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The Bulletin aims to support and contribute to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities over their forests and territories. Subscription is free.

Racism in the forests: A process of oppression at the service of capital



OUR VIEWPOINT

Racism: A Legacy of Colonial Power

Most of the dominant stories we know today were written by white men during the era of colonization. Through these stories, stereotypes and prejudices were built and imposed based on classifying the world population by “race”: black, white, Indian, brown “Race” is a mental construction of colonial rule which has since permeated the most important dimensions of global power.

RACISM IN THE FORESTS: A PROCESS OF OPPRESSION AT THE SERVICE OF CAPITAL

A blueprint for environmental racism

In 1969, my parents were forced to move from the home in which I was born to a sand dune cleared of all its vegetation and left naked except for poorly constructed block houses with no internal electricity, plaster or ceilings and crowned with an asbestos roof. We were moved because my family was classified in South Africa as coloured (Black), people of mixed descent. Because of our physical features we were treated differently by the State, which was an all white apartheid State. As a view, we were cursed with having to look down upon the US-Mobil oil refinery, which externalized its toxic fumes onto local people of colour.

“Nigger” and “Nature”: Expanding the Concept of Environmental Racism

Classically, environmental racism is defined in terms of the racialized distribution of pollution. But it's also about the ways people, ethnic groups, nature and pollution are co-defined in the first place. And this aspect of environmental racism is perhaps even more visible in forests than elsewhere.

“For a change of paradigm”: Interview with Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network

“Globally, the exploitation and plunder of the world’s ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the violations of the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples that depend on them, have intensified. Our rights to self-determination, to our own governance and own self-determined development, our inherent rights to our lands, territories and resources are increasingly and alarmingly under attack by the collaboration of governments, transnational corporations and conservationist NGOs. Forced relocation or assimilation assault our future generations, cultures, languages, spiritual ways and relationship to the earth, economically and politically. This is happening all over the planet – all over our Mother Earth. All this is an injustice.”

Out of the Grid: Resistance to Capitalist Mapping

For many, mapping is an unsuspecting technique that helps us orient ourselves in the world. What is often overlooked is that it matters a little which political agendas are being served by mapping. Even the global industry of "counter-mapping", which remains partly useful to resist encroachment aided by conventional mapping, have begun to adopt the spatiality, temporality and logic of change that underlies hegemonic mapping. A critical story of the "mapping from within" movements —as opposed to the hegemonic "mapping from without" industry— must therefore be embedded in social learning agendas to support real change.

Community Mapping: Geo-graphing for Resistance

Geography was always considered strategic knowledge by States and capital in order to “make war.” Knowledge about space was associated with politics in a broader sense, being essential to know, organize and control space and the population over which the State apparatus exercised its authority. After its institutionalization as an academic and scholarly discipline in the nineteenth century, geography started to play a key role in the process of legitimizing the State's monopoly as land use planner in the collective imagination.

The Racist Colonial Roots of Western Forest Conservation: A look into a REDD project in Kenya

The “Kasigau corridor REDD project” shows how this mechanism deepens issues of land injustice. What happens when communities already marginalized by land tenure systems are subjected to projects that ensure that land and power remains in the hands of a few? And what happens when these projects restrict communities livelihoods by “locking in” forests for carbon projects? Projects like the Kasigua project not only deepen local inequalities and racist practices but they also allow polluting industries that are buying the generated carbon credits to do the same elsewhere.

TRICKS AND DECEPTION THAT PROMOTE LAND GRABBING

Rio Tinto's biodiversity offset in Madagascar: How culture and religion are used to enforce restrictions

In September 2015, Re:Common and WRM visited communities affected by one of the most widely advertised biodiversity compensation initiatives in the mining sector, the Rio Tinto biodiversity offset in south-eastern Madagascar. What we found was a failure by NGOs and the mining corporation to disclose to communities that the "conservation project" in fact is a biodiversity offset. Villagers felt restrictions prohibiting the growing of their staple food, manioc, at the edge of the forest, had been imposed with little regard for their situation. Their subsistence livelihoods are made even more precarious. A meeting with a conservation NGO involved in the offset revealed that ethically deplorable methods have been used to ensure compliance with these restrictions on forest use.

ACTION ALERTS

- **Update on POSCO's harassments in Odisha India**

RECOMMENDED

- **Corporate power over territories and people**
- **Violence broke out in the fields and forests of Brazil**
- **The WWF in DRC: Conservation without people**

OUR VIEWPOINT

Racism: A Legacy of Colonial Power

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi warns us of the risks of listening to the same version of a story over and over again. That story we repeatedly hear in history books, the media or literature, about a people or culture or particular place is ONE of the many existing and possible stories. But then, which story is constantly repeated? The prevalence of one particular story almost always responds to global power structures: "How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power (...) Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign."(1)

Most of the dominant stories we know today were written by white men during the era of colonization. Through these stories, stereotypes and prejudices were built and imposed based on classifying the world population by "race": black, white, Indian, brown. Of course, since white men wrote the story, white men were attributed the best

possible qualities. Racism began to appear in that moment. “Race” is a mental construction of colonial rule which has since permeated the most important dimensions of global power. This story—that is to say, that people could be classified by “race”—was a way to legitimize relationships of superiority/inferiority between dominated peoples and dominators (2).

In this issue of the newsletter we want to tell other stories: Stories that make many people uncomfortable and that have to do with racism tied to environmental destruction and contamination, the appropriation of territories, and the destruction of forests and rivers. This is called Environmental Racism.

It is necessary to confront and denounce that the capitalist system, rooted in colonial logic, is structurally racist. The current economic model implicitly thrusts destruction, pollution, occupation and violence on black populations, indigenous people and farmers, with the aim of continuing to exploit, produce and therefore accumulate. It is these populations that the system (and everyone who defends it) sees as “the other;” they are peoples or “races” to be assimilated into the system, or else deprived of any right to be “other.” The ways of denying the “other’s” existence and of continuing to impose a narrative that categorizes people based on “race,” can occur in many different ways, though almost always violent.

When oil is extracted in Nigeria, when millions of hectares of forests in Indonesia are burned to clear land for oil palm monoculture, when a mega-dam is built in Brazil, when a “conservation park” is set up in Thailand and prohibits entry to local peoples, when a REDD project is established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Who owns these lands? Which peoples are affected? Similarly, when an oil refinery opens in a city, or a municipal waste landfill is installed, are these facilities perchance built near wealthy, privileged neighborhoods, which are almost always “white”?

The answers to these questions are the other stories we have chosen to address in this issue of the newsletter. This newsletter speaks directly about environmental racism.

In this difficult challenge of reflecting on racism as a process of oppression, we recognize and stand in solidarity with the many resistance movements confronting it. People continue to resist and build networks of unity, telling many stories in order to build a world where many worlds fit. Once again, remembering Chimamanda Ngozi’s words, we believe that “stories can also be used to empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

We hope this newsletter helps open up more spaces for the many stories that are essential.

(1) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “*The danger of a single story*”, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en (video with subtitles in more than 40 languages)

(2) Anibal Quijano, *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina*, <https://marxismocritico.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/1161337413-anibal-quijano.pdf>

RACISM IN THE FORESTS: A PROCESS OF OPPRESSION AT THE SERVICE OF CAPITAL

A blueprint for environmental racism

In 1969, at the age of 3 my parents were forced to move from the home in which I was born, in a neighbourhood of people of all colours, ethnicity and even class, to a sand dune cleared of all its vegetation and left naked except for poorly constructed block houses with no internal electricity, plaster or ceilings and crowned with an asbestos roof.

We were moved because my family was classified in South Africa as coloured (Black), people of mixed descent. Because of our physical features we were treated differently by the State, which was an all white apartheid State.

The houses on a steep bank of loose sand void of vegetation were separated with nothing more than a few sheets of construction metal. As a view, we were cursed with having to look down upon the US-Mobil oil refinery, which externalized its toxic fumes onto local people of colour. The immediate result of this was injury not only to one's dignity and psychological well-being, but also physical damage to one's body. Without electricity we had to boil water on a primus stove, which I pulled down as a toddler and was drenched in boiling water and pain as my skin blistered and left my body attached to my clothes. With steep slopes and metal as retaining walls, disaster was soon to strike. As the first rains came my sister slipped down the bank onto the metal sheeting and her body gouged open. With the toxic fumes came asthma and I was part of the 52% of our local youth population – the highest formally recorded figure in the country – cursed by this. Because of the toxic fumes from the Mobil oil refinery and local Mondi paper mill, which was one of the main Anglo American subsidiaries, our normal growth was stunted. But more alarmingly as a young person, in an environment that was void of indigenous vegetation, where people were crammed into poor housing and where your view was dirty industry, your reality and outlook on life was warped. You could not imagine another world and you took a sick sense of pride in having to live amongst this reality of industrial brutality and destroyed nature.

This apartheid planning and environmental racism did not happen by chance. It was something that was constructed as corporate capital colluded with the State. Like slavery, apartheid planning needed both corporate greed and a state to facilitate and protect the wealth. More than a 150 years after slavery and two decades after the demise of apartheid, the reality is that these racist laws have resulted in the inhuman and illegal accumulation of wealth, which today is still protected by 'property rights' in many constitutions globally, including South Africa's very own. The State has set up systems to protect ill-gotten gains.

Critically, apartheid planning and the subsequent environmental racism is often thought of in the context of the openly racist National Party coming into power in 1948, and writing laws that forced the segregation of people. But this is not entirely correct. Environmental racism linked to planning can be traced back to the 1920's when the then British government created the first segregated city in Durban. The British plan was perfected and institutionalized by the apartheid government, which resulted in, what I often refer to as a "blue print for a township". A township is a place where black people

were forced to reside by law, a place where I, and my family, were forced to move to and live in 1969. So what does this blue print look like? It is poorly developed homes, void of indigenous vegetation, with dust roads, dirty industry on the fenceline, waste – toxic and municipal – dumpsites sites in your neighbourhood and for good measure a sewage works on your doorstep. This is the blueprint of apartheid planning.

When one speaks about environmental racism today, often the United States civil rights movement comes to the fore. This is because of how successful black people were during the 60's and 70's to challenge and document these violations of racism. It was easy then to make the step from civil rights to environmental rights and in the 80's environmental racism began as a discourse in the US. Coupled with this, the way in which academics such as Professor Bullard in a seminal work "Dumping in Dixie" highlighted how class and colour played a very important role as to where white administrations would place toxic dumpsites.

This narrative of environmental racism was therefore not a very difficult one to make in a newly emerging democratic South Africa in the early 1990's. Already people challenging for democracy and equality for all through struggles for a just housing, schooling, educational and health system could easily align with that of pushing back on environmental racism.

But despite these civil rights victories in the United States, the democratic victory in South Africa, and the very many progressive people aligned governments that have emerged, especially in places such as Latin America, the ongoing impacts of the "development project" leaves people and their land damaged.

Dirty coal-fired power stations in South Africa today result in the majority of deaths caused by outdoor air pollution amongst poor black communities in South Africa, rather than providing people with meaningful and affordable energy. In a democratic South Africa, more than 30% of South Africans live in energy poverty, i.e. they do not have sufficient energy for safe cooking and heating.

Large infrastructure projects such as the proposed Mphanda Nkuwa Dam, Friends of the Earth, Mozambique has warned, will destroy the lower Zambezi river and peoples livelihoods, not in exchange for energy for local people, but rather for the energy intensive and destructive industries in South Africa. Placing transmission lines in Mozambique to reach the poor is too expensive. Large monoculture plantations in KwaZulu Natal, a South African province, have magnified the impacts of the two year drought in South Africa, with those that use the least water being affected the most as their annual subsistence crops fail and their animals dropped dead. Unlike commercial mono agricultural farmers, there is no insurance to save them. But it has also been the large increase in monoculture plantations of predominantly eucalyptus trees in the 1980's in the KwaZulu Natal midlands that destroyed the labour intensive dairy industry, and forced rural black people to move to urban areas resulting in the intensifying of political violence between the urban and incoming rural people, resulting in thousands of deaths.

Presently, our global governments have capitulated to corporate power that will further entrench environmental racism, which will harm black communities and indigenous people the most. In the aftermath of another round of the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change jamboree in December 2015, market mechanisms such as REDD have been entrenched in the outcome, making the future bleak for indigenous peoples, as their lands will be taken from them in the name of “saving the planet and forest” while their livelihoods are cut off and their waters are sucked up by plantations. Not one government stood up in Paris during the UN talks and said, “this will harm our people, we cannot abide by it”. So the path that facilitates environmental racism has been agreed upon at a global level, to be implemented at a local level.

But like many of us who were relocated in the dark days of apartheid, credit has to be given to the older folk. For them another world was possible as they had experienced it, and many ensured that through the dark days of apartheid we as children were often reminded of this. Today, let us listen to the indigenous peoples of the world, and to those who live with the land and remember that another world is possible.

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“Nigger” and “Nature”: Expanding the Concept of Environmental Racism

“Environmental racism” is a concept it's hard to imagine environmentalism ever having done without. It names a reality that can't be tackled “before” or “after” environmental campaigning, but has to be confronted every day in building movements against the ways oppressive societies organize nature.

Blowing a hole in the attitude, widespread among middle-class environmentalists, that “I'm not a racist, so don't talk to me about racism,” the concept highlights the ways that nice guys without racist theories participate in racism, too – not only when they disregard the extent to which pollution flows toward black and brown people and away from whites, but also when they obey the rules of polite society that tend to forbid even raising such uncomfortable issues.

Cities and Forests

The idea of environmental racism grew up in the US in the 1980s among minority groups who were being forced to incorporate into their bodies huge quantities of poisons from chemical or nuclear waste dumps, municipal landfills, polluting power plants, incinerators, pesticide-laden air or lead-laden water.

What US groups were describing, of course, was going on all over the world. In 1984, both the Union Carbide chemical factory in Bhopal, India and the PEMEX liquid propane gas plant in Mexico City blew up, blighting a million lives. Not long after, the enormously toxic work of dismantling obsolete computers began to fall mostly on cheap Asian and African labour.

Environmental racism of this kind had also long been obvious in forests. Between 1964 and 1992, Texaco subjected tens of thousands of indigenous and peasant (largely mestizo) Ecuadorians to an intensity of pollution from its Lago Agrio oil fields that would never have been tolerated in the wealthy white suburbs of New York City. In the

1990s, indigenous communities worldwide began to be “assigned” the job of using their forests and *paramos* to help absorb the carbon-dioxide pollution flowing from industries whose profits disproportionately benefit other ethnic groups.

From the US to the Democratic Republic of Congo

In fact, for every example of environmental racism in cities, another example can probably be found in forests.

US environmental justice movements have long pointed out the racism inherent in the way some big Washington, DC-based environmental organizations fall all over themselves to give superficial green makeovers to industries whose profits remain based in part on the unequal distribution of pollution within the country.

But isn't it racist in precisely the same way for, say, the UK government's development finance arm, the CDC Group, to invest public money in the Feronia oil palm company in the Democratic Republic of Congo? Feronia's precarious business could not be sustained if it did not occupy forest lands that were stolen from communities along the Congo River under Belgian colonial occupation between 1908 and 1960. Given the persistent legacy of malnutrition and dependence on poverty wages that continues to affect local people, isn't it racist for CDC to claim that it is only trying to “improve a situation” that it has “inherited”, has no responsibility for, and can do nothing about?

Another Dimension

But environmental racism isn't just about the racialized distribution of pre-existing pollution or pre-existing nature. It's also about the ways people, ethnic groups, nature and pollution are co-defined in the first place. And this aspect of environmental racism is perhaps even more visible in the forests than elsewhere.

For example, REDD is racist not just because it grabs indigenous people's land to clean up non-indigenous carbon dioxide emissions. It's also racist because it discriminates against indigenous ideas of land. Indigenous understandings of forests are not even dismissed, because they are not even recognized as existing. A similar racism is inherent in what Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa calls “zones of sacrifice”, where indigenous valuations of land are ignored as obstacles to the commodity export economy.

Or take the “nature” that is preserved in countless protected areas worldwide. From the time of the establishment of the US's Yellowstone National Park onwards, this is a nature that depends on the exclusion of indigenous peoples. Innumerable relationships among humans, animals and plants are banned and replaced with new relationships involving wildlife managers, academic researchers, forest rangers, tourists and broadcasters.

In essence, such transformations are nothing new. In medieval England, the words “park” and “forest” signified places where there were deer set aside for royal elites to hunt, not necessarily places where there were trees. But post-Yellowstone practice added new twists. Elites pretended to erase themselves from the scene by claiming to be

representatives of nonhuman “nature”. Yet the word “protected” in “protected areas” still meant little more than “protected from the uneducated and dark-skinned”.

Of course, under progressive regimes, some “natives” were allowed back inside such “natures”. But in the process they usually had to agree to convert themselves into either picturesque “noble savages” or agents of Western ecological management. For example, they might have to dichotomize their land into permanent agricultural fields and agriculture-free forests, leaving no room for other forms such as forest fallows. Such natures remained inescapably racist. Fighting the human/nature binary that defined them became a part of fighting racism more generally.

Stereotyped Natures

And hasn't racism always gone hand in hand with prejudicial ideas of nature as lying somehow outside and beneath the human?

Isn't it more than a coincidence, for example, that the derogatory connotations of many words for “forest” resonate with the racist tone of terms often applied to marginalized minority groups?

In Thailand, where racist conservationism has often advocated programmes to resettle highland minorities away from watershed forests, *thuen* (jungle) is just another word for “outlaw”, and *paa* (forest) is that which is not *siwilai* (civilized). How many racist epithets from around the world – *indios de mierda*, *khon thuen*, *nyika*, *spruce monkey*, *kariang*, *jangli*, *jungle bunny* – do not implicitly locate their referents in precisely such stereotyped zones of forest primitivity?

To know how to live in and with such purportedly “savage” environments – to have the skills to vary, extend, enrich or interact with them without simply reducing them to resources for infinite growth – has frequently been assumed to diminish your humanity. Among European colonialist thinkers like John Locke, Native Americans were not felt to be capable of adding any human ingredients to land at all. In colonial India, “waste” lands were seen to be occupied by “criminal” people. Today, the Asian Development Bank is on record claiming that it is only by removing people from forested mountain areas that they can be brought to “normal life”.

Science and Responsibility

This leads straight to a perhaps even more uncomfortable question. If certain natures are racist, then can the sciences that study them be innocent?

The reality of science is that it can't call everything into question at the same time. It has to stand on certain assumptions which for the time being are not challenged, in order to test other things. As of 2016, a racist human/nature dichotomy is often one of those assumptions.

For example, an environmental science whose problems are shaped by a fixed agenda of “reducing the impact of humans on nature” or “determining carrying capacity” is going to be racially biased regardless of the intentions of the scientists who practice it.

Yet sciences that study things like “Yellowstone nature” can't remain free forever from the responsibility to question – scientifically – the very construction of what they investigate. Today it is widely recognized that an anthropology that treats the peoples it studies as static museum pieces to be “protected” from change is racist. But isn't restoration ecology racist in precisely the same way? And what about climate models seeking ways of “stabilizing” global temperatures at economically optimal levels?

Of course, few scientists brave enough to challenge racist axioms inside their own discipline are seen by their colleagues as acting out of the scientific spirit to which they have dedicated their lives. Instead they are interpreted as engaging in personal attacks and sowing divisiveness. Racism, they are told, is never anything more than some individual bad guys behaving immorally or unprofessionally, whereas science itself, being about “nature”, is “race-blind”.

This reaction is widespread partly because it has been so effective in defending the prestige of the scientific class and those whose power science legitimates. But at bottom it's merely one more restatement of the same human/nature division. It's as much an obstacle to rational discussion as racial epithets themselves.

Discomfort or Movement-Building?

Are forest activists ready to entertain the idea that certain concepts of *nature* and *forest* that help define the work not only of many scientists, but also of organizations like the World Bank, the FAO, the UNFCCC, UNESCO and CIFOR, are in some ways on a par with *nigger*? Are activists willing to challenge the way they themselves sometimes use these terms?

Stretching the concept of environmental racism in this way is bound to stir widespread resistance, if not hysteria. Among professional classes, as the US legal scholar Patricia J. Williams noted years ago, “matters of race are resented and repressed in much the same way as matters of sex and scandal: the subject is considered a rude and transgressive one in mixed company.”

But perhaps those discomfited by the topic will just have to get over themselves. For centuries, indigenous and forest peoples and peasants have had to withstand the racism of having human/nature binaries imposed wholesale on them and their forests. For middle-class environmentalists and others to have to work through a little temporary discomfort is nothing by comparison.

Particularly when the potential gains are so disproportionate. When, at the recent UN Paris climate summit, some young African-American activists working against environmental racism in the US encountered representatives of the “No REDD in Africa” coalition, the rapport was immediate and electric. Part of this may have been due simply to different aspects of a shared global environmental history suddenly falling into place. But perhaps it also owed something to a sense that older concepts of racial oppression and liberation were being extended, and that surprising new things might be on the verge of happening. Here was the kind of moment from which transformation flows. Movement-building is concept-building.

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More reading:

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“For a change of paradigm”: Interview with Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network

What is the Indigenous Environmental Network?

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) was born in 1990 in North America of hope, courage and common vision by Indigenous youth, women and elders of many Tribes to protect our dignity from environmental destruction taking place in our homelands. IEN is a large alliance of Indigenous communities on the frontline of resistance against fossil fuel, mining and toxic industries encroaching upon lands and waterways. We are community-based, grassroots and speak for ourselves under the principles of free, prior and informed consent. Many of our founders come from a long lineage of indigenous resistance against colonization of North America.

How (and why) is it that the implementation of large-scale projects (from oil extraction to highways and dams) most often affects indigenous and traditional communities?

From the perspectives of our Indigenous peoples from the North, the conquest and colonization of our lands and territories by the European settlers starting over 500 years ago was always about the colonizers goals to exert power and control over our lands. So, when the European invaders came to indigenous lands they brought with them a cosmology so different from ours that we couldn't comprehend them and they couldn't comprehend us. The most destructive value that the European invaders imposed is the

quantification and objectification of the natural world by imposing a monetary value on sacred things, and committing genocide against the Indigenous peoples who resisted. So, these people, who now have implemented unsustainable economic systems of capitalism, are constantly looking for “natural resources” to feed the big large monster they have created. This monster needs energy, so they look for remote areas of the country to extract minerals, to build large dams, to take our native trees, and even steal our traditional medicines. They need to build roads and train rails to access our lands and territories. We live in a world with a dominant society that always wants to take and take and never give back. They are like a predator species, not a species of compassion and love for the forests, the waters, the land, plants, animals, birds, fish and all life. I believe this dominant society now has a value system of no respect for the sacredness of the female creative principles of Mother Earth and the relationship with Father Sky. They have created neoliberal policies of globalization, liberalization, privatization, deregulation and denationalization that constantly intensify the violation of our inherent rights as Indigenous peoples and violating the natural laws of our Mother Earth, of her biodiversity. This is why they have a quest for oil, for so-called rich minerals under the ground, to tear down all the aged elder trees, to capture the spirit of the water and block the Spirit of the Water’s life-flowing cycles.

What does “environmental racism” mean to you?

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s in the United States, there were studies conducted that discovered the environmental and public health laws of this country discriminated against Indigenous peoples and people-of-color. By people-of-color, I mean the African American, the Latin American and the Asian American people. Since the early 1970’s there were strong national environmental laws enacted that also required the States to comply with. These were clean air, clean water and many other environmental and health laws and standards. However, in the 1980’s it was found that many corporations and factories were building polluting industries in the backyards of people-of-color communities with no regard of these people’s health. And, large-scale toxic waste dumping was being done near the communities of these ethnic people including our Indigenous Tribal nations (communities). In the early 1990’s the United States and the nuclear industry was pushing plans to dump highly radioactive waste from the nuclear energy reactors in Indigenous lands and territories. The government promised millions of dollars as benefit-sharing agreements to each tribal member to obtain their support of using our lands as a nuclear and toxic waste dump. However, with all these toxic, radioactive, and ecological destructive forms of industrial developments, the US government did not apply the federal environmental laws equally. We called this environmental racism.

This also applies to the extractive industries related to mining and fossil fuel development. The US government, through its Bureau of Indian Affairs programs brokered mining deals with our Tribal governments with false promises that these mining deals and fossil fuel developments would be beneficial. But, the provisions of applying effective environmental standards and regulations to protect water and air quality and the health of our people and the ecosystem and traditional food systems was never addressed. This is ecological and health injustice.

The fact that remotely located Tribal lands across North America contain much of the remaining energy resources, coupled with the desire by the US to achieve “energy

independence” using fossil fuels, means that both government and industry are aggressively targeting Tribal lands to meet the US (and Canada) energy needs. This push to exploit fossil fuel resources in indigenous lands is of great concern to all who are working on energy and climate issues.

Because many Tribal communities are economically depressed and Tribal governments are under pressure to provide solutions, the energy industry is able to leverage the promise of short-term economic benefits to gain access to tribal lands and resources. Possession of energy resources coupled with depressed economies result with our many Indigenous Tribes of the North being vulnerable to the destructive and short term economic “solutions” of the dominant world.

Now, this “racism” is practiced worldwide. Elites of the countries in the global South that push their national agenda to exploit the natural environment have no regard for the Indigenous peoples of their countries. Globally, the exploitation and plunder of the world’s ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the violations of the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples that depend on them, have intensified. Our rights to self-determination, to our own governance and own self-determined development, our inherent rights to our lands, territories and resources are increasingly and alarmingly under attack by the collaboration of governments, transnational corporations and conservationist NGOs. Indigenous activists and leaders defending their territories continue to suffer repression, militarization, including assassination, imprisonment, harassment and vilification as “terrorists.” The violation of our collective rights faces the same impunity. Forced relocation or assimilation assault our future generations, cultures, languages, spiritual ways and relationship to the earth, economically and politically. This is happening all over the planet – all over our Mother Earth. All this is an injustice.

And what does this mean for the struggle of Indigenous Peoples?

Looking back at the past 26 years, our Indigenous Peoples and people-of-color within the environmental and economic justice movement have put soul into the environmental movement, taking environmental protection out of its square box; making changes in policies, and building the base for strategic resistance of grassroots communities disproportionately affected by polluting industries, but more so, for social and economic change, as well.

The struggle for our Indigenous peoples is a rights-based struggle. We, Indigenous Peoples from all regions of the world are defending our Mother Earth – our forests, water, and all Life, from the aggression of unsustainable development and the overexploitation of our natural resources by mining, logging, mega-dams, exploration and extraction of petroleum. Our forests suffer from the production of agro-fuels, bio-mass, plantations and other impositions of false solutions to climate change and unsustainable, damaging development.

We are also fighting the commodification of all Life – of Nature – of Mother Earth and Father Sky. The capitalism of nature is a perverse attempt by corporations, extractive industries and governments to cash in on Creation by privatizing, commodifying, and selling off the Sacred and all forms of life and the sky, including the air we breathe, the water we drink and all the genes, plants, traditional seeds, trees,

animals, fish, biological and cultural diversity, ecosystems and traditional knowledge that make life on Earth possible and enjoyable.

Mother Earth is the source of life which needs to be protected, not a resource to be exploited and commodified as a “natural capital.” As Indigenous Peoples, we understand our own place and our responsibilities within Creation’s sacred order. We feel the pain of disharmony of the world when we witness the dishonor of the natural order of Creation and the continued economic colonization and degradation of Mother Earth and all life upon her.

The modern world cannot achieve economic sustainability without environmental justice and without strong environmental ethics that recognizes our human relationship to the sacredness of Mother Earth. The future of mankind depends on a new economic and environmental paradigm that fully recognizes the life-cycles of nature and recognizes the Rights of our Mother Earth.

In addition to our fight for our Rights as Indigenous Peoples, the struggle is for the recognition of the rights of the water to be healthy; and the rights of the Forest and the Sacred Woman of the Forest to be healthy, this is our struggle.

I often share my fears, concerns and insights about the question of our struggles. From the North, I see that if current trends continue, native trees will no longer find habitable locations in our forests, fish will no longer find their streams livable, and humanity will find their homelands flooded or drought-stricken due to a changing climate and unpredictable and extreme weather events. Our Indigenous Peoples have already disproportionately suffered the negative compounding effects of global warming and a changing climate, including the negative effects of the extractive fossil fuel industry and its processing systems.

Mother Earth and her natural resources cannot sustain the consumption and production needs of this modern industrialized society and its dominant economic paradigm, which places value on the rapid economic growth, the quest for corporate and individual accumulation of wealth, and a race to exploit natural resources.

I view the challenges of the non-regenerative production system of the world creating too much waste and toxic pollution. We recognized the need for countries, whether they are here in the North, or in the global South to focus on new economy structures, governed by the absolute limits and boundaries of ecological sustainability, the carrying capacities of Mother Earth. I see the need for a more equitable sharing of global and local resources. I envision the need for encouragement and support of self-sustaining communities.

As Indigenous peoples we are observing the United Nations, the World Bank, and other financial and private sectors, including energy and extractive industries, and, including States in the United States, such as California, that are pushing a “green” economy agenda that is expanding the commodification, financialization and privatization of the functions of Nature. These functions of Nature are the life-giving cycles of Mother Earth.

I must talk about this as one of the most pressing issues we are facing as Indigenous Peoples. This “green” economy regime places a monetary price on Nature and creates new financial markets that will only increase inequality and expedite the destruction of Nature – of Mother Earth – and in turn, our indigenous homelands. We cannot put the future of Nature and humanity in the hands of financial speculative mechanisms like carbon trading, carbon offset regimes, such as “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and other market systems of conservation and biodiversity offsets.

REDD-type and carbon offset projects are already causing human rights violations, land grabs and environmental destruction. If REDD+ is implemented worldwide, it may open the floodgates to the biggest land grab of the last 500 years. These offset initiatives allow corporate criminals like Shell and Chevron off the hook.

Just as historically the Doctrine of Discovery was used to justify the first wave of colonialism by alleging that Indigenous Peoples did not have souls, and that our territories were “*terra nullius*,” land of nobody, now carbon trading and REDD+ are inventing similarly dishonest premises to justify this new wave of colonialization and privatization of nature. This is very serious.

The inseparable relationship between humans and the Earth, inherent to Indigenous Peoples, must be respected for the sake of all of our future generations and all of humanity. This is the struggle.

Can you think of other ways of top-down approaches on indigenous territories that are less evident or visible? And if so, could you explain how these impositions are also expressions of environmental racism?

In most national, State and subnational governance systems from the North, to the global South, the mechanisms for meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in policy development is lacking. Most governments have a top-down paternalistic policy of deciding what is best for its’ Indigenous Peoples. This is especially true in energy development policies and mineral extraction. The governments very rarely want to grant sub-surface rights to its Indigenous Peoples and limit territorial land rights. There are constant questions as to secret deals being made by national governments that later when implemented infringe on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. So, what are the mechanisms we are advocating for? The principles, or the standards of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are very important in all governmental decisions being made. FPIC also reserves the inherent right of our Indigenous communities to say No! to any forms of development coming into our territories. In the North, the US government wants to limit our voice and right to say No, by continuing to push the policies of “consultation”. The question is consultation with whom? The governments like to “consult” with our indigenous intermediaries and never actually come down to the grassroots, community level to meet with the collective of our communities to discuss every aspects of a form of development they want to impose on our people. This happens everywhere. Very often they already have made up the plans for development. This is why we demand our indigenous communities be fully informed prior to the development taking place. And, we have the right to be fully informed of all aspects of what is being proposed. Good and bad. And finally, we have the right to offer our

collective consent, even if we have to say no to the project. The government must respect our right to say no. But this is not the case.

How do you think the solidarity movement on social and environmental justice can help the fight against environmental racism in all its forms?

In the North, in the early 1990's when the height of the environmental racism and cry for our demands for environment justice is recognized, we came together as Indigenous Peoples with the minorities, with people-of-colour. We did this as a political strategy to build our power for change. As Indigenous Peoples, we are the "First Nations" and indigenous to the lands and territories of the US, and we said to the people-of-colour and social justice movements that we will stand together with them, as long as they would also stand in solidarity with our rights as Indigenous Peoples. We saw a need to build a power base of solidarity with other social and environmental justice movements to strengthen our voices for change in the US. This strategy continues within the climate movement, as we have applied "justice" to climate. In this climate justice movement, we share many of the same problems with other communities that are poor, who face racism and poverty, and who are being marginalized and discriminated by the dominant society of the US. So, we have formed our own climate justice alliances and mobilizing communities in struggle and who are on the frontlines of the fossil fuel economy to stand with one voice demanding system change, not climate change.

Dialogue is needed amongst Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people and frontline communities to put pressure on their governments to reevaluate a colonial legal system that doesn't work. This solidarity is needed to build a power base, to develop popular education to inform communities that have historically been oppressed of what is happening to our Mother Earth. Through popular education and principles of community based organizing, more people are recognizing the need for a body of law that recognizes the inherent rights of the environment, of animals, fish, birds, plants, water, and air itself.

Now, we are seeing social Movements starting to see a power structure that has no respect for anyone, except the small 1% of the wealthy elites. They are now starting to see the wisdom and importance of indigenous cosmologies, philosophies and world views. It is a worthy effort to mobilize for system change with other non-Indigenous movements. We need people power to seek and achieve long term solutions turning away from prevailing paradigms and ideologies centered on pursuing economic growth, corporate profits and personal wealth accumulation as primary engines of social well-being. The outside pressures of the world will continue to have negative affects on our Indigenous Peoples. So, how do we change this? We network and build alliances with the non-Indigenous allies and with social movements. The transitions will inevitably be toward dominant societies that can equitably adjust to reduced levels of production and consumption, and increasingly localized systems of economic organization that recognize, honor and are bounded by the limits of nature that recognize the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

Thank you.

Out of the Grid: Resistance to Capitalist Mapping

For many, mapping is an unsuspecting technique that helps us orient ourselves in the world. What is often overlooked is that it matters a little which political agendas are being served by mapping. Even the global industry of "counter-mapping", which remains partly useful to resist encroachment aided by conventional mapping, have begun to adopt the spatiality, temporality and logic of change that underlies hegemonic mapping. In quite a number of regions, participation and shareholding in the mining and plantation industry or in REDD and other carbon offset projects substitute the logic of resistance and healing supposedly served by participatory mapping. A critical story of the "mapping from within" movements —as opposed to the hegemonic "mapping from without" industry— must therefore be embedded in social learning agendas to support real change.

The past four decades have seen dramatic changes across the global South. Amid an increasingly integrated global energy and materials economy, well-financed businesses have rushed to occupy new or potential value-producing sites. Production has been fragmented and redistributed, trade patterns disassembled and re-organised, and national states reconfigured in response. As the slogan "Made in the World" replaces older labels like "Made in Germany" or "Made in Japan", new and accelerated forms of ecological and social deterioration have emerged.

One part of these shifts is a change in mapping. In the past, the presentation of land on maps was often a way of helping businesses and states claim territories and organise the knowledge needed for capital accumulation. It often disregarded "other" claims and knowledges considered irrelevant.

Capitalist mapping extends and transforms military logistics. Such mapping is getting more specialised and narrower in its disciplinary background not only by accumulating knowledge that is deemed useful for the reproduction of the global economy, but also by simultaneously dismissing or condemning any "other" knowledge considered irrelevant. Today, mapping is on the whole becoming perhaps even less democratic and even more elitist and exclusionary – even further removed from the concerns of the weakest social groups. Investors and political leaders consult global maps revealing where "shrinkage of food-producing regions" is "tolerable". Where "tropical forest carbon stocks" can be annexed most cheaply. Where agricultural land has the lowest or highest dollar value. Where new "corridors" facilitating streamlined trade and production can be most easily cut across thousands of kilometres of political and topographical boundaries, reorganising both human and nonhuman communities in their wake. Bringing "development" to those affected by the large-scale investment prepared by such maps is usually cited in defence of the destruction.

Within half a century since the late 1960s, such a vigorous re-mapping of the world has nurtured confidence across a broad political spectrum —including some within the environmentalist movements— in the utility of such reductionist "geographies".

State-driven "spatial planning" maps areas outside existing investment blocks or in already built-up areas that can be ravaged at the least political cost, in order to make them available for the next round of international investment. Drones and satellites help states and businesses achieve profitable sub-meter accuracy in the spatial representation

of everything from soil types to legal boundaries.

Meanwhile, local communities find it hard to get recompensed for invasions of their territories when the maps used by their investor and state adversaries are incapable even of recognizing what they need to be compensated for.

Alternative Spaces

Yet even the most powerful and systematic attempts at remapping the earth for a new wave of plunder produce their own nemesis. Every attempt to expand the boundaries of monopolised space to generate more economic value provokes efforts to define, defend, reclaim and recreate “alternative” spaces.

Such spaces can be found not only at big events like World Social Forums in cities such as Porto Alegre, Mumbai or Tunis. They are also being recreated in many places where people’s commons are being eroded and who are trying to reconnect with their own forests, mountains and soil.

Potentially, such "alternative" spaces might also be built out of the often-ignored transient lifespaces of the newly dispossessed, including urban squatters, oppressed factory workers and rural refugees. In such groups, the sense of community often gets invoked only in emergency situations, such as threatened evictions, manifesting itself in uprisings or riots. But out of these emergency situations also emerge untelevised and unfunded spaces for long-term collaborative learning – for re-planting devastated land, growing crops to meet communities' internal needs, and so forth. Such efforts are ways of regrowing some of the organs we need to move forward.

Alternative Mapping

Attempts to map such spaces can potentially help carve out new arenas for challenging capitalist expansion. But they can also end up themselves serving global corporate or imperial interests.

“Counter-mapping” and “participatory mapping” are examples. Counter-mapping typically enlists the help of professionals to create maps that better represent ordinary people's interests and concerns, while participatory mapping often relies partly on information that only local people can provide.

Such efforts are frequently well-intentioned. But they can also reproduce the discriminatory ways of thinking about space that characterize dominant maps.

For example, they may filter out the voices of those that are not capable of using the mapping technologies, or ignore the vocabularies they use. They may represent local lifespaces as locations on a property or prospecting grid, contradicting what defines those lifespaces. Even where they attempt to depict the extent of the invasion of ancestral lands or the spread of resistance movements, they will probably be unable to probe, let alone represent on a one-dimensional map, very deeply the nature of the underlying conflicts.

In addition, “alternative” mapping efforts may end up serving as sources of

commercially-valuable information that states and corporations find hard to acquire, like the GPS locations of cliffs that match the colour of specified mineral samples, or knowledge about local conservation practices that can be later commodified and sold, e.g. under REDD+ schemes.

In Indonesia, for instance, Constitutional Court Decision 35 of 2013 mandated state recognition of "customary forests" to customary territorial maps. This gets mapped and administered in tandem with communities participation in REDD. By the end of 2014, the Indonesian Indigenous Peoples Alliance (AMAN) had submitted 517 maps covering an area of over 4.8 million hectares to the now defunct Executive Board of REDD+, which had assumed a role of geographical "data caretaker."

In the worst cases, "participatory" mapping degenerates into sheer manipulation. In one notorious Indonesian example, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) lent 50 video cameras to community members in Lamalera, Lembata Island and conducted local trainings in video-making. The community then used the cameras to record a partly-ceremonial, non-commercial annual whale hunt in the island's coastal waters. After taking back the cameras, WWF used the footage to discredit the Lamalerans and to propose a government ban of such rituals, without any effort to analyse and understand the social history of the Lamalerans,

Ways Forward

In our efforts to challenge or "decentre" a resurgent colonialism's aggressive re-mapping of the world, we can learn a lot from well-established alternative ways of organizing space and time.

The Balinese cosmos, for instance, integrates not only spatial cardinality, such as compass directions, with virtue, colour and degree of sacredness, but also connects cosmic events, profane and sacred human activities, and a sharp and accurate understanding of ecological lifespace with a hybrid calendric system. Such a hybrid system incorporates both the lunar and solar calendars, and includes the Gregorian, Hijri, Chinese, Wuku and Çaka calendars. The idea is to calibrate temporal cycles of social or ceremonial routines according to the virtues offered by climate and microclimate dynamics. Today, for example, residents of the four communities guarding Tamblingan Lake understand and live in accordance with a detailed mental map of the landscape based on a set of environmental laws in the form of inscriptions dating back to 480 AD.

Mappings of space associated with (for example) the two millennium-old *Shan Hai Jing* (the Classics of Mountains and Seas) or the *mappamundi* of medieval Europe provide more tools for a critical analysis of contemporary capitalist mapping.

Resistance, healing and re-commoning will require collective efforts in understanding and exposing today's brutal extractivism. In this context, it is important to highlight the role mapping – including many forms of participatory mapping – plays in aiding continued extractivism. But resistance, healing and re-commoning also requires different kinds of mapping that bring into play codes and rationalities distinct from those that dominate capitalist geography, regarding the use of space, working-time, energy and the earth's materials.

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Community Mapping: Geo-graphing for Resistance

Geography is associated with the memorization of geographical features (mountains, rivers, valleys, etc.) and the “simple” creation of maps, generally understood to be a true portrayal of reality, and not a representation created from a certain point of view. And on the other hand, geography was always considered strategic knowledge by States and capital in order to “make war.” According to radical geographer Lacoste, this went far beyond strictly “conducting military operations”: knowledge about space was associated with politics in a broader sense, being essential to know, organize and control space and the population over which the State apparatus exercised its authority. Lacoste's analysis shows us that geography's role in strengthening States and companies went beyond strategic knowledge: after its institutionalization as an academic and scholarly discipline in the nineteenth century, geography started to play a key role in the process of legitimizing the State's monopoly as land use planner in the collective imagination.

This perspective conceals an overall view of space, creating two distinct, yet closely related consequences. On the one hand, it has naturalized spatial configurations as givens (national borders and political-administrative divisions within States, for example), as if the formation of spaces were not political processes simultaneous to societal organization processes themselves. On the other hand, this concealment is responsible for creating a particular collective imagination that has naturalized the inherent linking of territory to the State; as if other groups/collectives were not also actors who appropriate and create space, as legitimate land use planners of their own living spaces and reproduction.

This powerful collective imagination began to be called into question in the 1970s (and more strongly in the following decades) both in academia (for which Lacoste's work was essential), and by social movements starting to organize based on new discursive strategies. Indigenous and Afro movements launched a mobilization for the recognition of cultural diversity, which brought to the surface the fact that nation-states—far from

being homogenous cultural and territorial units—comprised a vast number of cultural particularities that were systematically trampled by state land use planning, which was criticized for destroying the lifestyles of different peoples. With a critical analysis of the hegemonic state model, these groups questioned the naturalization of the direct association between state, nation and territory, and in so doing sought to undo the founding myth of so-called “Modernity.”

Organized around demands for territory and autonomy, these movements made explicit that various forms of appropriation and land use exist, as well as different ways of relating to nature and organizing politically and economically; and through their struggles they tried to force the State to recognize their different geographies. Their demands directly confronted a colonialist model of development and social organization, proposing a rupture with colonialism's power and the knowledge that serves it, and proposing political, epistemic and territorial transformations.

Indigenous Latin American organizations—mainly in Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico and Colombia—provide perhaps the most emblematic case of the change in discourse with respect to this imagination. By politicizing their identity and considering their different ethnicities as important, these peoples who had before self-identified as peasant farmers, radically changed their discourse and strategies. Thus, the old struggle for land broadened and transformed into a struggle for territory, self-determination and autonomy. However, the claim for cultural diversity within the nation-State—and its respective connection to territory—is not restricted to the indigenous movement; urban and black sectors, farmers, collectors (as in the case of rubber tappers in Brazil), among others, also began to organize in the 1980s, around a discourse that articulated recognition/respect for demands for territorial autonomy within nation-States.

In constant dialogue with these movements and with political science, geography also went through a period of critical rethinking, in which the supposed neutrality of academic and scholarly production began to be questioned. The “New Geography” of the Brazilian school, led by Milton Santos, Carlos Walter Porto Gonçalves and Rogério Haesbaert, broadened its understanding of the political and the territorial, so that it ceased to be tied exclusively to the State. Territorial and power relations began to be understood from a broader perspective, through the multiple subjects involved in space. Territory ceased to be under the State's monopoly, and geography became a tool to mark and demarcate land, and graph it in order to be materially and symbolically appropriated by subaltern groups, inseparable dimensions. Therefore, territory was not a pre-determined fact, but rather the result of a struggle of varying intensities and among different actors to appropriate a certain space, in continuous redefinition.

It is essential that social movements critically re-appropriate the concept of territory, as well as the strategy of “mapping” their territory in order to appropriate it, in the struggle against multiple dispossessions. From this perspective of critical geography, we believe that community mapping exercises can be tools for struggle and social transformation, as a way to build power among political subjects facing territorialization of capital in their living spaces; forge collective and individual imagination on the legitimacy of territorial appropriation in the face of the State and companies, and stimulate dialogue between younger generations and elders who have knowledge about territory, in a context of rural exodus.

It is essential to destroy the hierarchy of knowledge between people with degrees in geography and communities who create territory. The ultimate format of the resulting map will vary depending on its purpose: from mapping processes in which there is no actual map, to mental maps, maps with diagrams, artistic renditions/productions, life plans for counter land use planning, to Cartesian maps with all the legal requirements, etc. The map will depend on the scale of the demand and the organizational need. However, we must never forget that geography is always a weapon of war. Lacoste reminds us that with the best intentions, one may be providing the information most prized by the enemy. If mapping is conceived of as an end and not as a means, one runs the risk of providing a strong support to State and capitalist company planning strategies. Indeed, community mapping itself has been one of the tools most used by oil company community relations representatives, ministry officials interested in destroying indigenous territoriality, conservationist NGOs or capitalists who seek to implement tree plantations, to name some of the best known examples. Critical geography will be a contribution as long as it recognizes the dispute for territory among different political subjects, and chooses to place its tools in service of territorial appropriation of dispossessed peoples. From this perspective, community mapping can be a tactic to use.

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The complete original article is available here: <https://geografiacriticaecuador.org/2016/04/10/mapeo-comunitario-geo-grafiando-para-la-resistencia/>

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The Racist Colonial Roots of Western Forest Conservation: A look into a REDD project in Kenya

It would be both ahistorical and apolitical to not firmly locate the roots of the western concepts of nature conservation to the colonial era. Political ecologist and eco-feminist Dr. Vandana Shiva makes this relationship very clear in her book, *‘Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India’*, when she states that,

“When the British colonized India, they first colonized her forests. Ignorant of their wealth and the wealth of knowledge of local people to sustainably manage the forests, they displaced local rights, local needs and knowledge and reduced this primary source of life to timber.” (Shiva 1990)

When the women of the *Chipko movement* from the Himalaya region rose up to protest and protect their forests from commercial exploitation in the 1970's by putting their bodies and lives at risk, it was a continuation of almost a century of resistance across the country. The British colonial administration introduced the *Forest Acts of 1878 and 1972* which completely eroded local people's rights to their forests while giving unfettered access to the British military and its corporations.

These women were not just rejecting a political and economic order imposed on them and which served the interests of the British Empire, including a local elite; but they were in effect challenging the various manifestations of hetero-patriarchal capitalism that now presented itself in the re-defining and re-valuing of "nature" based on a western patriarchal world-view. A worldview that puts profits over the welfare of people and ecosystems as well as over their productive and reproductive work. One which completely fails to see the interconnectedness of "nature" and that is steeped deep in the racist politics of othering the "native" and specifically their ways of knowing.

One of the places where these tensions and ideological differences play out strongly is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the global body tasked with working with world governments to chart a path that would address the climate crises. Unfortunately, the consensus among progressive groups and frontline communities battling the impacts of the crises is that the negotiations have been open to corporate lobbying and have allowed Western countries, those most responsible for the crises, to undermine principles of equity and justice and have in effect bullied Southern nations into carrying the largest share of the burden of adaptation and mitigation efforts via carbon markets.

The importance of forests and forest eco-systems to this planet extends far beyond literally acting as the lungs of the earth by absorbing carbon dioxide emissions and releasing oxygen. Millions of people worldwide, including indigenous peoples, depend on forest resources for all or part of their sustenance and livelihoods. Forests refill aquifers when water gets past their roots; they protect downstream ecosystems by soaking up surface run-off and they bear significant spiritual, cultural and linguistic value in every part of the world but more so in the worldviews of indigenous peoples.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) is an example of a carbon market mechanism under the UNFCCC. It places a monetary value on the carbon being "absorbed" by forests under the belief that providing money for local communities, states, NGOs and corporations will give the "incentives" to protect forests – and the carbon they hold. This, then, reframes the climate crises not as a historical problem rooted in the fossil-fuel based capitalist development model but rather as a market problem to be solved by the same economic system(s) that created the problem.

REDD in Kenya: reinforcing historical inequalities

The "Kasigau corridor REDD project", located in Taita Taveta County in Kenya, provides an interesting case into the ways in which carbon markets depoliticize and de-historicize not only local community experiences of the ways in which their ecosystems

and livelihoods are destroyed but also the global climate change discussions. The project, now in its 3rd phase of implementation, began in 2008 on ranches under various forms of ownership and land tenure systems: individual, private companies and Directed Agricultural Companies (DACs).

The project is run by Wildlife Works, a US based Private Corporation, which estimates that the Kasigau project will help avoid over 48 million metric tonnes of carbon emissions over a 30-year period. The emission reductions are mainly through land-use change monitoring and management practices, which include putting a halt to slash and burn farming, charcoal production as well as reducing deforestation and forest degradation. It is estimated that 400 people are employed by the project in running its operations, including an export-processing factory for clothing.

The carbon credits generated by the project are sold on the voluntary market and the revenue is divided in 3 ways (at least in theory); a third going to the project implementer, Wildlife Works, another third going to the local communities in the settlement areas while the remaining third goes to the ranch owners. A research paper released last year highlights the problematic manner in which the profits are being shared at present. In reality, the land owners (ranch owners) are paid first, then the project costs are deducted with the remainder of the money being distributed to local communities (1).

The research also reveals that the ranch owners had signed 30-year contractual agreements that entitled them to a third of the revenue generated before costs associated with the project implementation are deducted. Local communities on the other hand did not have any legally binding agreements with the project that clearly defined their revenue share. They only had something that could be described as a “gentleman’s agreement” and often received only a sixth of the revenue collected. This despite the fact that communities are allowed neither doing sustenance agriculture nor using forests as they used to do.

But revenue allocation is not the only problem associated with the project, there are serious issues around how the carbon project is further reinforcing historical inequalities around land that the local communities (most notably the Taita) have faced since Kenya was under British colonial rule. The land under which the project is under was initially communal land, before colonial land policies in the 20th century drastically changed the land tenure system to various forms of private ownership that successive post-independence governments in Kenya have further entrenched.

In the 1920’s and 30’s the colonial administration facilitated the setting up of large-scale commercial farming estates that primarily planted sisal and coffee by leasing land to white farmers. Thousands of local communities were swiftly evicted from their land during this period and were also restricted from accessing communal lands they used seasonally for hunting, gathering and grazing. These lands were labeled as “idle” by the administration, a term that is still used to describe lands used by local and indigenous communities globally. In addition to this, more land was annexed from local communities for the creation of national parks and reserves and therefore further increasing their land grievances and also undermining the knowledge and relationship that the communities had with nature and wildlife.

Post-independence, ranches were created on trust lands (land held on behalf of the local communities by local government councils) but rather than reverse the historical injustices that the communities had long faced, a local elite consisting mostly of politicians granted themselves and their allies land leases on an individual or shareholder basis in Directed Agricultural Companies (DACs). Eventually, most of the ranches went into debt due to mismanagement and the general failure of the local coffee and sisal markets; but ranch ownership dynamic still remains, even as a lot of the local community members have been forced into becoming squatters on these ranches and other lands owned by private individuals.

What happens when communities already marginalized by land tenure systems that privilege individual private property ownership are subjected to projects that ensure that land-based wealth and power remains in the hands of a few? And, what happens when these projects restrict the livelihood and sustenance work communities do by “locking in” forests for carbon projects? The Kasigau project not only deepens the issue of land injustice but also explicitly favors ranch owners in matters of revenue allocation. Yet, the costs of land insecurity and rigid demands of the carbon project on land use are borne by the local communities.

“Carbon issues” cannot be separated from the broader concerns around forest rights and human rights. This is why frontline communities and activists around the world demand that discourses on climate change as well as the solutions need to be attentive to the politics and histories of the world and particularly the geo-political narratives that have marked the association of the Global North and Global South.

As it stands, market mechanisms like REDD+ redefine “nature” by taking on a particularly ideological route – one which would further reinforce the “supremacy” of a concept of western conservation that only sees forests as trees and then literally as money. Meanwhile, local communities are viewed as hindrances to “nature conservation” and thus, profit making. Ultimately, REDD+ does not address the root causes of forest destruction. Projects like the Kasigau project not only deepen local inequalities and racist practices but they also allow polluting industries that are buying the generated carbon credits to do the same elsewhere.

The scale and speed of the ecological crises of food, energy and climate are not only unprecedented but their impacts are largely concentrated in the Global South and in spaces and territories in the Global North in which people of color, including tribal and first nations people reside. All over the world it has been extremely apparent that the impacts of the ecological crises bear distinct racial and class markers. Locking in people’s land and territories using REDD+ projects reinforce the anti-commons, class war on the poor, anti-indigenous, anti-women, racist and discriminatory ideologies around access to land and we must reject the idea that our forests are for sale!

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(1) <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264837715002926>

TRICKS AND DECEPTION THAT PROMOTE LAND GRABBING

Rio Tinto's biodiversity offset in Madagascar: How culture and religion are used to enforce restrictions

In September 2015, Re:Common and WRM investigated one of the most widely advertised biodiversity compensation initiatives in the mining sector, the Rio Tinto biodiversity offset in south-eastern Madagascar. Rio Tinto and its partners from the conservation sector claim that the company's biodiversity conservation strategy will even have a "Net Positive Impact" on biodiversity in the end, meaning that the company's presence in the area would ultimately benefit biodiversity. This, even though extracting ilmenite at the Rio Tinto mine will destroy 1,600 hectares of a rare coastal forest with many species only found in this type of coastal forest in Madagascar. The "Net Positive Impact" is to be achieved through a combination of conservation measures inside the mining concession and biodiversity offsets at three different locations.

WRM and Re:Common visited communities affected by one of the biodiversity offsets, the Bemangidy-Ivohibe site, some 50 kilometres north of the mining concession. We wanted to find out what those most directly affected by the Rio Tinto biodiversity offset make of this pilot initiative in the mining sector.

Failure to disclose to communities that the "conservation project" in fact is a biodiversity offset

What we found was that little information has been made available to communities about what biodiversity offsets actually are. Villagers had not been informed that what had been presented to them as a "conservation project" was actually designed to compensate for destruction of a unique and rare littoral forest – and the livelihoods of families dependent on that forest - near the city of Fort Dauphin, some 50 km to the south of the Bemangidy-Ivohibe biodiversity offset site, where Rio Tinto QMM (1) is extracting ilmenite.

For example, soon after our arrival in one village we were told: "The company QMM has this project here to protect the forest, and they are bringing students from Tana [Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar] to do research here in the forest. We don't understand very much what QMM wants here. They are planting some trees and that's it. We don't understand and we would be very grateful if you could share more information on their plans."

Prior to the arrival of the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset project, villagers practised shifting cultivation to grow their staple food, manioc, at the edge of the forest. Among the restrictions the Bemangidy biodiversity offset now imposes is that villagers are no longer allowed to plant manioc along the forest edge or use the forest as they did before.

Threat to food security

Because villagers were told they could no longer plant along the edge of the forest, communities started to search for new areas to cultivate. The only place available to them are the sand dunes. Fields are now as far as 3-4 kilometres from villages and to get there, villagers have to walk for about an hour, passing small lagoons and streams. Villagers explained that during the rainy season (from November to April), getting to and from the fields is treacherous, particularly when carrying food back to the villages. In addition, productivity in the sandy soil is lower than at the forest fields, and growing manioc in the sandy soils is not going well. The new manioc fields are not producing enough to feed all families in the villages.

In terms of food security alone, the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset at Bemangidy is thus turning out to be a disaster. It leaves villagers without their staple food for much of the year and families have no regular cash income to buy food. At the same time, none of the alternative income generating activities that were promised at the start of the project have been forthcoming at villages such as Antsofso, and villagers have yet to receive compensation for loss of access to customary land.

Villagers at this biodiversity offset site felt that restrictions had been imposed without negotiation and with little regard for their situation. “They do not come to ask, they come to tell,” was a comment made by villagers on several occasions during our visit. If people are found farming in the forest without a permit, or in zones where use is prohibited, they have to pay a fine of between 50,000 and 1,000,000 Ariary (around 15-300 euros). To put this into perspective, more than 75 per cent of Malagasy people are living on less than US\$ 2 a day and the official minimum wage in Madagascar was 125,000.00 Ariary (35 euros / month) in 2015. “If you can’t pay the fine, they take you to the Forest Department and then to jail,” one villager explained during a community meeting.

Deplorable tactics to enforce restrictions

State institutions and the conservation sector in Madagascar are increasingly using expressions rooted in customary land use decision-making to enforce local land use restrictions in and around protected areas. One example is how conservation NGOs use the word "dina".

A dina is part of the traditional system of regulating customary land use within and among communities. The process of agreeing a dina involves a negotiation between those using the land, about how a certain area can be used. For this reason, a dina commands a degree of respect that state regulation generally does not. Until recently, a dina was not a written document—it did not need to be. Those to whom it applied had been involved in the negotiation and as part of the process, they committed to respecting what had been agreed together.

In the past decade or so, however, state authorities and conservation NGOs have begun to use the term dina for documents containing written rules imposed on communities as part of conservation projects. An academic article on the transfer of protected area management in Madagascar notes that dinas linked to such management transfers "reflect the agenda of the institution (NGO and/or project) that supports the

implementation of management transfers, rather than the priorities of the community. They lack the flexibility of traditional rules and are incapable of taking into consideration the specific economic situation of rule breakers. They focus on repression and penalties rather than resource extraction modalities." (2)

In conversation, villagers mentioned a "dina from Asity". Asity Madagascar is the national affiliate of BirdLife International in Madagascar and in charge of implementing the biodiversity offset at Bemangidy-Ivohibe. The dina from Asity, villagers explained, prohibits use of fire anywhere on the hillside, even for taking shifting cultivation patches in recuperation back into cultivation. Shortly after our visit in September 2015, a villager burned the vegetation on one of these patches in preparation for planting. Villagers at a meeting discussing the draft findings of the field report explained that he is suffering and needs land to cultivate manioc. He was ordered to pay a fine of 100,000 Ariary [30 euros] for burning in an area where the dina that regulates forest use in the biodiversity offset area prohibits such use.

Meetings with a conservation NGO involved in the implementation of the biodiversity offset additionally revealed that deplorable methods have been used to ensure compliance with these restrictions on forest use. In the meetings, we heard about various methods and tactics used to "make the offset project a success". These tactics are perhaps not a unique occurrence in the conservation sector. But they are rarely shared in such a candid way.

We were told that because Rio Tinto QMM is undertaking the biodiversity offset with a view to creating a "Net Positive Impact" on biodiversity, conservation NGOs had a particular obligation to help them succeed. What followed was an explanation of how this was done at the Bemangidy-Ivohibe biodiversity offset site.

To introduce the Bemangidy biodiversity offset activities, NGO staff engaged in a series of visits to communities. Sometimes, these were joint visits by the company and the NGO; sometimes, NGO staff would visit the villages around the biodiversity offset site without Rio Tinto QMM representatives. These visits were presented alternatively as a means of implementing the offset project in a participatory manner and as being part of a process of slow persuasion. "Basically it was brainwashing," we were told at one point in the conversation. (3)

In a first meeting, NGO staff would talk about the importance of the forest, followed by the presentation of the biodiversity offset, which was presented only as a conservation project. There would also be a harsh critique about current local land use practises. We learned that not all community meetings went well. One meeting in particular, with Rio Tinto QMM representatives present, was described as "a fiasco", partly because villagers had requested resolution of the outstanding issue of compensation for lost access to the forest.

To avoid a similar "fiasco" at following meetings, these were started with a church service. The meeting on the offset project that followed the church service was also held in the church, "to avoid disruption". (4) It was thought that people would remain calmer in a church. This was described as "leveraging on the ecumenical culture". Such "leveraging on the ecumenical culture" also facilitated alluding to God and ancestors as

the ones who had requested protection of the forest “for future generations and to respect the ancestors”.

Tapping into the strong culture of reciprocity in traditional customs— the importance of sharing, and the sentiment that if one does not learn how to give one will not receive— also made it easier for the NGO to cast aside requests for compensation more easily.

Biodiversity offsets – a double land grab in the name of biodiversity

Communities affected by the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset at Bemangidy-Ivohibe, in south-eastern Madagascar, that were struggling already before are now facing an increased risk of hunger and deprivation as a direct result of a biodiversity offset benefitting one of the world’s largest mining corporations. Yet Rio Tinto is able to claim that its ilmenite mine has come “at the rescue of the unique biodiversity of the littoral zone of Fort Dauphin”. (5) This is despite the fact that a large portion of the 1,600 hectares of a rare littoral forest inside the mining concession will be destroyed during mining.

The mining giant and its collaborators speak enthusiastically of a “Net Positive Impact” on biodiversity, claiming that the coastal forest it is mining would have been destroyed anyway over the next few decades by local peasant farming practises. The arguments used to underpin this claim are certainly questionable. Regardless, Rio Tinto QMM argue that by retaining some forest inside the mining concession as well as protecting and restoring forest elsewhere that is similar to the one being destroyed at the mine, the company’s mining activities will result in a “Net Positive Impact” on biodiversity, compared to what might otherwise have been. They further claim that the forest at the biodiversity offset sites would have been destroyed through peasant farming without the activities implemented by Rio Tinto and its partners through the biodiversity offset.

The reality, however, is very different from the story in glossy brochures distributed internationally. Subsistence livelihoods of villagers affected not only by the mining itself but also by the biodiversity offset are made even more precarious so Rio Tinto can increase its profits from the extraction of ilmenite. Thus, in reality, the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset model project turns into a double land grab in the name of biodiversity.

The report is available in English and French at <http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/new-report-rio-tintos-biodiversity-offset-in-madagascar/>.

A Malagasy version is available on request. A summary in Italian is available at <http://www.recommon.org/linganno-del-biodiversity-offsetting-il-caso-rio-tinto/>.

(1) The mine is run by QIT Madagascar Minerals (QMM), a joint venture in which Rio Tinto holds 80% and the state of Madagascar the remaining 20% of shares.

(2) M. Berard (2011): Legitimite des normes environnementales dans la gestion locale de la foret a Madagascar. Canadian Journal of Law and Society, Vol. 26. P 89-111.

(3) Response from Asity to the description of the conversation, received on 08 April 2016 by Email: “la façon dont on a rédigé la phrase ne relate pas vraiment la réalité. Primo, le « lavage de cerveau » n’est pas le mot approprié, mieux vaut dire que c’est un moyen d’apporter des éclaircissements pour la population. Secundo, les visites servent à sensibiliser la population sur les tenants et aboutissants du projet Offset.” [The manner in which the sentence is written does not really reflect reality. First, “brain-washing is not the appropriate word, it is better to say that

it is a process of clarification for the population. Second, the visits serve to raise awareness about how the Offset project works.]

(4) Response from Asity to the description of the conversation in the report, received on 08 April 2016 by Email: “En voici la réalité : tout au début, des groupes de personnes trouvaient toujours les moyens de perturber la réunion. Pour éviter cela, nous avons négocié avec les responsables de l’Eglise de Iaboakoho à débiter la réunion par une prière, et de prendre les décisions difficiles dans l’église même.” [“Here’s the reality: at the beginning, groups of people always find ways to disrupt such meetings. To avoid this, we negotiated with the leaders of the Church at Iaboakoho to start the meeting with a prayer, and to take the tough decisions in the church.”]

(5) A mine at the rescue of the unique biodiversity of the littoral zone of Fort Dauphin, QIT Madagascar Minerals SA Press Kit, 2009.

ACTION ALERTS

Update on POSCO’s harassments in Odisha India

Despite India’s National Green Tribunal statement on early April affirming that POSCO’s Environmental Clearance is valid only up to 19th July 2017, the case has not been closed and it will have another hearing on early May of this year. Meanwhile, the state police have turned the area in to a repressive colony. More than 420 false cases have lodged against villagers and warrant order has been issued against more than 2000 people. Land reoccupations have also faced prosecution and criminalization. Various people movements organised a three-day protest early this year and demand that POSCO be forced to make formal announcement to completely withdraw from the project immediately; to give all the land occupied by POSCO back to the villagers; to stop all types of repression; among others.

Read the full update (in English) here:

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/f91b651f7fecdf835b57dc11d/files/B223_PeA_POSCO.docx

RECOMMENDED

Corporate power over territories and people

The recently launched number of the Nyéléni Newsletter for food sovereignty, highlights the importance of the struggle against the growing power transnational corporations are gaining and the negative impact this is having on people’s lives. Water, seeds, land, among others, are becoming more and more a core part of the business of a group of corporations, which pursue their activities with impunity, leading to a kind of “corporate colonialism”. The newsletter echoes crimes committed by corporations against communities in Nigeria or the privatization of cities in Honduras.

Access the newsletter (in English) at: http://viacampesina.org/en/images/stories/pdf/2016-03-16-Nyeleni_Newsletter_Num_25_EN.pdf

Violence broke out in the fields and forests of Brazil

The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) of Brazil released its Notebook on Field Conflicts 2015 last April 15. The research data reveal a terrible reality. Last year there were 50 murders. And impunity reigns. Worsening the situation: 59 people suffered assassination attempts and another 144 received death threats, leaving them with the uncertainty of whether they will die soon. An atrocity that, in quantitative terms, has not occurred since 2004. The worst has occurred in the Amazonia, especially in Pará and Rondonia: in those states 40 people were killed. According to CPT lawyer in Marabá, José Batista Afonso, conflicts exist throughout the country, and they originate from structural causes related to the expansion of capital in the field and the increasing concentration of land. A CartaCapital report tells us that “the quilombolas and indigenous people are fighting for territory, the farmers are fighting for land, and everyone is being exterminated, murdered, dispossessed.”

Read the report in Portuguese here: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/553769-a-explosao-da-violencia-na-luta-pela-terra-e-territorio>

Access CPT's full investigation in Portuguese here:

<http://www.cptnacional.org.br/index.php/downloads/finish/43-conflitos-no-campo-brasil-publicacao/14019-conflitos-no-campo-brasil-2015>

The WWF in DRC: Conservation without people

A short film from the Rainforest Foundation UK about forest communities affected by the Tumba Lediiima Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shows how the communities living in the area established for the Reserved were, and still are, completely ignored. The Reserve was established in 2006 by the DRC government in collaboration with the WWF, which hired “eco guards” from ICCN, the Congolese nature conservation agency. Local communities have their farming and hunting practices curtailed so severely that there has been a significant rise in malnutrition. On top of this, local communities are confronting various human rights abuses. As a community representative of one affected village says in the video, “When they patrolled, they searched our camps. They tortured people. They raped the women”. After 10 years since the creation of the Reserve, it is clear that the violence must stop.

See the video here: <https://vimeo.com/163667069>

The video accompanies the report from the same organization “Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: failing both people and biodiversity?” Of the 34 protected areas included in the study: 26 have reported some form of displacement of local people (with a possible additional six areas for which there was no data available); 21 have reported conflicts between park management and local communities, including severe human rights violations (with a possible additional ten areas for which there was no data available); 18 have reported no consultation with local people prior to creation (with a possible additional four areas for which there was no data available).

See report at: <http://blog.mappingforrights.org/wp-content/uploads/38342-Rainforest-Foundation-Conservation-Study-Web-ready.pdf>

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