
Land grabbing and the importance of words

Among many indigenous peoples, words are considered sacred, and must be used with care. But in today's digitalized, high-speed, globalized world, words are not viewed this way. They are used carelessly, often without realizing the true meaning of what is being said or typed. And sometimes, often without meaning too, we end up inadvertently reinforcing ideas, concepts and values implied by the words we use.

On the other hand, those who promote the globalized market economy, such as big corporations, who are determined to continue pursuing limitless growth and have led us into so many serious problems, tend to devote a great deal of thought to the names they give to things.

What we walk on every day they call land or property. It is something that, from their point of view, basically serves for production or profit-making. It is where they can find the "natural resources", minerals, oil, water, etc., that are seen to be at our disposal, ready to be exploited.

However, peoples with a connection to the land speak instead of territory and refer to it as their "home", a place that protects them, that gives them what they need to produce food, medicine and tools, as well as meeting spiritual and cultural needs. While land is being increasingly reduced to the question of ownership, individualized, privatized and commodified, territory cannot be sold, because it is a collective space, a space for everyone to share.

In the pursuit of greater revenue from land and property, land grabbing is on the rise, especially in the countries of the South, as a means of maximizing profits. Forests are reduced to a mere grouping of trees, according to FAO, and are preferably planted as large monoculture plantations, genetically modified to create "supertrees" in which one trait is modified to dominate the others, with no concern for the as yet unknown collateral effects.

In the globalized economy, peoples in all their diversity are not valued. People are merely consumers, as well as a source of labour, preferably outsourced and cheap. For this economy, there is no such thing as different cultures and identities, there are only markets, whose goal is to grow and to create new markets and profit-making opportunities.

For this economy, energy means electricity, and no consideration is given to other forms or meanings of energy for traditional peoples, who are probably much better prepared and most able to confront our uncertain future. But the globalized economy is determined to centralize and control not only the land, but also the way energy is viewed, through its powerful multinationals, promoting an energy model chosen primarily for its profit potential, be it run as currently on oil and coal, or on so-called renewable energy sources. In an unsustainable and just framework these technologies become part of a globalised energy model that maintains existing injustices and shows little concern for the consequences.

The globalized economy doesn't talk about nature, about its mysteries, or about its importance for the way of life that millions of people have developed in a way that does not destroy nature,

considering themselves to also form a part of it. The globalized economy talks about “environmental services” that must be ensured so that they can be used to provide the “rights” to continue polluting in other places – or even be traded on financial markets, while arguing that human beings are destructive. Local communities suffer the consequences of placing a price on nature, facing restrictions and prohibitions in places where the sale of these “services” is implemented. In a way, they are being “punished” for having conserved nature until now.

The fight against land grabbing and other grabs of the globalized economy is also a fight against the subtle imposition of new words and concepts that encourage new customs, ideas and values. This is why it is important not only to halt land grabbing and its many tentacles – the focus of this bulletin – but also to halt the process of “grabbing” and domination of the words imposed by the globalized economy, which disregards important values and ideals which the peoples of the world over have developed over the course of many, many centuries, and that are now being rapidly destroyed.

The people fight back any way they can, they resist because they want to live in peace, not only in their territories and with nature, but also with their own words for everything that gives life meaning.