 he completed a PhD, researching the history of collective creativity for social change in Ireland. He currently lectures in art history and critical theory in the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.

