
Next steps in the indigenous struggle: Territorial reoccupation and reconversion of eucalyptus plantations

Although the struggle for 11,009 hectares of Tupinikim and Guarani land in the hands of the greatest eucalyptus pulp exporter in the world, Aracruz Cellulose, was a major challenge, the reoccupation of this territory and reconversion of eucalyptus in the zone to other land uses is perhaps an even greater one. Over the past 40 years, more than 90% of the area has been occupied and exploited by monoculture eucalyptus plantations, causing degradation of countless streams and rivers, killing the fish and contaminating the scant water left for the indigenous people to drink, bathe and wash their clothes. The tree felling preceding the plantation of the eucalyptus trees destroyed the indigenous peoples' great wealth: the Atlantic forest, with its numerous kinds of wood, medicinal plants, game, fruit, raw material for traditional crafts, among other products.

The conditions for territorial reoccupation depend, in the first place, on the terms of an agreement known as TAC – Document for the Adjustment of Behaviour – that is to be drawn up by the Federal Public Ministry with the participation of the company, the indigenous peoples, the 6th Chamber and the Ministry of Justice. This TAC is aimed at “improvements” in the area, mainly the eucalyptus plantations. The signature of this TAC is important to avoid the company launching legal proceedings – as it constantly threatens – as this could make the conclusion of indigenous land demarcation unfeasible. If the government were to consider that Aracruz planted the eucalyptus trees in good faith, the company would have the lawful right to compensation – although this does not correspond to what happened at the time, as can be vouched for by the indigenous people who were present during Aracruz's invasion of the area. Aracruz has estimated the value of the “improvements” in the area at US\$ 53 million. However, for its part the federal government has declared that it does not have the resources to compensate the company, and for this reason suggests that the eucalyptus planted be part of the negotiation. Other improvements and items under negotiation include power transmission cables, a railway branch and part of the hydraulic complex.

The company will surely demand that all the eucalyptus trees be removed from the area, leaving a literally devastated landscape for the Tupinikim and Guarani people, while these want to ensure conditions that will enable them to work in the conquered lands. These conditions will be defined in the final draft of the TAC. Once the TAC is agreed upon, the demarcation process could be concluded. This process also consists of the physical demarcation of the area – placing signs – homologation of the area by the President of the Republic and legal registry of the lands, declaring that they belong to the federal government and that the Tupinikim and Guarani people have the right to their exclusive use.

So far, the Tupinikim and Guarani people have submitted the following proposals to establish territorial reoccupation:

- In the first place the Tupinikim and Guarani people want to rebuild the villages destroyed by the invasion of Aracruz in the area, as was the case twice in the past when they recovered their lands after 2005. Four Guarani families are already living in the recently rebuilt village of Olho D'Água. The Guarani people are cleaning the areas surrounding the straw-roofed wood and mud houses, built in

the middle of the eucalyptus plantation, to start growing foodstuffs. The presence in the area of one of the few springs that survived the environmental disaster of the monoculture eucalyptus plantation has encouraged the Guarani people to start living in this place and restore the old village. Another village that will be lived in shortly is Areal. Certainly other villages will start being populated and thus the indigenous people will be able to recover their traditional occupation of the region – with sufficient villages, each with a few families – thus freeing the existing villages that are suffering from overpopulation problems.

- Secondly, the communities want to reforest part of the area with native trees from the Atlantic forest, giving priority to the banks of rivers and streams, in addition to springs. They know that this work is important to guarantee water and thus life for future generations of the Tupinikim and Guarani people. Since 2005, the communities are discussing proposals for reforestation and a large meeting of the villages was organized under the name of “Replanting our Hopes.” A pilot project was launched in 2006 for a nursery to produce native tree saplings in the village of Pau Brasil, guided by a list of over 100 species prepared by the older indigenous people. They are species that have traditionally been used by the indigenous people for crafts, home-made remedies and domestic utensils. This year two reforestations have already taken place, including an area previously planted with eucalyptus trees. From now on the proposal is to encourage this restoration work.

- In the third place, the communities are seeking economic alternatives for the indigenous lands, using different kinds of crops that can generate employment and income. Various proposals are being studied, but no fully defined plan exists as yet. What does exist is an enormous will to ensure the communities’ economic autonomy, with a place where the children can live and in the future, work, enjoying the freedom that Aracruz took away from them in the past. A place where, even with all the changes frequently imposed on the indigenous people, the basic elements of their tradition and culture are preserved. In the future, this will enable the Tupinikim and Guarani people to continue developing their way of life.

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