

## **Can the Amazon survive false solutions?**

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The World Social Forum that took place in January in the city of Belem do Para, Brazil, had the Amazon as its backdrop: a vast diverse biome hosting one third of the planet's genetic varieties. According to Professor Aziz Ab'Saber, a leading Brazilian scientist quoted at a seminar on the 'Sustainable Amazon', the Amazon has 22 regional subsystems and contains an estimated 60 thousand plant species, 300 mammal species, over 2,000 species of fish and more than 2.5 million species of insects. Four hundred different groups of Indigenous People live there.

However, the Amazon is also seen as a resource for new biotechnologies, a source of fossil and water energy resources, a major watershed containing 20% of the planet's fresh water and, from the geological standpoint, it is of incalculable value because of its mineral resources. Thus the Amazon is being colonized by the rational discourse of science and will be further colonized by the thirst for 'development' – unless powerful social forces arise from the populations who have lived sustainably in this region for millennia.

The colonization agenda is currently advancing relentlessly, finding new ways of dominating and marketing life and imposing itself, through blood and fire, on the Amazon landscapes and in the hearts of the cultures inhabiting them. This model continues the domination and submission of societies and nature under the flag of capitalism, prioritizing development, private property and free enterprise, whilst generating environmental, climatic and economic disasters that are already visible.

Such colonization has managed to sustain itself in the name of democracy and progress – so that even countries such as Brazil, which we expected to have more critical positions *vis-à-vis* the mirages of green neo-capitalism, are willing to enter the race to transform the Amazon, despite the fact that it has conservation policies that protect some areas.

In this respect, it is essential for a critical and rational environmentalism to raise its sights beyond the immediate moment and see the chaotic consequences of this method of intervention. This region could still be a bastion of a new socio-ecological system and a new civilizing era – but we are witnessing the deployment of corrosive techno-cultural and bureaucratic mechanisms characteristic of colonialist-capitalist civilization. This system sometimes appears to have a social-democratic face, but it has already shown its destructive capacity, its emancipating promise subordinated to transnational and emerging economic elites.

Handing over economic governance and responsibility for decisions that compromise the survival of the Amazon peoples and cultures, to stakeholders captured by a market rationale and a short-term, selfish perspective is a recipe for disaster. Such stakeholders include the big conservation NGOs, as well as transnational corporations and national and international economic and bureaucratic elites. Claiming to speak on behalf of ecology and civil society, these NGOs assume the right to talk of economic and ecological justice, but they are no more than instruments of a new model for the accumulation of capital, that speaks the discourse of conservation and eco-efficiency, while concealing its mercantilist nature and capitalist corporate partners. Although speaking of environmental justice and the rights of future generations and living beings, they lack the sensitivity and the ethical

responsibility to understand and incorporate the views and perspectives of those whom they claim to represent.

Dominated by their fascination for instruments such as REDD, carbon bonds, payments for environmental services; they hide behind the offer of more employment, more welfare, contamination control, reduction of the stock of atmospheric carbon, and increased benefits from technology, without appreciating the real impacts of their proposed solutions. Their attitude is unjust, sacrificing through deception the possibility of a sustainable and achievable world.

In our Latin American region, many of the enterprises carried out in the name of development, or to create conservation corridors through the Amazon, the Choco, the Gran Chaco and the plains in the northern part of the subcontinent, have led to the erosion of cultural and biological diversity and the loss of the ways of life built up by the peoples who inhabit these areas. It is depressing to ask who will repair the consequences of these new injustices in full knowledge that the consequences of previous colonial ransacking were never repaired. The outcome is clear and involves the deepening of social and ecological debts, the fruit of past and present injustices that will never be compensated in the present political and economic framework.

Now, in the name of salvation from the damages that the current system is causing, we are asked to accept new sacrifices: we must allow and promote a new colonization of the Amazon, to enable the salvation of the planet or the alleviation of poverty in rich countries. We must allow the Peoples who developed ways of life that are symbiotic with the forest to be delivered up to the inconsistencies of development and consumption. New sugar-candy paradises are imposed, such as clean development, ecological taxation and debt for nature swaps, which fail to address the causes of the problems or to transform the capitalist structure and the selfish objectives sustaining it.

This continuance of inequality is part of long-standing processes subjecting nature to the market, and cultures to mental colonization and cultural destruction. This perspective of salvation of the elites, particularly those in the North, submits our territories to domination and ransacking, and democracy to authoritarianism and ideological manipulation. The biased actions of the mass media also erode the strength of society and atomize its capacity to respond.

The WSF held in the Amazon left open this central debate that must be driven by us, the environmentalists.