Water and Pulp: The North's Thirst and the South's Resistance

About fifty years ago, Aracruz Celulose, now called Fibria, replaced original Atlantic Forest with the first fast-growing eucalyptus plantations in the northern part of Espírito Santo State, Brazil (1). Forty years ago, an industrial pulp complex— now owned by Fibria — was installed in the main Tupiniquim indigenous village (Macacos), in Barra do Riacho, Aracruz district. Now in 2017, drought punishes the remaining villages and families in resistance, and contamination serves as a political weapon to expropriate their territories.

Accessing water is an enormous sacrifice and challenge for the entire region. Rationing is constant. Inhabitants — whether from indigenous territories, other traditional groups like quilombolas (communities tracing their roots back to slaves who escaped captivity), or coastal, farming or fishing communities — are always concerned about water quality, since they live on the outskirts of peri-urban areas with industrial pulp and port facilities.

Because they are connected to the structurally unstable agrochemical industry, large-scale eucalyptus plantations provoke fear and distrust among people who live near them. For their own safety, whenever they can, villagers avoid drinking water from wells and streams that have survived the drought. They witness how the plantation operations require the intense and daily use of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and fertilizers, and how subcontracted workers and animals are exposed to contamination. In industrial districts, pulp production and export monopolizes the region's water, which is used to supply the three factories and their associated industries (chlorine, peroxide, etc). These facilities use an amount of water equivalent to the entire population's consumption in the metropolitan region of the state's capital, Vitória (1.9 million inhabitants/IBGE, 2016).

Since the late 1960s, the industrial port complex for pulp, and eucalyptus monoculture — which occupies a large portion of the Conceição da Barra, São Mateus, Linhares and Aracruz municipalities — have subjected rivers, streams, springs, lakes and seas to the demands of Northern consumption. In Espírito Santo, one can see the tragic results and effects of this trend: the growing aridity of the climate, the pollution and drying up of water, and the thirst of nature and the people who live there. While exports to the United States and China are increasing, the European consumer market continues to be the main source of Fibria Celulose's profits, financing this company's war for water.

In the global North there is another type of thirst and pollution, one of an existential nature. It involves the manipulation and standardization of desires. In the global North, people are thirsty for more toilet paper and packaging material — packaging carrying, for example, the *greenwashing* FSC label. (2) By mentally habituating people to stratospheric levels of consumption, the so-called Green Economy provides an escape from the boredom and nihilism of the Old World. People believe that water will always be available in one-way PET bottles, that is, in disposable containers.

In the tropical South, the opposite is already occurring. Resistance does not believe in development as the path to good life. And it has many aspirations: it wants to revise and reinvent its historical destiny; it wants to create and try out post-eucalyptus transition technologies; it wants to denounce violations of human rights and nature; and it wants to protect and care for water and life. It cannot live

on the margins of its own (unjust) planet, which it shares with the global North. An anti-capitalist counterculture is committed to protecting water and the climate — which are currently threatened by international agreements; financial, economic and technological corporations; and European-style development policies. Without a doubt, the Green Economy has not been designed for people in the global South.

This is the case, for example, in the quilombola territories of Sapê do Norte in Espírito Santo. Surrounded by huge eucalyptus plantations and oil and gas boreholes, the 33 Quilombola communities living there experience and suffer from the disappearance and contamination of their streams and springs, forests and seeds, and fish and hunting possibilities. In 2015, when the State declared a state of public emergency — due to months without rain and a widespread water crisis—Fibria's subcontractors (Plantar, Emflora, and others) were using dozens of agrochemical tankers to extract the little water that remained in the São Domingos River, in order to irrigate their recent eucalyptus plantings. Meanwhile, in the Linharinho quilombo, those who depended on river water could not irrigate their fields and forest gardens or their agroforestry micro-systems, which both provide them with food and income, and protect the riparian vegetation from the criminal invasion of eucalyptus. In their public statement at a CONSEA hearing (National *Council* for Food and Nutrition Security), in front of the State Government and Federal Public Ministry, Sapezeiro and Joice, members of the Sapê do Norte Quilombola Commission, explained how there was not enough water even to wash their children's clothes, to bathe, or for their animals during the 2015 drought.

In the riverside quilombola community of Angelim do Meio in Conceição da Barra, it has become impossible to access water from the river, ever since the arrival of eucalyptus trees and sugar cane fields that surround them. This is due to massive contamination from agrochemicals, and to constant spillage of waste products from the alcohol and sugar industries that are located in the far North of Espírito Santo. With CONSEA’s support, the situation in Angelim do Meio has been denounced since 2014 in reports on violations of the human right to adequate food, in Brasilia and Espírito Santo. Yet in 2017, the situation remains serious. It is a social and environmental crime for which no one has been held to account; because although the community successfully obtained a water storage tank, it still depends on the supply of water from tanks, whether from the municipality or from eucalyptus or sugar cane companies.

Coastal and fishing communities in Linhares are also living with drought and contamination. In between Regência and Povoação districts, the mouth of the Doce River—the main river basin of Espírito Santo — was no longer reaching the Atlantic Ocean shortly before the largest environmental crime in Brazilian history took place. This was in late 2015, when mining company Samarco (owned by BHP and Vale) spilled 40 million liters of toxic sludge into the Doce River. There was once again a state of emergency. Since 2016, hundreds of coastal peoples, fisherfolk, farmers and rural landless workers have been forced to move to less contaminated neighboring regions, where they occupy areas in dispute with Fibria and Petrobras. The State, large companies, the local press and management of public conservation units criminalize them — *these people*, who did not even receive necessary reparations for the successive environmental crimes of Samarco, Fibria and Petrobras!

When Fibria opened its third pulp mill in 2002 in the Barra do Riacho district in Aracruz, the company already perceived a regional water collapse. It also perceived that, due to expanding demand, it had to seek water even further away from its industrial plant. The Caboclo Bernardo Canal — built with a highly suspicious environmental license, inaugurated in a hurry and strongly criticized by social movements, civil society organizations, lawyers, technicians and academic researchers — began to divert waters from the Doce River to the company, by interconnecting micro-basins to Fibria's industrial water reserve. At that time, the company and governors justified the canal by saying it

would supply water to residents of Barra do Riacho and Vila do Riacho, two districts located near the factories and pulp port. Pure charades!

Fifteen years later, in these very districts, water rationing is constant, and the population cannot use the salinized and polluted canal water. Not even the pulp mills can use the contaminated water of the Doce River since the spill from the mine, without first applying a chemical cocktail that brings it up to standards for the machinery, according to reports from workers of the industrial pulp complex itself. Coastal peoples, fisherfolk, landless peasants and the leaders of Barra and Vila do Riacho, also witnessed the massive death of fish in the Caboclo Bernardo Canal in 2016.

Seeking to adapt to the State's water collapse—and to the detriment of the local population's water supply—the company has begun to build very deep and wide artesian wells within its own industrial plant. Indigenous leaders from the village of Tupiniquim de Pau, Brazil, and residents and fisherfolk from Barra do Riacho, fear a worsening of the drought that affects their rivers and streams.

The agroindustrial pulp complex's monopoly on water has caused serious social and environmental impacts throughout the northern region of Espírito Santo. In order to contain a growing upwell of rebellion, the company is using subcontracted state security forces, further exacerbating existing conflicts. Its policy of social responsibility alternates between violent threats of eviction, and manipulation of inter-community conflicts — or in some cases, conflicts within a single community. Modernizing the ecological curse of Aracruz Celulose, the current owner Fibria is confirming the forecast of naturalist Augusto Ruschi, who in the 1960s and 1970s coined the term "green desert" in reference to eucalyptus plantations.

While the global North continues with its rampant consumption of paper, people throughout Espírito Santo are resisting, to defend their territories and protect their water. They are reoccupying traditional lands and reconverting eucalyptus groves into food-producing agroecological gardens; they are bringing back vegetation invaded by monoculture, and implementing agroforestry systems; they are monitoring and denouncing violations of human rights and the rights of nature; they are learning technologies that allow them to live with drought; they are facing violence from private and military police forces; they are setting up camps to take back land. They survived the first 50 years. And they will be there after the company closes its first factory, due to lack of water.

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(1) See more information on the resistance to Aracruz Celulose / Fibria, at: http://wrm.org.uy/?s=Fibria+Aracruz

(2) See more information on plantation certification models at: http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/certification/