

OUR LUNGS OR THEIR FOREST

Ecological Imperialism and the Case of the Amazonian Forest Fires in Brazil

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Abstract

This thesis explores the theory of ecological imperialism. The term eco-imperialism refers to a postcolonialist critique of environmentalist initiatives, as they are argued to portray imperialist characteristics. It claims that ideas from the Global North are imposed on the Global South, reinforcing their political and economic dominance. This thesis aims to test this theory on the case of the fires in the Brazilian Amazonian rainforest. Deforestation can be portrayed as a devastating process internationally, but at the same time, as progress and economic development locally. This discrepancy between local and international perspectives possibly portrays imperialist patterns. A critical discourse analysis is performed on international governmental and non-governmental sources covering these fires. This analysis aims to find proof of imperialist rhetoric. In addition, the Brazilian reaction to such discourse will be analyzed to strengthen this argument and find possible implications of current environmentalist discourse and counter-productive effects. The analysis finds numerous instances of discourse that point toward imperialist power relations in both governmental and non-governmental sources. However, especially NGOs repeatedly described the Amazon as being theirs and excluded local perspectives. With increasing international environmental attention and cooperation, it is important to ensure that initiatives are not counterproductive, and that equal agency is provided globally in order to guard itself from past mistakes in international interventions.

Keywords: ecological imperialism, postcolonialism, international environmentalism

Introduction

During the summer of 2019 news of forest fires spread through international media like wildfire. Although fires in the dry season of the Amazonian rainforest are not uncommon, this year the increased amount of forest burning in Brazil, along with recent political change, was cause for international concern (CBS News, 2019; The Guardian, 2019; The Washington Post, 2019). The reporting started with the suggestion that wind and the dry season were causing these fires, but this information was quickly rectified. Most of the fires were deliberate and started by farmers preparing more land for crops and cattle. The increase in these fires has several possible reasons, for example, drought and Brazil's strong agricultural lobby, but most attention has been given to Brazil's president Bolsonaro. Already since before taking office in January 2019, Bolsonaro has expressed a very strong anti-environment rhetoric. Focusing on economic development, Bolsonaro has promoted the opening of the Amazon to mining, farming and logging, while also attacking conservation NGOs (The Guardian, 2019).

The news about the fires was met with outrage and concern, as for example the French President Emmanuel Macron took to twitter to state that "*Our house is burning. Literally*" in addition to calling on the G7 countries to discuss this matter at the upcoming summit (Andreoni & Londoño, 2019). Many others took to social media to express concern, NGOs called for action, and celebrities donated to the cause (BBC News, 2019). Often referred to as "the lungs of our planet", reactions frequently involved the negative impact the loss of the rainforest has on the rest of the planet. This negative impact includes the loss of biodiversity and the loss of the world's largest terrestrial carbon sink (The Guardian, 2019). For Brazil this creates a complex and particular debate, between protecting the forest for international environmental benefits, or burning it for its own economic benefits.

This is a very relevant current case in which economic development and environmental protection come face to face. The international sphere expects Brazil to protect the rainforest because the entire world benefits from its conservation. Whereas, on the other hand, the current Brazilian government and those in favor of the agricultural expansion are done limiting development for conservation. It is peculiar that many of the non-Brazilians fighting for the protection of the rainforest, themselves come from countries who have already burnt down most of its forest for development. Many countries with large and successful economies, such as the United States, have already burned down a large extent of its forests for agriculture (Rudel, 1998). Another example is France; the amount of agricultural land in France has been reported to be at 52% of the total land, whereas for Brazil

the amount of agricultural land was reported at 34% (Trading Economics, 2016). Though, a large amount of this deforestation across the globe occurred before the negative impacts on the climate were acknowledged, still the large amounts of land that have already been cleared for agriculture make further worldwide deforestation extra problematic.

In a way, the international sphere is making a claim on Brazilian land, suggesting that international concerns need to be taken into consideration in decisions concerning the development of the Amazonian Rainforest. Within this claim there seems to be an assumption that Brazil is incapable of being the sole entity to decide the future of its land. This possibly has some resemblance of colonialism, as colonialism and international intervention has often been legitimized by the belief that these countries could not take care of their land and resources themselves (Soomin & Shirley, 2009). Bolsonaro has indeed described international environmental NGOs as threatening the Brazilian sovereignty (The New York Times, 2019). This also seems comparable to more recent postcolonial critiques of international interventions aimed at spreading development, democracy or modernization as these are criticized for sustaining a Western hegemony (Omar, 2012).

Thus, the question arises whether environmentalism is possibly portraying similar imperialist tendencies. With increasing international attention and cooperation on climate related issues this question is very important. Furthermore, the debate between development and environment is also becoming increasingly relevant. Countries with smaller economies do not want to be left further behind by not being able to reach the same degree of industrialization and development due to environmental and sustainability regulations. Due to the complex relationship between development and the environment it is important that proposals to address global environmental degradation must take this relationship into account (Gonzalez, 2000). Decisions need to be made together with, and not for other countries, likewise for the case of the Amazonian Rainforest. If this is not done countries with who have been subject to imperialism, such as is the case for Brazil, might produce counterproductive reactions when international environmental concern is seen as a threat to national sovereignty.

Even before the current widespread international attention to climate issues, Gonzalez (2000, p. 1016) already expressed the need for environmental initiatives to be “*carefully scrutinized to reconcile trade and the environment in order to ensure that they promote environmental justice and do not merely reinforce Northern political and economic dominance*”. Therefore, using a postcolonial approach, this research aims to study current international reactions to Amazonian forest fires to examine the discourse for possible

imperialistic rhetoric. **The main question that this thesis aims to answer is whether current international environmentalist discourse points towards imperialist power relations.**

This question will be answered by conducting a case study, focusing firstly on international reactions to the Amazonian rainforest fires. Discourse from political sources, international institutions and NGOs will be examined through a critical discourse analysis. Additionally, this thesis will include Brazilian responses to the global concern over the Amazonian forest fires. Literature calls for the necessity to include local perspectives in global environmental initiatives and literature (Barca, 2014; Egan, 2002; Heatherington, 2010; Sen, 2009). Therefore, this thesis will also examine Brazilian sources for anti-imperialist discourse. Anti-imperialist discourse from Brazilian sources can help to further prove patterns of imperialism and in addition it can portray the possible counterproductive outcomes of current international environmentalism. The research aims to provide empirical evidence for ecological imperialism and discuss possible implications.

The thesis will start with an overview of the available literature. Foremost, it is essential to define the concepts of imperialism and ecological imperialism, as a part of the postcolonial approach this thesis takes on environmentalism. Following, the theory on ecological imperialism will be discussed. Unfortunately, the amount of literature on this specific topic is rather limited. Therefore, the theoretical overview will continue to discuss broader works on the topic of environmentalism and history relevant to the understanding of ecological imperialism. The theory discussed will be used for the analytical element of this thesis, in which international and Brazilian discourse will be analysed. A critical discourse analysis of these sources will be conducted which will result in the discussion whether international environmentalism had imperialist tendencies or not. This thesis will also shed light on the Brazilian reactions and the possible consequences this might have for future policies.

Literature Review

Postcolonialism & Imperialism

The terms colonialism, imperialism and postcolonialism are incredibly complex, offering various definitions. Postcolonialism is so complex because is not merely a disciplinary field, or a theory, it is a much broader approach aimed at shedding light on power structures and knowledge formations in which the West remains dominant (Young, 2012). As Young (2012, p. 20) describes it involves “*an interrelated set of critical and counterintuitive practices that have been developed out of traditions of resistance to a global historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism*”. It is concerned with remaining legacies of the past continuing into the experience of the present. The assumption is that global power structures have not changed entirely since the end of the imperial era and that there exists a continuous economic dominance of the north over the south, which then is the cause for injustices (Young, 2016). Postcolonialism addresses and criticizes the remaining hegemon of the Global North, or also often termed as the West and it is devoted to revisiting and remembering the colonial past (Gandhi, 2019, p. 44). Postcolonialism acts in order to make legacies and other invisible actors and perspectives visible so that injustices can be redressed (Young, 2012). The theory emanates from anticolonial writings, but now involves a broad range of perspectives from Marxism to post-structuralism (Prasad, 2003). Similar amongst all these different theories is the focus on explaining various historical and ongoing effects of Western imperialism (Khan & Lund-Thomsen, 2011).

The issue with defining colonialism and imperialism is that these terms are often used as if they are synonyms. Both of these terms address a form of dominance of one people over another. However, the type of dominance differs, and this explains why this paper uses the term ‘imperialism’ and not ‘colonialism. Different from colonialism which refers to the “implanting of settlements on a distant territory”, imperialism refers to the “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (Said, 1993, p. 9). Colonialism refers to an empire developed by individual communities or for commercial purposes by a trading company (Young, 2016). Colonialism is pragmatic and was usually developed locally. It refers to an activity on the periphery and is economically driven. Imperialism differs from colonialism as it is more of a concept rather than a practice. Imperialism refers to an empire controlled by a government from the center that is developed for ideological as well as financial reasons (Young, 2016). It is ideological and concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power. Imperialism is more concerned with power relations; it covers a wide range of relationships of domination and dependence. Thus, it is

generally used in modern postcolonialist critique in which the West is criticized for exerting dominance over the non-Western countries.

Originally, imperialism described a political system involved with actual conquest, but this is no longer necessarily the case. This has changed with the advancement of neocolonialism, which argues that even though the state is independent, its economic system and thus policy can still be directed from outside (Young, 2016). Imperialism has increasingly been used to refer to general (economic) domination rather than formal political dependence.

An important example of postcolonialist criticism is the disapproval of international developmental initiatives in the post-World War II period for being imperialist. This field of research previously disregarded local knowledge and practices and applied Western ideas of development universally (Karagiannis, 2004; Young, 2016). According to this approach the Global South was labelled as underdeveloped and initiatives for development, such as trade agreements, foreign aid and US-controlled organizations such as the World Bank had the effect of establishing and maintaining control (Omar, 2012; Young, 2016). This kept the newly independent states dependent on the more economically powerful Western states.

International developmental initiatives were framed as universal solutions for the problems of the developing world and there was little room and consideration for subaltern voices (Sylvester, 1999). This thesis questions whether similar trends might be occurring in modern environmentalist initiatives, and thus, whether there is a form of environmental imperialism evident in current ecological action and ideas.

Ecological Imperialism

Though the extent is still limited, some research does exist on the relation between environmentalism and imperialism. Commonly phrased as ecological imperialism, or eco-imperialism, several studies do predict a problematic relationship between (economic) development of the Global South, and international environmental policies mostly being formed and imposed by the Global North. Discourse related to eco-imperialism is gaining popularity (Nygren, 2013). It fits into a new form of ecocriticism, which combines critical theory and environmental sciences that has emerged in the 2000s (Slovic, 2010, p. 7).

Ecological imperialism stems from the idea that the field of environmental sciences can benefit from postcolonial theory (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007, p. 3). Research contends that environmental conservation is closely connected to postcolonialism as it was in colonized areas of the world that Europeans had first recognized the need for conservation methods (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007, p. 3). The argument holds that environmental literature may benefit

from drawing upon postcolonial theory and studying possible ongoing effects of imperialism. As previously explained imperialism differs from the term colonialism and thus eco-imperialism does not necessary refer to the direct settling in distant territories but is concerned with dominating attitudes possibly effecting a different territory. The postcolonial critique does not oppose itself against conservation in general, but calls attention to the problematic impact of conservation without local consultation and participation (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007, p. 5).

Eco-imperialism calls attention to the issue that the Global North presents itself as a leader in environmental protection, while also being the cause for most of the degradation (Gonzalez, 2000). In international efforts, proposals often aim to impose common environmental standards without addressing particular countries' more ecologically damaging behavior. The term eco-imperialism usually refers to the imposition of an ecological agenda on the Global South. However, Gonzalez (2000, p. 983) goes further in defining this term as "*the North's systematic and ongoing appropriation of the South's ecological resources*". Drawing a direct line between environmentalism and colonialism. Authors writing on the topic of eco-imperialism criticize environmental initiatives for reinforcing Northern political and economic dominance, rather than solely promoting environmental justice.

Soomin & Shirley (2009) include a similar critique in their opinion piece. According to them "climate change" and "resource protection" presents new ways in which the developed Global North seeks to control the resources of the less developed Global South. It is a relatively new terrain in which "western" ideas of what is fair, good and appropriate in matters of environmental policy can be imposed on the rest of the world (Soomin & Shirley, 2009, p. 849). Already since the 1990s the question was raised whether environmentalism portrayed similar patterns as the spreading of western ideology and norms during the Cold War, which was also criticized as being imperialist (Clark, 1993).

Instead of this focus on norms Scholtz (2008) writes about the idea of common heritage and resource exploitation. The idea of common heritage suggests that important global resources, such as the Amazon, may be declared the common heritage of humankind. According to Scholtz it is no coincidence that these global resources are mainly found within the Global South. This provides a clear example of eco-imperialism. States that have already depleted their own natural resources, now pressure other states with the obligation to protect their existing resources for future generations. The author describes this as a new form of neo-colonization and as possibly interfering with a states' sovereignty (Scholtz, 2008). Such a threat to a state's sovereignty presents a direct link to colonial times, when the colonizers

determined what would happen with the colony's land. Eco-imperialism does not argue that there is a complete disregard of a state's sovereignty. Nonetheless, pressuring a state to use their land in a way that is in accordance with the more dominant state's ideal presents a partially similar type of interference with sovereignty.

The focus of the existing research on eco-imperialism might vary but it all holds the same postcolonial argument that local populations are neglected in projects of conservation and sustainability (Sen, 2009). This neglect holds the assumption that the North is more advanced, and solutions to environmental degradation become exclusive and imposed (Sluyter, 2002). There is a clear call for more local participation, and attention directed at the relationship between colonial power relationships and environmental conservation.

Environmental History

Though direct literature on ecological imperialism is limited, numerous authors have argued for more local and inclusive perspectives to environmentalism, especially in the field of environmental history. Barca (2014) focusses on the dynamics between labor and the environment, yet her conclusions are relevant for this research. Barca argues that sustainability policies need to consider local labor and the working class. This is relevant to our case as it concludes that sustainability policies should not be top-down imposed but need to include local narratives. Barca claims that it needs to be understood that local labor has historically mostly been concerned with economic growth, and therefore might not immediately recognize the importance of environmental conservation. This is contradictory to a possible Western dominant perception that particular environments “*need to be protected from work*” (Barca, 2014, p. 9) This is directly applicable to the Amazon which, according to the common international reaction, needs to be protected from unsustainable agriculture. Whether this is accurate or not, according to Barca this perception disregards local labor and their economic concerns. Barca's answer to this problem suggests bringing the right to a voice and possibly compensation to labor that is dependent on the environment that needs to be conserved.

Heatherington's (2010) research is more closely connected to the postcolonialist approach of ecological imperialism. Her work focusses specifically on the case of Sardinia in which residents of Orgosolo struggle with the formation of a national park. Heatherington claims that environmentalism does have a universalistic pretention and that there is a dominant model of global sustainability coming from NGOs such as the WWF. With the analysis of the case of Orgosolo, Heatherington concludes that a dominant global

environmentalism and its values subordinates the needs and sovereignty of smaller groups. The case analyzed presents similarities to the case of Brazil discussed in this thesis. In Sardinia the local culture of land-managing came into conflict with policies advocated by global environmentalism. Local people are said to have become suspicious of international conservation programs that claim the necessity of conservation for some larger interest from which they are excluded (Heatherington, 2010).

Numerous other sources argue for the need for the subaltern voice to be included in environmental history and policies (Dawson, 2017; Egan, 2002; Sen, 2009). Though this literature focusses on different aspects of the relationship between power, people and the environment, the over-arching consensus, which supports the aims of this research, is that environmental history and policies can benefit from including insights in power relations, local narratives and culture. For this thesis it is especially relevant to apply postcolonial theory to our case of environmentalism. Postcolonialism places power relationships at the center of analysis and therefore sheds light on economic and developmentalist issues that are often intertwined with environmental ones (Sen, 2009). As previously described, the debate around the Amazon forest fires exemplifies this interwovenness, and therefore specifically ecological imperialism, and not solely environmental history, is applied as a theoretical background in this thesis.

The Case of Brazil and its Amazonian Rainforest

The Global concern over the Amazon stems from the fact that this rainforest is essential for the biodiversity of the world and its devastation can negatively affect climate change (de Area Leão Pereira, Silveira Ferreira, de Santana Ribeiro, Sabadini Carvalho, & de Barros Pereira, 2019). It is estimated to be home to about a quarter of all animal and plant species. Deforestation of such a large rainforest can affect the water cycle, influencing rainfall in a large region and can significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions (de Area Leão Pereira et al., 2019).

In the case of the Brazilian rainforest, deforestation, as a part of Brazilian development, was once actually met with excitement in the 1970s in the New York Times. A major shift in international public opinion occurred and in the 1980s after growing awareness of the importance of the forest for the international climate (Barbosa, 1993). Excitement was replaced with concern. This sudden lack of support for Amazonian development meant Brazil had to defend itself. Already in the 1980s the Brazilian government labeled the international call for preservation as an attempt to violate its sovereignty over the Amazon. Previously the

Brazilian government had even received economic support that subsidized the destruction of the Amazon and now suddenly the deforestation was no longer accepted internationally. In a way the deforestation was financed by the countries that are now condemning it (Barbosa, 1993).

Still deforestation continued, and Brazil was the country with the highest amount of deforestation between 1996 and 2005 (de Area Leão Pereira et al., 2019). This deforestation is connected to the expansion of Brazil's agricultural sector. Brazil now produces an estimated 30% of the world's soy and 15% of its beef, and this land has often come at the expense of forests (Stabile et al., 2020). However, in 2004 the Brazilian government started to commit itself to reducing deforestation. Up until 2012 the country saw a great reduction in the amount of forest that was being cleared. Despite these efforts, this reduction did not remain consistent and ever since 2012 the amount of deforestation has increased again, with especially sharp increases measured ever since Bolsonaro came into office in 2018 (Stabile et al., 2020).

Bolsonaro has criticized Brazil's environmental policies for being biased against agriculture and economic development (Escobar, 2019). As previously mentioned, when discussing international environmentalism Bolsonaro has criticized these initiatives for being a threat to Brazil's national sovereignty (The New York Times, 2019). This has led to policy changes that facilitate the expansion of the agricultural sector. The local opinion on these political changes varies greatly. This can vary per region, Kröger (2020) describes how there are regions in which the majority sees deforestation as a destruction of prior lifestyles and nature. However, in other regions the majority perceives opposing deforestation as standing in the way of progress and economic productivity.

What is noticeable from this brief overview of Brazil's relationship with the international environmentalist community and the Amazon rainforest, is the recurrence of the issue of 'sovereignty'. Sovereignty and independence are key issues in Brazilian politics and in Latin America in general (Almeida, 2013; Miller, 2006, p. 205). A complex history of European colonialism, and the rising influence of the United States as a dominant power in the 20th century are factors that explain the strict adherence to national sovereignty in Latin America (Almeida, 2013, p. 473). This fear of losing the power to make autonomous decisions can also inhibit international cooperation. This has also been the case for Brazil where presidents before Bolsonaro have already complained that Brazil is too submissive to foreign powers (Almeida, 2013, pp. 488–489). Often, international law is not used for deepening cooperation, but to preserve national sovereignty (Almeida, 2013, p. 472).

This thesis presents an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between Brazil and international action on the topic of conservation. Existent literature on eco-imperialism is often more opinion-based and lacks comprehensive studies with actual empirical evidence on this matter. The term ‘ecological imperialism’ has been covered in literature since the 1990s, but it does not play a significant role in more current literature. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent it is a significant concern for this present day.

Current literature also often lacks a comprehensive theoretical background on imperialism and its connection to environmentalism. Thus, it is unclear which aspects specifically make environmental policy or discourse imperialist and does not apply this theory to distinguished cases. This limits the representability of this writing. In order to detect imperialist discourse and discuss its implications it is important to define imperialism and to determine how it can be distinguished. Therefore, in addition to finding empirical evidence for eco-imperialism, this thesis provides a stronger theoretical backing on the subject of imperialism, leading up to eco-imperialism.

Furthermore, the literature does not include the reactions from within the countries subject to this possible eco-imperialism. The majority of ecocritical studies still speak on behalf of the Global South and subalternized communities rather than actually including their views and voices (Slovic, Rangarajan, & Sarveswaran, 2015, p. 6) Including the reactions from within these countries can provide further evidence for the existence of an imperial discourse and can further generate the argument for possible counterproductive effects of current environmental protection initiatives.

Altogether, clear gaps are located in the available literature. The existence, theory and the applicability of ecological imperialism have not comprehensively been established. As this research lays its focus on the recent case of deforestation in the Amazon it cannot necessarily present a representable outcome for the worldwide existence or non-existence of ecological imperialism. However, it can present a start of a better understanding of this matter that can inspire future research and policy.

Research Design and Methodology

This research aims to provide a more comprehensive overview of the meaning of ecological imperialism by supplementing theory with empirical evidence. It is focused on observing both the existence of eco-imperialism in international discourse, and the local response for the case of the Brazilian Amazon forest fires in late 2019. Thus, a within-case research design is used.

The analysis will determine whether, for the case of the rainforest in Brazil, discourse can be detected suggesting the presence of ecological imperialism. In addition, it will be studied whether there is evidence of an anti-imperialist discourse coming from Brazil, arguing against international interference, possibly in favor of economic development and against the protection of the rainforest. As the analysis only applies one theory, inferences on the causal relationships between the international and Brazilian discourse will be limited. However, as current research on this matter is so limited it is still incredibly relevant to provide an in-depth analysis of the case and the theory. This can still provide significant insights and stimulate future research on this matter.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The study of language has become increasingly prominent in international relations literature (Hansen, 2014, p. 172). Analyzing discourse can help understand the world and underlying dynamics. Language-use can provide insight in how powerful actors make sense of global issues, and construct reality. Specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis has proven to be a relevant tool to examine linguistic properties of texts to reveal underlying power relations (Van Dijk, 1993). It distinguishes itself as a tool of analysis specifically aimed at addressing inequalities in these power relations (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 252).

Eco-imperialism argues that certain dynamics exist in modern environmentalism that resemble postcolonial power relations. Critical discourse analysis can help reveal such dynamics in discourse used by prominent actors involved in international environmental language. In addition, the analysis can show how the discourse shapes political behavior. Thus, critical discourse can help identify power relations related to imperialism in environmentalism and accordingly, connect this to the political reaction in Brazil.

In order to achieve this, this thesis distinguishes three categories of discourse through which the sources will be analyzed. These categories build upon the literature review. The literature on ecological imperialism criticizes global environmentalism for making claims on or decisions over land that is not theirs. For example this refers to what Scholtz (2008)

explained on common heritage and how nature in the Global South is often deemed as global heritage and thus belonging to everyone. Thus, the analysis will focus on how the discourse describes the Amazon. Is it described as Brazil's forest or the lungs of our planet? Secondly, both the postcolonial and general historical literature on environmentalism emphasize the need to understand localities. For the case of the Amazon this can, for example, mean that deforestation is not only destruction, but for local farmers it can also be a means of economic development. Finally, this local inclusion needs to also be reflected in the proposed solution. Do suggested initiatives include Brazil, its citizens and government, or could it be perceived as imposed?

Text Selection

This research will use primary sources involving information and/or persuasive language on the topic of fires in the Brazilian Amazonian rainforest. The research will consist of two main elements. The first being the analysis of international discourse, i.e. sources coming from outside of Brazil, on the Brazilian forest fires. Secondly, the analysis includes translated discourse coming from Brazil.

For the international response sources from both governmental and non-governmental actors will be analyzed. The choice for these actors is based on the fact that they are large, well-known institutions and organizations that are active in matters of international environmentalism. The variety in both governmental and non-governmental actors is included to account for the different purposes a source can have. For example, documents from NGOs might be more likely to include environmental initiatives and thus the discourse used might be influenced by its purpose. Instead of solely presenting information on the rainforest fires the NGOs' discourse probably includes some type of a call for action. This could influence the content as it might create stronger incentives to persuade people into protective action, by for example emphasizing the connection between the world and the Amazon. NGOs rely on their funders, thus regardless of their intentions, their discourse might be affected by their need to raise money. Discourse from governmental and non-governmental actors will be compared separately.

In order to prevent or at least limit possible bias it is important that these sources represent a truly international perspective, and not just that of a few dominant countries. However, as the focus is on finding proof for ecological imperialism, a bias towards sources from more 'Western' countries is not necessarily problematic and thus the analysis includes only sources written in English. Ecological imperialism is focused on the dominance of these

“western” regions of the Global North. Though, it is important that the sources represent the international discourse and therefore discourse from international institutions will be included. This means that discourse from international political institutions will be analyzed namely: sources from the United Nations, the European Union.

The choice of NGOs included is also based on to what extent these NGOs could represent a dominant international discourse. Therefore, the analysis includes larger NGOs that are recognized internationally and include action for conservation in their programs namely: The WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), Greenpeace and Conservation International. Each of these organizations has a clear international focus and are active in between 50 and over 100 different countries (Conservation International, 2019; Greenpeace, 2019; World Wildlife Fund, 2017). As discussed in the literature Heatherington (2010) criticizes the WWF for having a universalistic pretention and enforcing a dominant model of global sustainability. This thesis aims to find further proof for this claim in the WWF’s discourse and increases its representability by also including the other prominent international environmental NGOs. There is however some overlap between the governmental and non-governmental sources, as, for example, Harrison Ford is a board member of Conservation International, but he has also spoken at the General Assembly of the UN. This should be kept in mind when comparing the variety of sources.

The analysis of the Brazilian response will focus on a more limited scope of sources from different levels of society including both governmental and non-governmental sources. The number of Brazilian sources is limited due to a language barrier, but this does not have large implications for the research. The main purpose of the research is to find evidence of international eco-imperialism. Therefore, this part of the analysis can be less comprehensive. However still the Brazilian response is important to include when discussing implications of the current international discourse and thus a limited number of sources that are translated to English are included. The analysis only relies on sources that have already been translated by the source itself and has not performed any own translations. As already stated, the inferences between international and local responses will have to be limited, but still the Brazilian response can suggest possible implications and lay the foundation for future research on this matter.

The analysis has a specific timeframe, namely August 2019 until the end of 2019 in December. The analysis can clearly start in August as this was the first time that the forest fires had reached international attention in this year. This started the large concerned international response. In the months that followed new data from NASA, and Brazil was

published, keeping it a matter of international concern and ensuring both local and international responses. Therefore, the responses will be followed up to and including December. This will provide the most comprehensive analysis possible and also allow to track whether reactions have changed over time.

International Analysis

As is described in the methodology, the analysis consists of two sections, the international, and the Brazilian response to the forest fires in the Amazon in 2019. The analysis of international response is split into two categories, namely the analysis of governmental, and that of non-governmental sources. The texts are examined for noticeable discourse on the three aspects of potential imperialist discourse explained in the methodology. Namely, whether the discourse claims the Amazon, or presents it as common heritage, whether local perspectives on the problem are described and whether solutions provided are inclusive towards the Brazilian people and/or government.

Governmental Sources

The governmental sources consist of news, press releases and briefings from the United Nations and the European. Both of these organizations have published discourse expressing their concerns with the wildfires in the Amazon in the fall of 2019. In general, both of these actors described the situation as highly problematic and they all agreed that action was needed to bring a halt to the fires.

The Amazon as Common Heritage

In the initial reporting the United Nations' discourse did not make a strong claim on the land of the Amazon. In the reports published in August the forest was not described as "*our forest*" or anything in that direction. When expressing concern over the fires in August sources from the UN even stated that not only the Amazon is important but that the "*international community recognizes the importance of all forests for the health of the entire world*" (United Nations, 2019a). Although, when the UN spokesperson continue to specify which forests were of importance, het mentioned the Amazon, the forests in the Congo basin and forests in Indonesia, these are all forests in the Global South (United Nations, 2019a).

The discourse changed in September when Michelle Bachelet, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, described the Amazon fires as "*literally burning up our future*" (United Nations, 2019c), establishing a stronger global connection to the rainforest. The UN Secretary used a similar discourse a few weeks later, stating that "*our world's forests are on fire*", that "*these are not localized disasters but part of a global threat*", and finally that "*we will not overcome the climate emergency without safeguarding our planet's very lungs*" (United Nations, 2019d). Though not directly making a claim on Brazilian land, this does establish the Amazon wildfires as a global problem, and the conservation of the forest as a global good, necessary for the future of the planet.

The UN's strongest discourse suggesting that the Amazon is common heritage comes from a speech at the UN Climate Action Summit, from Harrison Ford, vice-chair of the NGO Conservation International. When speaking about the Amazon fires Harrison Ford declared that "*if a room in your house is on fire, your house is on fire, and we only have one house ... We need to protect what we have; we need to restore what we have lost*" (United Nations, 2019e). Thus, according to Ford the Amazon rainforest is something that we all have, he presents it as a global property.

The European Union's sources do not include discourse that present the Amazon as a global good. Contrary to the UN's discourse, in an extensive briefing on the Amazon Wildfire Crisis from the European Parliamentary Research Service included concerns over sovereignty stating that "*although Amazonia is widely recognized as a public good for the whole planet, some countries may see international action as interfering with their national sovereignty over territories*" (European Union, 2019c). However, in the same text the briefing went on to describe that experts do advise that the Amazon with its biological assets should be considered as a "*global public good*" (European Union, 2019c). Nevertheless, the source continues to describe the need for cooperation between countries, and thus it remains unclear whether the EU Parliament agrees with the experts on making the Amazon a common heritage.

Though there is some variance between the above-mentioned sources, in general the international institutions' discourse did not contain strong claims on the Amazon rainforest. Especially the EU mentioned the importance of the Amazon, not just as a global good, but also for local communities. Discourse from the EU even acknowledged the potential for international action to be interpreted as a threat to national sovereignty.

Local Problem-setting and Information

The sources from the UN barely contained any local information on the fires in Brazil. None of the texts describe why the farmers are burning pieces of the forest and there is no mentioning of the debate between development and conservation in Brazil's agricultural sector. Sources from the UN do describe the negative impact the fires can have on local families and farmers (United Nations, 2019c, 2019d), but there is no further context given on local dynamics and problem-setting. The UN does call for global action, in doing so placing pressure on the Brazilian government, but in its reporting barely includes information on what exactly is going on in Brazil. Barely any of the context discussed in the literature review is included. There is no mentioning of local farmers who believe they have the right to deforest the Amazon for economic productivity. The reports do include brief bits of

information on why the Amazon is important globally, but no local considerations are taken into account for the future of the Amazon.

On the contrary, the EU does provide a much more nuanced understanding of the problem with the fires in Brazil. Such information is included in the more extensive briefing, but also in a shorter text, as the European Parliament states that “*the recent forest fires in the Amazon highlight the need for greater measures worldwide to attenuate tensions between resource needs, for example mining or grazing, that cause deforestation*” (European Union, 2019a). The EU addresses how deforestation is not only destruction but can be motivated by resource need and economic incentives. In the more extensive briefing, the EU explains how local political changes, such as Bolsonaro coming to power have played a role in the sharp increase in the amount of fires (European Union, 2019c). This text even provides not only a local, but also a more inclusive approach to the problem by explaining that “*international market demand leads to intensive use of Amazonian natural resources ... that promotes an unsustainable production model*”. This provides a deeper understanding of the problem, also recognizing international blame, and not only pointing towards Brazil for being in the wrong. Finally, the EU’s briefing continues to discuss the large role that criminal activity plays in the forest fires in Brazil, explaining that criminal networks are active in clearing the forest for agriculture, making this illegal process difficult to tackle (European Union, 2019c).

These different international organizations show great variance in the extent of information and local problem-setting provided. Whereas the UN barely discussed the complexity of the problem, the EU provided a much deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issues at stake. What is important to keep in mind, is that during the time of the publication of the European Parliament’s briefing the EU was negotiating a trade deal with Mercosur, a Latin American regional organization, of which Brazil is a prominent member (European Union, 2019a). This could possibly explain the large differences in discourse between the EU and the UN as the EU might be motivated to ensure the continuation of this trade deal.

Presenting an Inclusive Solution

The solutions presented by the UN mainly revolve around contact between countries. In August discussions started between countries to get the topic of deforestation on the agenda for the General Assembly in September (United Nations, 2019b). As Brazil is also a member of the UN, the government was included in such discussions. This indeed led to an “Alliance for Rainforests Event” at the General Assembly (United Nations, 2019d). The discourse on halting deforestation and fires in the Amazon did involve a more inclusive

perspective, stating that “*we must change the way we farm and rebalance the global food system by growing food without destroying large tracts of forest*” and that “*restoring degraded lands means better lives and income for farmers and herders, and less pressure to migrate to cities*” (United Nations, 2019d). These presented solutions acknowledge the complexity of the issue and include effects on the local population. Furthermore, at the General Assembly, Harrison Ford discusses the money that France, and the UN will donate, expressing that this money needs to go to civil society and indigenous people, which again hints at ensuring local participation in proposed solutions (United Nations, 2019e). However, as will be discussed later in this analysis, the Brazilian government did not necessarily welcome this action and these donations with open arms. Therefore, still it can be questioned whether the solutions were really that inclusive towards Brazil.

Similar to the problem-setting, when discussing solutions, the EU has included far more context and local considerations. As previously explained the European Union was negotiating a deal with Mercosur, but this trade deal received a lot of critique due to concerns over deforestation of the Amazon. Halting negotiations is seen as a way to force compliance with climate commitments, however the EU describes how this can have adverse effects and potentially penalize other sectors or countries that are not responsible for the deforestation (European Union, 2019a). Instead the European Commission chooses to use the trade deal to foster change through constructive political dialogue (European Union, 2019a). This does involve discourse focusing on working with Brazil, and not on imposing the European Union’s climate goals on Latin America. In the same text it is even proposed that the EU could influence a beneficiary for the protection of forests, in which is invested in sustainable development and good governance. Furthermore, again international responsibility is discussed, by mentioning consumer behavior and corporate social responsibility (European Union, 2019a). Thus, the EU does not expect to impose certain rules and regulations on Brazil, rather it mentions options on how to stimulate good forest management and is reflective on how the international community can change its own behavior to ensure sustainable forest management.

Though it is unclear to what extent the EU is focused on inclusivity towards Brazil and Latin America, or whether it is more concerned with the future of its trade deal. Still in the more extensive briefing in November the EU continued to address local considerations when proposing solutions to the deforestation of the Amazon. For example, the text emphasizes that the solution to deforestation “*requires that the underlying causes are addressed, and further action is taken at both national and international levels*” and

numerous times “*cooperation with Mercosur countries*” is mentioned in this text (European Union, 2019c). The briefing also mentions local action and regional agreements made such as the ‘Leticia Pact for Amazonia’, in which the governments of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru and Suriname agreed on action to end devastation of the region’s biodiversity (European Union, 2019c). However, the text does mention critique on whether this agreement is solely a declaration of intent, or whether it will actually help to save the rainforest. Thus, there is some room for questioning whether the local governments are capable of protecting their forests without further international intervention.

Finally, what is interesting is that again the EU does describe Bolsonaro’s concerns with international action taken. When describing the previously mentioned donations pledged by the UN and France the EU’s briefing describes how “*Bolsonaro implied that accepting this aid would amount to putting Brazil’s sovereignty over its Amazonian territories into question*” (European Union, 2019c). Though the text includes discourse questioning Brazil’s capability to protect its own forest, this is somewhat balanced by mentioning how international action could be perceived as a threat to sovereignty. In the conclusion the proposed solutions do revolve around cooperation between countries and stakeholders, which does point towards an inclusive solution.

Overall the United Nations and the European Union vary in terms of the extent of discourse that points towards imperialist power relations. The extent of direct claims on the land of the Amazon, i.e. describing the forest as “ours” or “our lungs” is limited, and the EU provides more nuanced information in which local perspectives and inclusive solutions are provided. However, the UN does present a much more simplified image of the problem, in which only concerns over biodiversity and climate change are included.

Non-Governmental Sources

The non-governmental sources include the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Greenpeace and Conservation International. These are all large-scale international NGOs that actively spoke out against the fires in the Amazon in 2019. News releases, and further publications on their websites are analyzed in this section.

The Amazon as Common Heritage

Throughout the different texts analyzed the WWF uses much more emotionally loaded text when discussing the Amazon. In this discourse the Amazon is often described as a global good. Examples include “*as one of the world’s most iconic forests burns*” (WWF, 2019a), “*the world’s largest tropical forest*” (WWF, 2019b), “*there is a clear link between*

the health of the Amazon and the health of the planet” (WWF, 2019c). Though not literally calling it “our forest” the Amazon is continuously described as the world’s forest. As if it is a global good. When expressing concerns over deforestation this is described as “*losing more of the forest*” (WWF, 2019c), which insinuates that it is our, and not only South America’s, forest to lose.

In addition, conservation of the Amazon is often presented as the key goal in order to protect the planet from climate change. Greenpeace states that “*We can’t protect the climate without the Amazon*” (Greenpeace, 2019b). Of course, indeed the Amazon has a large impact on the climate, of a large part of our world. However, there are other large forests in the world, or potential areas for reforestation. Thus, such strong discourse focusing on the Amazon presents a sort of power relationship in which it is expected that the Amazon is conserved for the global good.

Furthermore, Greenpeace does mention Bolsonaro’s critique on the international environmentalist action. However, these critiques are completely discredited stating on the topic of Bolsonaro that “*He distorts the concept of national sovereignty to justify his agenda of destruction of the Amazon ... Sovereignty means having a national responsibility to ensure the protection of Brazil’s greatest environmental heritage*” (Greenpeace, 2019d). Thus, Brazil’s concerns over sovereignty are completely discredited. Rather than letting the government create its own course of action, there is a global policy of conservation that needs to be enforced. The discourse directly labels the amazon as “*environmental heritage*”. This contains underlying power dynamics as it is expected that Brazil follows what the international community wants and that it places the global good over its own sovereignty.

As previously described Harrison Ford, as a part of the organization Conservation International, spoke at the UN General Assembly in September 2019. In his speech he made a direct claim on Brazilian land, stating that “*our house is on fire*”, clearly establishing a global connection with the Amazon. However, in further discourse coming from Conservation International there was no language found that made a claim on the Amazon or presented it as a global heritage. It expresses less emotional concern than the WWF and Greenpeace, e.g. it does not state that we are “*losing our world’s largest rainforest*” or something similar.

Thus, in comparison to the governmental actors, in general the non-governmental organizations do express a stronger connection with the Amazon in which it often is described as a global good, or common heritage. However, the written discourse from Conservation International available on their website was an exception. A final interesting remark is that when looking through the websites of these organizations it is noticeable that all three of these

NGOs mainly operate in the Global South (Conservation International, 2019; Greenpeace, 2019; World Wildlife Fund, 2017). This is predicted in the literature by Scholtz (2008) and it does bear resemblance to imperialist power relations, as only nature in the Global South seems to be in need of protection.

Local Problem-Setting and Information

What is common for most of the sources analyzed, is that they mostly include extensive information on the dangers of deforestation and climate change, but very little information on the causes of deforestation and the local situation. The WWF's discourse is no exception. The organization does recognize that the fires are used for deforestation to prepare land for agriculture but is mainly concerned with the illegality of this matter (WWF, 2019c).

The only local concern that is thoroughly discussed is the state of indigenous people. The impact of the fires on these indigenous communities was emphasized (WWF, 2019c). This does provide a more local perspective to the problem, not only expressing concern over the global loss of biodiversity and climate change, but also bringing attention to local people struggling due to these fires. However, when discussing Bolsonaro the WWF does argue that he is "*diverting the focus of attention from what really matters: the well-being of nature and the people of the Amazon*" (WWF, 2019b). Though the concern over the local participation might generate a more local perspective, it does completely discredit other possible concerns. It does not consider Brazil's history and assumes that Bolsonaro's concerns over sovereignty and imperialism are merely a tactic for diversion, without addressing these concerns or explaining why this is just a political tactic. Thus, it is unclear whether the WWF can legitimately claim that Bolsonaro is diverting attention from what really matters, or if the WWF assumes that they are more capable in determining what is best for the Amazon.

A similar argument can be made for Greenpeace's discourse. At the UN general assembly Bolsonaro held a speech in which he expressed concerns over sovereignty in matters of international environmentalist action, this speech will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter of this thesis. When discussing this speech, a source from Greenpeace state that "*in his opening statement to the United Nations General Assembly last Tuesday, President Jair Bolsonaro chose to continue distorting the narrative about the environmental social crises*" (Greenpeace, 2019d). Bolsonaro's concerns over sovereignty, or Brazil's history with colonialism and imperialism were not mentioned at all. Thus, again it remains unclear whether it is justified that Greenpeace claims that Bolsonaro's concerns were merely a diversion. A local perspective on sovereignty and possible imperialist considerations is not included.

Finally, Conservation International has published a similar discourse. When including a local perspective, the focus is mainly on the negative impact President Bolsonaro has had on the Brazilian environment (Conservation International, 2019a, 2019b). However, in contrast to the previously analyzed texts, Conservation International does discuss more local initiatives that have successfully combatted deforestation. Though, these local initiatives are mostly found in the other Amazon countries. When discussing Brazil, it is solely negative on Bolsonaro and his political decisions.

What is interesting is that when discussing local problem-setting, the NGO's texts include much stronger discourse in which it directly opposes Bolsonaro and his policies. It is especially noticeable that these organizations completely disregard Bolsonaro's concern over Brazil's sovereignty. Furthermore, similar to the governmental sources, there is limited information on the exact reasons and cases of deforestation, more text is devoted to describing biological and climate related issues of the fires. The developmental aspect of Bolsonaro's policies and the deforestation is not mentioned.

Presenting an Inclusive Solution

The WWF's amount of discourse devoted to solutions to the fires is limited, however two strategies can be distinguished. The first involves pressuring the governments involved into changing their environmental policies. As is stated in the WWF's statement on the forest fires in the Amazon "*WWF calls on the countries of the region ... to protect the Amazon, fight deforestation and reduce the causes behind these fires*" (WWF, 2019b). Specifically, regarding Brazil, the WWF asserts that "*Deforestation is simply unacceptable, but the damage can be undone if Brazil's government steps up and ends illegal clearing in the region*" (WWF, 2019e). What is noticeable is that, in contrast to some of the discourse from governmental actors, the WWF does not describe the intention of a conversation or discussion with the government of Brazil. Rather the organization's discourse reads more like an imposition of their plans for conservation. Brazil does not seem to be included in these plans.

The second strategy against the forest fires does present a more inclusive solution. The WWF has developed an emergency fund to provide resources to fight the fires (WWF, 2019c). When describing this fund, the WWF consistently declares that this money will go to "*the people at the front lines of the Amazon fires, specifically to local civil society organizations that represent and work with indigenous peoples and local communities to protect the Amazon*" (WWF, 2019d). This can ensure a more inclusive approach to conservation, in which it is not imposed on locals, but in which it is achieved through

cooperation. Finally, the WWF does briefly recognize the need to promote sustainable livelihoods for small agricultural producers, acknowledging that their livelihood depends on using forest fires to expand their land (WWF, 2019b). However, this is only mentioned in one sentence in one article, and thus it is somewhat unclear what their exact intention is on this matter.

Greenpeace also discusses different strategies for Amazon conservation in its publications. Firstly, Greenpeace calls on major fast-food chains to “*reject goods linked to environmental destruction in the Amazon and across Brazil*” (Greenpeace, 2019b). This boycott is supposed to put pressure on Bolsonaro to change his environmental agenda. In addition, Greenpeace advises individuals to eat less meat and dairy (Greenpeace, 2019b). This solution is somewhat inclusive as it does not only expect change from Brazil but also holds international consumerism accountable. However, there is no information on the possible negative economic impacts of such a boycott on local farmers in Brazil. There is no financial stimulation proposed for sustainable farming, only a boycott against existing farmers in the Amazonian region. Thus, local concern and inclusion is very limited. In addition, Greenpeace does aim to place pressure on the Brazilian government. Nonetheless, in a different piece of writing Greenpeace does not only exclusively call out Bolsonaro, but also emphasizes that presidents such as Donald Trump “*are part of the problem and the world needs leaders that are pushing for real solutions not more climate deniers*” (Greenpeace, 2019c). This discourse is more inclusive, as it not only focused on changing environmental policy in the Global South.

Conservation International has not written much on solutions to the fires in the Amazon. Harrison Ford did discuss the previously mentioned large donations promised at the UN General Assembly, but there is not further reporting on this matter. In addition, Conservation International does express the intention to apply “*international pressure on the Brazilian government to take action*” (Conservation International, 2019b). Though the discourse is limited, it does suggest the imposition of the international environmentalist agenda as it does not mention a conversation with the Brazilian government, and solely discusses the intention to apply pressure.

It is noticeable that none of the NGOs mention the intention to start a conversation with Brazil, not with its government nor with the local population. The organizations do seem to use the strategy of pressuring the government, which does hold the underlying meaning that these organizations have the power and right to apply such pressure. Indeed, it does suggest that the NGOs are better capable of managing Brazilian land. On the other hand,

when discussing donations and funding these organizations do often mention the cooperation with indigenous communities and other local people to ensure the successful conservation of the Amazon.

In general, the NGOs present a much less nuanced position on the fires in the Amazon. The organizations make numerous emotional claims on the land, stating that we are losing “our” most iconic forest. Also, the organizations are much more pronounced in their intentions to pressure the Brazilian government for change. Furthermore, the organizations completely disregard Bolsonaro’s concerns over Brazil’s sovereignty. Finally, similar to the UN’s discourse, the organizations include very little local information except for information about the climate or Amazon’s biodiversity. All in all, these texts could therefore be perceived as to hold underlying imperialist power relations.

Brazilian Analysis

Evidently, there is not one single Brazilian opinion on the future of the Amazon. As any other country, Brazil consists of governmental actors, businesses, organizations and the general population, who can all hold different opinions on this matter. Therefore, this thesis does not claim to include a comprehensive Brazilian perspective. Rather, it aims to include some Brazilian discourse in order to account for possible differences between national and international discourse. This section of the thesis only includes limited sources from governmental and non-governmental actors.

Bolsonaro

The Brazilian government has been rather outspoken on this issue, especially the President. On the 24th of September, Bolsonaro held a speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations. A large portion of this speech was devoted to the issue of the Amazon. He was very clear in labeling the international response to the fires in the Amazon as colonialist. Stating that *“It is a fallacy to say that the Amazon is the heritage of humanity and a misconception, as scientists say, to say our forest is the lungs of the world. Resorting to these fallacies, some countries, instead of helping, have followed the lies of the media and behaved disrespectfully, with a colonialist spirit. They have questioned what is most sacred to us: our sovereignty!”* (Bolsonaro, 2019). According to Bolsonaro the international response to the fires was definitely imperialist, and he speaks out against the idea of the Amazon as common heritage. An argument that he provides is that *“we cannot forget that the world must be fed. France and Germany, for instance, use more than 50% of their territories for agriculture, while Brazil uses merely 8% of its lands for the production of food – 61% of our territory is preserved”* (Bolsonaro, 2019). Though Bolsonaro is not known for always telling the truth and in this case the 8% seems to be incorrect (2016 research estimates that about 30% of Brazil’s land is used for agriculture), the rest of these numbers can be backed by sources (Trading Economics, 2016). In this statement Bolsonaro is concerned with the hypocrisy of countries calling for conservation of the Amazon who have already turned so much of their own land into fields for agriculture. He suggests that the fires are not necessarily a global crisis, but also partially portray Brazil’s right to develop its own land.

He does not only criticize the response to the fires but also the proposed solutions stating that it was suggested to impose sanctions against Brazil without even speaking to them first (Bolsonaro, 2019). In addition, Bolsonaro criticizes the focus on indigenous people by NGOs and foreign governments. Bolsonaro argues that they present a narrow perspective of indigenous people to use them as a pawn for their own interests. According to him *“the*

indigenous peoples do not want to be poor landowners on top of rich lands” but that they want economic autonomy and development (Bolsonaro, 2019). Indeed, the NGOs analyzed often focused on protecting the indigenous people of the Amazon. They did provide limited information on these people, and thus questions remain whether their image of indigenous people is limited and holding them back from development. Or whether Bolsonaro is incorrect in stating that indigenous people want development. When looking at the literature Kröger (2020) does describe the existence of both of these opinions in Amazonian regions. Perhaps both of these sources present a narrow perspective of the diversity of indigenous people.

Bolsonaro clearly denounces the exclusiveness of international solutions and demands that *“any initiative for assistance or support to the preservation of the Amazon Rainforest ... must be conducted in full respect to Brazilian sovereignty”* (Bolsonaro, 2019). He continues to emphasize that Brazil is willing to embrace sustainability, as long as this is done in partnership. As is predicted in literature, Bolsonaro seems to use international law to preserve national sovereignty (Almeida, 2013).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a document in response to international initiatives for environmental funding. This press release was published on August 26, which was when international initiatives started pledging funding to bring a halt to the fires in the Amazon. The main argument in this document is that these new initiatives for funding are redundant and considerably below existing international commitments that have not yet been met. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs *“several instruments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are already available, with a view to finance deforestation reduction and reforestation activities”* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The press release continues to mention several existent initiatives that should have already led to billions of dollars in funding for Brazil, but these promised funds have yet to be fulfilled. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests that the international community engages in discussions with the UNFCCC instead of launching new initiatives without Brazil’s consultation. In addition, again, the government state that these new initiatives include threats to the national sovereignty. Hence, the ministry states that:

“Brazil is ready to move forward as a full sovereign nation, in accordance with the international instruments that we are party to and with our own environmental policy, implementing concrete actions to combat deforestation and forest degradation, particularly in the Amazon region” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

The discourse provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in line with Bolsonaro's speech. The government emphasizes the need to work with initiatives in which Brazil is already included, rather than creating new ones. Such new initiatives are perceived as imperialist as they try to impose environmental policy on Brazil without including its government.

NGO: Imazon

The discourse found from the Brazilian NGO Imazon is much more similar to the international discourse. The NGO expresses far more concern over the Amazonian fires than the Brazilian government. Though, what is interesting is that in an interview with Carlos Souza Jr., the senior associate researcher at Imazon, Carlos does include more discourse on the reasons for deforestation. He describes how those opposing conservation believe that the amount of protected land in Brazil is too high and that they believe in 'developing' the Amazon (Imazon, 2019). The word 'develop' was not at all used in the international discourse, though it does help in presenting a more nuanced image of those in favor of deforestation, as their motives become clearer. The fact that this NGO does include this information shows how essential it is to understand the situation. Thus, it is a local perspective that was not considered by international NGOs. The rest of the text is more similar to the international NGO's discourse, it is mostly concerned with information related to the Amazon and the climate. In addition, it describes how a majority of the Brazilian people is against deforestation.

Brazilian Ranchers & Union leaders

Contrarily, a video of a political meeting of ranchers living in the Amazon region, paints an entirely different picture. At this meeting we hear local politicians, union leaders and further locals all speak out against conservation. NGOs are claimed to interfere with sovereignty and conspire against Brazil and it is emphasized that the Amazon is theirs. As the head of a union for ranchers states "*we will preserve the Amazon. But we will preserve it for our needs, not the needs of the world*" (The New York Times, 2019). In the video these locals also describe how land that was given to them in the 80s for development was suddenly taken back with new environmental policy in the last decades, and that "*Nobody cares about the people who live here, the breadwinners who live here*" (The New York Times, 2019). This is in line with the aforementioned changes in environmental policy in Brazil. The statements made by these local ranchers and politicians seem to be much more in line with what is said

by the current government. They are mostly focused on an economic angle and their right to use the land for development. Especially NGOs are seen as a threat to sovereignty and thus described as being imperialist. The perspective of these ranchers reaffirms what Barca (2014) described on the topic of labor and conservation. Local ranchers do not immediately recognize the importance of environmental conservation. In addition, as Heatherington (2010) expects this makes local people suspicious of international conservation programs that claim the necessity of conservation for some larger interest from which they are excluded.

The analysis of these Brazilian sources does suggest the existence of ecological imperialism. This is directly claimed by local ranchers and governmental officials, but even this Brazilian NGO that strives for the conservation of the Amazon, presented a more nuanced description of the issue than the international organizations did.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to provide a better understanding of ecological imperialism. Through literature and a discourse analysis this research aimed to estimate the contemporary relevance of this theory. The discourse analysis was performed to find evidence for the existence of eco-imperialism in a current case of international environmentalism. Overall, the analysis has indeed found numerous examples of discourse that point towards imperialist power relations. In both the governmental, and non-governmental sources there were occurrences of the actor claiming the land of the Amazon as theirs, disregarding local perspectives, or suggesting initiatives that did not ensure Brazil's inclusion.

When studying the evidence in more detail, there are apparent differences between the sources. For the governmental organizations included in this analysis, especially for the EU, less imperialistic discourse was reported. Both the UN and the EU had more discourse focusing on cooperating with Brazil, and especially the EU presented a much more nuanced overview of the causes of deforestation, including more local information. Contrarily, the NGOs that were analyzed presented more discourse that portrayed the Amazon as 'ours' or as common heritage. Furthermore, the NGOs did not mention cooperating or starting a conversation with Brazil. Their solutions revolved around placing pressure on the Brazilian government.

A possible explanation of these differences could be that discourse from NGOs has a different purpose and is aimed at attracting attention and donors. Thus, they might be more inclined to include more persuasive language that plays on people's emotions rather than governmental organizations that might want to appear more objective. In addition, Brazil is a member of the UN and the EU was at that time working on a trade deal with Mercosur which includes Brazil. Thus, these organizations are more dependent on cooperation with Brazil.

The difference in discourse between governmental and non-governmental sources is note-worthy. It is especially interesting that the European Union presented such a cooperative and inclusive position with only limited discourse that could point towards imperialistic power relations. This is interesting because the EU includes dominant countries with a past of colonization who are often criticized by postcolonial theory (Young, 2016). The analyzed discourse from the EU varies greatly from France's, who is an EU member, original response when President Macron described the Amazon as "our house". Though this might be related to the aforementioned EU-Mercosur trade deal, still this might have been beneficial for cooperation and inclusive initiatives towards conservation. Additionally, Bolsonaro did not criticize the EU, he was more critical of international NGOs. Thus, different from many past

examples of imperialism, it appears to not be dominant countries, but dominant NGOs that are displaying ecological imperialism. However, these NGOs do have a prominent role in international politics. This can be noted through the fact that, for example, it was Harrison Ford, board member of Conservation International, who spoke at the UN General Assembly. Hence, international environmental NGOs play a significant part in setting the global agenda and discourse.

This can lead to potentially narrow perceptions of environmental crises. All of the actors analyzed provided rather extensive information on climate change and other ecological factors such as biodiversity. However, further information on local politics or dilemmas was barely ever included. The inclusion of the Brazilian sources sheds lights on numerous arguments and pieces of information that were left out by the international organizations. Except for the EU, no international source discussed Brazil's right to development. Neither did these sources provide information on different opinions in Brazil, such as that of the ranchers in favor of agricultural expansion.

As described the Brazilian sources that opposed the international environmental initiatives for the Amazon directly called these initiatives a threat to their sovereignty, accusing them of imperialism. The Brazilian section of the analysis was rather confined, so only limited conclusions can be drawn from this. However, it does prove that concerns over colonialism and sovereignty are existent. Whether these concerns are legitimate or a tactic to divert attention away from conservation of the Amazon is a question for further research, but these concerns do exist and are barely covered in the international media. With again an exception of the EU, Brazil's concerns over sovereignty were either not mentioned, or immediately disregarded as political strategy.

It seems that the opposing sides on the discussion of the Amazonian forest fires, Brazil and the international organizations, are talking past each other. International actors mostly discuss the fires in terms of greed and destruction, and the forest is often described as a form of a global good. On the other hand, Brazilian actors in favor of agricultural expansion in the Amazon, barely discuss the fires and future plans for the Amazon because they seem more concerned with the influence of international organizations in their country. From this analysis it is difficult to tell which side is more justified. The Amazon does have international importance, but the discourse around the fires does portray imperialist tendencies. In this degree, the main problem seems to exist in the fact that these different actors seem to be talking about each other instead of with each other. The current international discourse might

even have counter-productive implications on conservation as Brazil seemed to be more concerned with protecting its sovereignty than its rainforest.

This leads to the conclusion that the theory of ecological imperialism does have relevance in the current field of international environmentalism. Environmental organizations and initiatives need to be considerate of possible imperialist tendencies and unequal power relationships, especially towards the Global South. Local tensions and opposing opinions need to be acknowledged in order to create durable plans for conservation. International environmental attention and cooperation is increasing, and with this trend it is important to ensure that such initiatives provide equal agency globally. In the future there should be no plans for conservation without local consultation.

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