Bulletin Issue Nº 209 – December 2014

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The WRM team

OUR VIEWPOINT

The complex debate about alternatives

This last World Rainforest Movement bulletin of the year 2014 focuses on an issue that is somehow present in all of the local struggles and related issues that this bulletin informs you about every month. Although it is not specifically about a forest or tree plantation-related issue, it is about something that involves forest-dependent communities and that we feel is very important to dedicate an entire WRM bulletin to: the complex debate about alternatives.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE "ALTERNATIVES" DEBATE

An alternative to "alternatives"

Most people who go around asking activists for "alternatives" to the status quo are not really interested in alternatives. Or if they are, they are interested only in those "alternatives" that might benefit themselves, reinforce oppression, or fit with their own view of the world. It's no coincidence that many of the people who talk about an "alternative to capitalism" – or the lack of one – are capitalists. It serves their purposes to present capitalism as if it were an intellectual "model" that can only be threatened by another intellectual "model", rather than by the unending, 500-year-old struggles of the oppressed.

Challenges for the struggles of women rooted in their territories: A decolonial perspective

At whose expense are projects created in order to – according to their promoters – generate "development"? The hegemonic economic model, with its inherent discrimination and racism, views the communities of indigenous peoples, traditional peoples, peasant farmers, fisherfolk, etc. as "subaltern" communities that can be exploited, obliterated, reconfigured, to serve the needs of capitalist accumulation. This coloniality, rooted in power, is even more evident when viewed through a feminist lens – but from the viewpoint of a feminism that addresses the oppression of the bodies and lives of these black women, indigenous women, peasant women, fisherwomen. They are not just women. Their position within the "world system" is determined by the intersection of oppressions based on gender, race and class.

AlteRAtive Energies: When the only "alternative" is integral change

In communities on the border between Ecuador and Colombia that live under the influence of armed conflict, monoculture fruit tree plantations soaked pesticides, and/or oil drilling – and therefore, in the midst of contamination – the social fabric has deteriorated to critical degrees. In Ecuador, in the last 10 years, there have been 8,688 suicides, most of them young people, primarily women, and most often in rural areas. This could lead us to ask, what is the energy missing from these peasant and indigenous communities, when their members choose to turn out the lights on their lives forever?

Indian Forest Struggles: the quest for alternatives

The world over, social movements resisting the neo-liberal aggression on nature and on the various forms of common property regimes, have to grapple with the thorny question of 'alternatives'. The clamour for such 'alternatives' is provoked most often by proponents of the free-market economy and even a section of the mainstream left, as if the neo-liberal model of economic development is always a given, by default meant to inform and control the idea that nature, including forests, is there to be used and appropriated. This short article will look at the issue of 'alternatives' in the limited context of Indian forests to better understand three things: 1. What meaning(s) one could

reasonably attach to the word/concept of 'alternatives', 2. Whether grassroots resistance appreciates and internalizes such alternatives as 'alternatives', and 3. Whether such alternatives, singly or collectively, offer some form of politics for social transformation, by overwhelming the capitalist production relations on the ground where such alternatives are being practised, and also, on a more general level, posit a transition to a more egalitarian and post-capitalist economy, society and political order.

PEOPLES IN ACTION

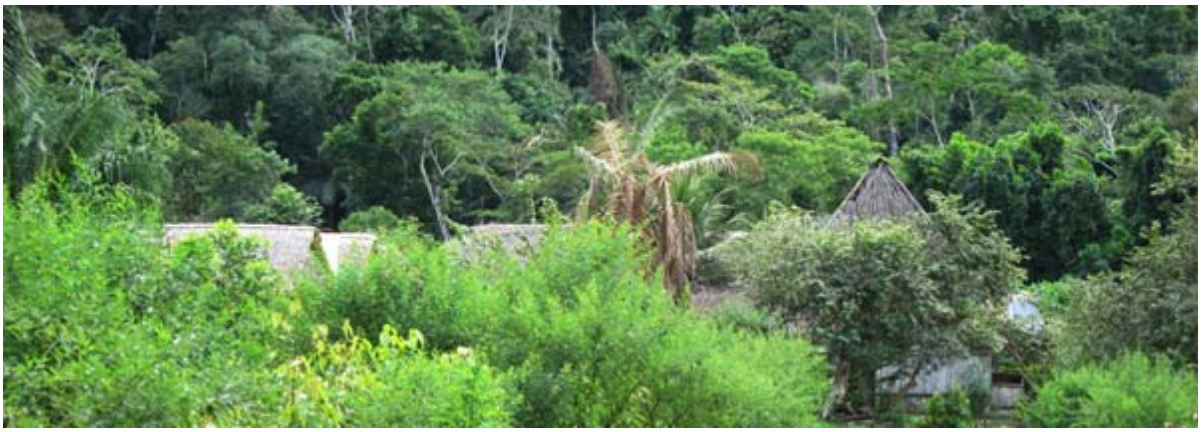
- **Declaration of the People's Summit on Climate Change, Lima, Peru**
- **Legal action in defence of the rights of nature of the Tangabana páramo**
- **Women fighting against extractive industries**
- **How the industrial food system contributes to the climate crisis**
- **Environmental and Social Justice Photography contest**

RECOMMENDED

- **"Energy Alternatives, Surveying the Territory"**
- **Mekong Commons Internet site**
- **Mapping popular alternative proposals of envisioning infrastructure**
- **Forests as important as farming for some rural communities**

OUR VIEWPOINT

The complex debate about alternatives



This last World Rainforest Movement bulletin of the year 2014 focuses on an issue that is somehow present in all of the local struggles and related issues that this bulletin informs you about every month. Although it is not specifically about a forest or tree plantation-related issue, it is about something that involves forest-dependent communities and that we feel is very important to dedicate an entire WRM bulletin to: the complex debate about alternatives.

As many of us are involved in struggles against forest-destructive projects, we all have often experienced a situation in which a company or state representative questions us when we oppose a certain project, demanding to know: "What is your alternative?" In this bulletin, we try to address this somewhat intimidating question from different angles in order to show not only its complexity but also to offer some ideas about how to deal with this question and the "alternatives" debate in general in our daily practice.

As Larry Lohmann shows in his article, when we eventually try to respond to the demand placed on us to provide an "alternative", we are often also forced to formulate our alternative within the logic of the hegemonic production model. As we know, this model exists to serve a very high level of material consumption for a minority in the world, which often lives far away from where most of the damage is done. Larry suggests that we should first of all question the demand posed on us, for example, by counter-questioning with queries such as "alternative to whom?" and "at whose expense?"

We should also continue our efforts to see through, reflect on and reply to the language used and imposed on us by those who push most for – and benefit most from – the big forest-destructive projects. For decades, companies, consultants, state officials, the mainstream media, etc., have argued that they have the "alternatives", the "solutions", to the diverse crises that our societies are facing. About 20 years ago, they talked about "sustainable development" as an "alternative" to the mainstream development model. In recent years, because the problems persisted despite two decades of implementing "sustainable development" policies and projects, they started talking about the "green economy" and of "putting a price on nature" as the new "alternatives". Such "alternatives" are adopted and promoted by UN bodies, by almost every government and every transnational corporation, while in practice, nothing structurally changes. It seems then that thinking up and proposing "alternatives" have become, more than anything else, simply part of the same model to which these are meant to provide "alternatives".

But is there an alternative to the debate/demand for "alternatives"? An interesting experience is recounted in the article by Adolfo Maldonado from Ecuador, about how to deal with the situation faced by many thousands of communities around the global South who find themselves facing a major crisis in many respects as a result of years of destructive activities in and around their homes; in the case of Ecuador, these activities involve the oil industry and monoculture fruit-tree plantations. For years, Adolfo worked with an affected community through a so-called "Environmental Clinic" – an initiative

of the organization *Acción Ecológica* based on the belief that when nature is “sick”, then people will also be “sick”. In the community involved in this initiative, the alternative to “alternatives” came to be called *alteractiv*e energy, referring to an energy capable of changing the lives of the people in the community for the better.

In practice, around the globe, a lot of unique experiences are taking place in many countries at the very local level that share the common daily need of people to change their lives for the better, despite an often adverse situation of a large-scale destructive project nearby. Such experiences are pushed forward by people in the communities, by women’s and youth groups, by organizations working around culture and by social movements, to give just a few examples.

Another example is the story of the challenge in a country as complex as India to transform the diverse efforts to change the lives of the people in the community for the better into a bigger political movement for social change and radical transformation. It is impossible then not to touch on the huge obstacles and challenges that arise, when it comes to looking for alternatives capable of changing people’s lives for the better in a country that is – like most of our countries – dominated by state power, by a capitalist regime which serves to the benefit of transnational corporations that control the market economy. How is it possible to build “alternatives” within a single, dominant model that continues destroying ways of life and cultures?

So the challenges are huge and, as we also address in one of the following articles, especially for women. The article address the issue of the challenge for feminists from the global South to look for new ways of feminism that better recognizes the realities of the majority of women affected by the aforementioned destructive model and who suffer from multiple oppressions, including of being a woman. Facing this challenge also means to overcome the fragmentation of the analyses that are done as well as the fragmentation of our struggles.

All in all, we hope this bulletin is a small but nevertheless valuable contribution to this complex but necessary debate. We invite you to share your views and also your experiences around the issue. And of course, we hope you enjoy reading it!

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE "ALTERNATIVES" DEBATE

An alternative to “alternatives”

There's an old joke in the US about a public prosecutor who starts to build a case against the Mafia in her city. One day she receives a mysterious visit from several large, polite, well-dressed gentlemen. They take their time to arrange themselves comfortably in chairs around her desk. After coffee is served, their leader clears his throat and begins to speak:

“Let me say first that I'm very sympathetic with what you're trying to do. You're concerned about contract killings, loan sharking, illicit gambling rings, heroin being sold on the streets. You want to do something about people's pensions being embezzled, women being trafficked for prostitution, public works contracts going to gangsters who skim off most of the budget for themselves, restaurants being burned down when they don't pay off extortionists, witnesses being threatened. You don't like any of this stuff. I understand that. Neither do I. There are big problems with this system. But what we want to know is: what's your alternative?”

The joke is funny for the same reason most jokes are funny. It brings an unspeakable truth out into the open – only to use it as a pretext for creating pleasure in the conspiratorial sharing of awareness of its very unspeakableness.

In this case, the unspeakable truth is that most people who go around asking activists for “alternatives” to the status quo are not really interested in alternatives. Or if they are, they are interested only in those “alternatives” that might benefit themselves, reinforce oppression, or fit with their own view of the world. Like the mafiosi visiting the prosecutor in her office, they are mainly just trying to bully you, because they feel threatened by what you are doing.

Examples are everywhere.

There are the parliamentarians who, facing criticisms of failed government policies that they can't answer, ask “What's your alternative?” just to change the subject.

There are the giant plantation companies who ask you what your alternative is for meeting paper demand in order to stop you from saying that the alternative involves questioning that very demand.

There are the World Bank officials who ask you “What's your alternative?” so that they can use you as an unpaid consultant on projects to build their own power, all the while cynically refusing to recognize any answers that would not provide jobs for their staff and move lots of money through the institution.

More innocently, there are the people who, instinctively more sympathetic to popular movements but taken aback by a depth of resistance they cannot understand, feel compelled to ask “What's your alternative?” because they can't see the alternatives that already exist all around them. In 1990, visiting European journalists asked Thai villagers who were trying to stop the Pak Mun dam what their alternative to the dam was. The villagers patiently replied that the “alternatives” were already there. We have our fisheries, they said. We have our community forests. We have our fields. We have our temples, our schools, our markets. These are what the dam would hurt or destroy. Sure we have problems, they continued. But we need to deal with them in our own way, and the dam would take away what we need to do that.

The response would likely be similar in many other places where the struggle is not to find a shiny new alternative, but to protect an ongoing process of developing ones that already exist. In the joke about the Mafia, the alternative to the Mafia is simple: no Mafia. For the Thai villagers, the alternative to Pak Mun was equally simple: no Pak Mun.

The example highlights a key feature of many demands for “alternatives”: they disrespect ordinary people. “Alternatives” are usually imagined to be comprehensive, well-thought-out blueprints formulated by a few smart people for political leaders to execute, rather than unpredictable,

ever-evolving processes rooted in mass resistance to unbearable injustice, full of unending sweat, pain and error, in which anybody can ask a question of anybody else.

In that respect, the usual demand for immediate “alternatives” tends to have two functions. First: to preserve the illusion that action is the implementation of ready-made plans by leaders. Ruling elites are the Mind. Everybody else is just a passive Body. And second: to prevent attempts to build genuine, open-ended alternatives, since during the process ordinary people might learn too much about how the world works. If beleaguered elites can convince you that you're not qualified to protest because you don't have a ready-made “alternative” to present, half their battle is won. They can then tie you up with requests for details and quibbles over credentials and ultimately turn you into their employee.

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek puts this well when he observes that the aggressive, dismissive demand for an alternative so often faced by social activists “aims precisely at precluding the true answer – its point is: ‘Say it in my terms or shut up!’ In this way, the process of translating an inchoate protest into a concrete project is blocked.”

The often-heard demand for an “alternative to capitalism” is no different. It's no coincidence that many of the people who talk about an “alternative to capitalism” – or the lack of one – are capitalists. It serves their purposes to present capitalism as if it were an intellectual “model” that can only be threatened by another intellectual “model”, rather than by the unending, 500-year-old struggles of the oppressed.

This is why, even if you have no master plan ready for the total overthrow of capitalism, capitalists like to pretend that you do. Because if you did, it would make you manageable. The word “alternative” in the question “What's your alternative?” is singular because the people asking the question usually want to draw attention away from the activities through which real political change takes place, which are plural.

How to deal with these manoeuvres? What is the alternative to “alternatives”? One step would be to make the question “What's your alternative?” into a problem wherever it arises. To meet it with the counter-question, “Alternative for whom?” To refuse to address elite-biased questions like “What's your alternative for meeting global demand for palm oil?”, instead working to make it possible for the public to be able to discuss questions like “How is the demand for palm oil being constructed and by whom, and at whose expense?”.

A related move would be to replace the question “What's your alternative?”, wherever possible, with the question “Whose side are you on?” – as a reminder that alternatives are not just a matter for intellectuals and political leaders to decide on but are already and always being explored everywhere, and that the issue is which explorations you are going to commit yourself to.

The peremptory question “What's your alternative?” is often not only an attempt to dismiss challenges to entrenched power, but also a coded effort to coopt you into the ranks of would-be master-planners. Loyalty to democracy means refusing the invitation.

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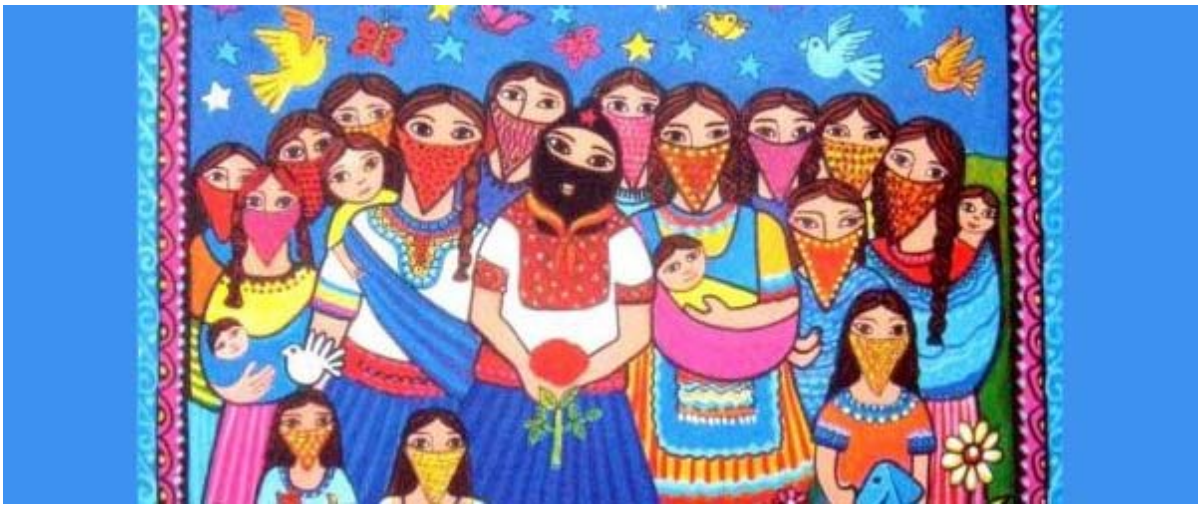
Challenges for the struggles of women rooted in their territories: A decolonial perspective



When corporations, government agencies and sometimes NGOs plan and implement projects for oil and gas extraction, hydroelectric power plants, highways, monoculture plantations, protected areas and forest reserves (as in REDD+ projects), industrial sawmills, and many others, who are the ones who must bear the unavoidable social and environmental impacts of these projects? At whose expense are these projects created in order to – according to their promoters – generate "development"? Whose "national interest" is so heavily promoted by governments to justify the expansion of projects that are destructive to forest-dependent communities and their territories? The hegemonic economic model, with its inherent discrimination and racism, views the communities of indigenous peoples, traditional peoples, peasant farmers, fisherfolk, etc. as "subaltern" communities that can be exploited, obliterated, reconfigured, to serve the needs of capitalist accumulation. This coloniality, rooted in power, is even more evident when viewed through a feminist lens – but from the viewpoint of a feminism that addresses the oppression of the bodies and lives of these black women, indigenous women, peasant women, fisherwomen. They are not just women. Their position within the "world system" is determined by the intersection of oppressions based on gender, race and class.

In this context, and through the constant exchange between the historical struggles of the peoples for their autonomy and the critical theorists of the academic world, the idea of feminism as it relates to decoloniality has begun to emerge. Decoloniality refers to the dissolution of the structures of domination and exploitation created by the coloniality of power (1). It is a concept still in dispute, which continues to change and be enriched through the struggles aimed at breaking with this colonial power system, and the exchange of experiences and dialogue with critical theorists. Perhaps the broadest consensus among those debating the concept of decolonial feminism is the need for a revision of classical, hegemonic feminism and the importance of including the perspectives and voices of many more traditions and oppressions that have been forgotten in telling the (her)stories of women.

At the same time, black and women of colour feminism in the United States affirmed the need to understand that the oppression of the vast majority of women cannot be explained from a perspective that considers gender alone, but also race, class and heterosexism. Women's groups in the South have taken this perspective and made it more complex with the analysis of their own colonial experience imposed on their territories and their bodies. This decolonial shift enables a breakaway from an understanding of the world based on Western modern sciences and Eurocentrism. At the same time, it enables the inclusion of community-based, indigenous or urban popular knowledge that has been systematically ignored through the imposition of a dominant Western perspective.

The autonomous feminism of the 1990s produced fierce criticism of the attempts to impose neoliberal agendas through cooperation for development and the "institutionalization" of feminism, viewed as percentages of women's "participation" in government spaces, and also many NGOs. This criticism then gave way to the historical analysis of colonialism. This implied reflection on the definition of the past and the roots of traditional peoples as well as the relationship between these peoples and a

nation-state that organized or attempted to organize life on the basis of this vision.

A history with a single voice?

The decolonial feminist perspective also recognizes the educational system as a system in the service of the expansion of the Western model. A system which has accompanied the processes of the expansion of the nation state and of the implementation of liberal and neoliberal models; one which has shaped our image of the world, which has told us what is barbaric, what is outdated, what is truly human, what type of relationship we should have with nature. It has assimilated us to the majority of people on this Earth, and injected us with this perspective created by the colonial model and imperial reasoning.

We need to turn the contents upside down. We need to revise what we think about knowledge, how we think about history, histories or her-stories. We need to recover models of knowledge, of the production of knowledge and the passing down of experiences from one generation to another. We must include other voices in order to write other stories.

Seeking new paths

"Hegemonic" feminism ended up defending a series of political strategies that actually perpetuated the model imposed by the colonial state and the bourgeois white subject. For example, some radical feminist meetings in the 1970s proposed that women's liberation would result from the fact that technology would replace the capacity for reproduction. Through this kind of thinking, feminism was reproducing the modern ideal of control over nature, of human supremacy over all life on the planet, which is precisely what ends up oppressing the vast majority of women, especially those who are indigenous, peasant, black, or fisherwomen. Obviously, that technological system would be a product of capitalist production. The first to openly challenge it were black feminists and feminists of colour, when they asked, who will be the women expected to pay the price of the liberation of a few women? And thus began the analysis of who really benefits from this type of modern and Western feminist perspective, that is, those who are in a position of privilege.

The search for new paths has given rise to a type of feminism which recognizes the reality of the majority of the world's women who face multiple oppressions and which, at the same time, can overcome the fragmentation of analysis and fragmentation of struggles. The decolonial perspective implies taking on not only feminist struggles but also anti-racism struggles, struggles in support of indigenous and peasant movements. What it fundamentally questions is the very interpretation of fragmented oppression.

The oppressions of women rooted in their territories were not limited to the "private" sphere of the home. "Outside", on the plantation, in the factory, in the assembly plant, in their daily work, the abuses came from the bosses, the corporations, those who controlled the means of production. A study based on the testimonies of women workers on oil palm plantations in Indonesia demonstrated the enormous effort that women must make to shoulder the double burden of working on the plantations and dealing with domestic chores (2). As one woman plantation worker explained, "Working in the [company] fields is very hard, essentially it's just so hard being a labourer. You have to accept the heat and being rained on. Apart from the responsibility in the house, there's also the work outside of the house, from morning until the afternoon and once home there are still more house chores that must be done."

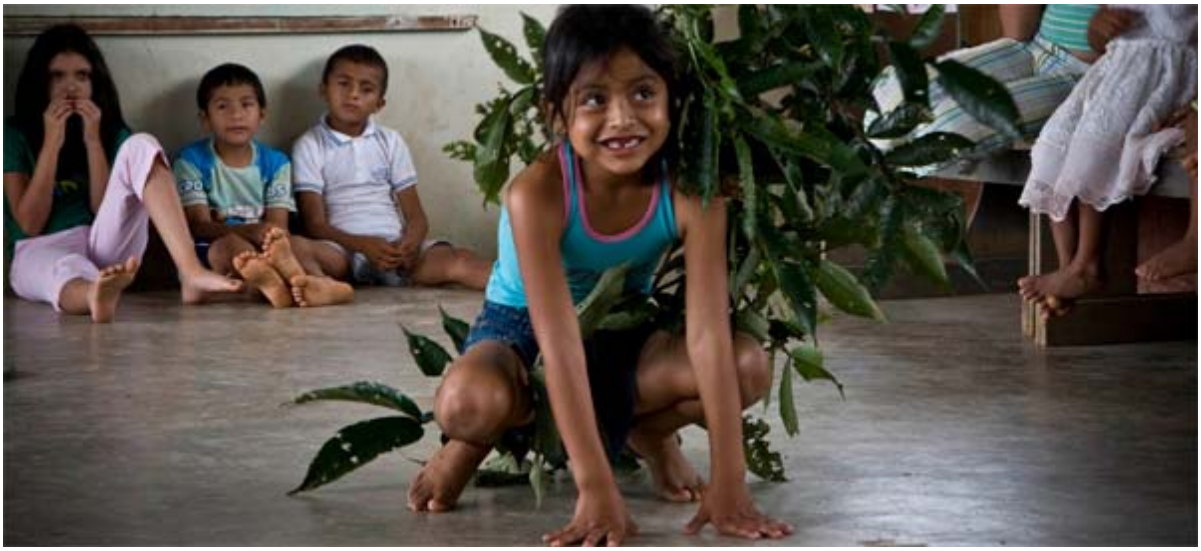
Women rooted in their territories work from sunrise to sunset alongside their partners, and are exploited in the same way. They are on the front lines of struggles, they take care of their children, and they are responsible for the protection of health and seeds, as well as the defence of their territories. They have also had to confront the violence of the capitalist liberal state – and often with much worse repercussions. This is where we begin to reflect on how the dominant system in which we live today creates oppressions that operate correlatively, oppressions than cannot be separated. Gender has to do with a position of race and class, and the place of humans as well. This leads to the building of struggles that lead towards possible paths to radical change rooted in solidarity and justice. As the women of the Mam People of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala declared at their second meeting in October 2014: "Women

have sustained life, and today more than ever, we pledge to rise up together with men to give our sons and daughters, our grandsons and granddaughters, a more dignified life; and we will do this by joining together as women and as the Mam People." (3)

Many of the ideas around decolonial feminism are taken from the article: *Barroso, J. M. (2014). Feminismo decolonial: una ruptura con la visión hegemónica eurocéntrica, racista y burguesa. Entrevista con Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso. Iberoamérica Social: revista-red de estudios sociales (III), pp. 22-33*
http://iberoamericasocial.com/feminismo-decolonial-una-ruptura-con-la-vision-hegemonica-eurocentrica-racista-yburguesa

(1) Peruvian academic Aníbal Quijano defines the "Coloniality of Power" as one of the specific elements of the capitalist model of global power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of this model of power and operates on every material and subjective level, sphere and dimension and daily social existence. The concept of coloniality is different from, although linked to, colonialism. The latter refers strictly to a structure of domination/exploitation where the control of the political authority, productive resources and labour of a certain population is exercised by a population with a different identity whose central seats of power are also in another territorial jurisdiction. But it does not always, or necessarily, imply racist power relations. See: http://www.jwsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/jwsr-v6n2-quijano.pdf
(2) An overview of industrial tree plantations in the global South, http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EJOLTplantations.pdf
(3) Guatemala: *Declaración de las mujeres del Pueblo Mam de Quetzaltenango, en el marco del segundo encuentro,*
https://generoymineriaperu.wordpress.com/2014/10/21/guatemala-declaracion-de-las-mujeres-del-pueblo-mam-de-quetzaltenango-en-el-marco-de-nuestro-ii-encuentro/

AlteRAtive Energies: When the only "alternative" is integral change



In communities on the border between Ecuador and Colombia that live under the influence of armed conflict, monoculture fruit tree plantations soaked pesticides, and/or oil drilling – and therefore, in the midst of contamination – the social fabric has deteriorated to critical degrees. In Ecuador, in the last 10

years, there have been 8,688 suicides, most of them young people, primarily women, and most often in rural areas. However, it is estimated that for every suicide reported, there have been another four not recorded as such, and another 20 attempted suicides. Poverty, created as a means of domination, has spread fear among thousands of families, whose dreams have been lost.

This could lead us to ask, what is the energy missing from these peasant and indigenous communities, when their members choose to turn out the lights on their lives forever?

The 'Environmental Clinic'

In 2006, after seeing how the drawings done by children affected by the Colombian conflict had turned from colour to black and white, and how they painted faces without eyes, ears or mouths, as if they no longer wanted to see, hear or speak, we decided to create a space where the goal was the repair of the social fabric through art and joy, the recovery of family ties and ties with nature through affection, and the reconstruction of the person through education. This led to the emergence in 2008 of what we call the Environmental Clinic. We chose the name clinic, which is derived from the Greek word for "bed", because when nature is "sick", its health must be recovered in order to maintain the health of the population. It is a space for discussion, where professionals from different fields address the problems presented by the population, in a similar way to the human rights clinics in some law schools, but with a multidisciplinary approach.

The work done by the Clinic has included community studies carried out alongside the affected people, which has made it possible to uncover the chains of aggression against the communities. In Pimampiro-Loma de Tigre, for example, it could be clearly observed that behind the various illnesses afflicting the communities, there was an obvious multi-exposure to poverty, violence, sadness and fear. Behind these, in turn, was the creation of privileges for a small few, granted by the oil companies, which were derived from plunder and the destruction of the social fabric and, simultaneously, from the destruction of self-esteem, the solidarity once offered by the social fabric, and the values and principles that had provided community cohesion. But what became even clearer was how this process began with the imposition of extractivist policies which for decades, and until today, have prioritized industrial activity over policies to guarantee people's rights, reinforced by the military presence deployed in the region to ensure continued exploitation. The process is Imposition-Plunder-Exposure.

Therefore, in the joint search to re-encounter, construct, maintain and re-affirm this collective "energy-light", we developed proposals that did not involve alternative energies, but rather alteRAtive energies, that is, energies with the capacity to alter or change our lives for the better.

Some indigenous peoples believe that communities should be small, so that all members, including children, have decision-making power. The process of deciding, of creating, is transformative, because it increases self-esteem and makes it possible to take on responsibilities. This stirs up our internal energy, it sparks enthusiasm, passion, the development of capacities. In the process of the development of alteRAtive alternatives, what is important is not so much the idea in itself, but rather the adoption of this idea with one's own materials, adapted to the needs and the setting.

The Huipala Proposal: A system of Integral Alterative Community Repair

To develop the Huipala Proposal (1) we decided to create seven levels of work, starting from the horizon of the reality in which we live and aiming towards the utopian horizon we want to reach. Each step is a step up towards that desired utopia: 0. Reality, 1. Do not pollute, 2. Do not waste, 3. Decontaminate, 4. Reduce consumption, 5. Enrich, 6. Use, and 7. Enjoy. But we also proposed three main columns: the personal, family and community/organizational levels. We believe it is important to give these spaces special attention, since they have been deeply fragmented by an economic model that solely places priority on money instead of people or nature.

The meaning of "rich"

> Food can be rich and not expensive, but we value the fact that it is filling and flavourful. People can be rich in experience because they have lived a lot or very intensely, although they may not be wealthy. Soil is rich in nutrients because it contains a lot of them, but that does not mean that it has a higher economic value. An organization can be enriched if it increases the ties that join its members together, yet sometimes when organizations obtain economic resources they are impoverished and destroyed. There are many people living in the forest who feel poor because they lack economic resources, but they live surrounded by the greatest diversity in the world. It is important not to confuse value with price.

At the personal level, we placed value on knowledge, skills and attitudes, and created a column for each of these, with the expectation that building relations among the three will bring us closer to COHERENCE. At the family level, we decided to value the means of production, the criteria for marketing and the energies used, with the intent that relating the soils with seeds, plants, animals and persons would lead to the emergence of an ETHIC of relationships. At the community level, we valued the building of relationships within the social fabric and with the territory through joy and organization, in order to create an ESTHETIC that belongs to each place and gives it an identity.

In this way, the Huipala Proposal is laid out in a grid, with the aim of moving, at the personal level, from disregarding to valuing one's own knowledge and skills; from felling incapable to creating art, and from selfishness to solidarity. In the realm of the family, moving from monoculture production to an integral approach to farming in which everything is related (soils, different plants, animals…); from giving up on marketing to self-management; and from the exhaustion of energies to participation with energies that are not only alternative but also alterative, which have the capacity to change our lives for the better. And at the community level, the idea is to move from fear to joy, and from the fragmentation of the social fabric to the consolidation of an organization that sees the need to address the problems that affect it and has the tools to solve them.

After five years of work we reflected on what we were doing, and in numerous group meetings we defined what should go into each square. This was how we put together and decided how to build this proposal. Various steps were identified, such as personal training plans that would help us in this process. Maps of the farms that made it possible for us to identify the relationships between crops, with the forest, with livestock or corrals to produce fertilizers; and maps of the community to identify areas at risk, areas in need of protection, places to watch the stars, trees to guard, etc., which would help us to join and intertwine the fragments into which our lives have often broken.

Fairs are organized that place value on our seeds, and on harvests as a way of feeding ourselves, and not merely something to be sold. We talk about eco-gastronomy, about *mingas* (2), about alterative energies, which help us to not contaminate the soils, but also to carry out studies that allow us to reflect on problems in order to begin to search for solutions. For the purpose of decontamination we also include healing therapies like Reiki (3) for adults, children and plants. We propose that within the family, decisions should be made by consensus, and not imposed by the "head" of the household. And we propose the recovery of acts of generosity and of exchange that does not involve money, such as the practice of bartering.

In the difficult climb towards utopia, more emphasis is placed on homemade technologies, on equity in time for rest within the family, on the recuperation of soils and integrated farms, on ensuring that young people have their own forms of expression, and that the community manages the water and forest, as well as its conflicts. Energy sovereignty is posed as a challenge; recreational gardens, local fairs; and at the same time, journalism and arts festivals are promoted as spaces for expression, while stressing that mobilization is crucial for processes of socio-environmental repair.

At the final level of work, level 7, would be activities corresponding to the utopian horizon proposed by each community, where all would be enjoyable experiences, and work would be a pleasure, given the ability to transform reality on the desired horizon.

This Huipala Proposal is not meant to be applied universally, since it was created as a response to the needs of a certain sector of the population in the Amazonian region of Ecuador, where there are certain problems it seeks to address. If the grid were used in another place, it would be necessary to work with the people affected to see how to move from the horizon of reality to the utopian horizon they dream of – which means beginning by collecting dreams as the destination point.

	PERSONAL COHERENCE			FAMILY ETHIC			COMMUNITY ESTHETIC	
	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES	PRODUCTION	MARKETING	ENERGIES	JOY	ORGANIZATION
7. Enjoy								
6. Use								
5. Enrich								
4. Reduce consumption								
3. Decontaminate								
2. Do not waste								
1. Do not pollute								
Reality								
	Relations for personal integration			Relations between the soil, plants, animals and people			Relations between generations and with the territory	

We also gave the grid the colours of the Huipala (to see the coloured grid, access the link below), which is why we gave the proposal this name. By doing so, we realized that these colours coincide with the chakras or centres of energy worked with in Reiki. That is why, in the right-hand column, we put the symbols of each of these chakras and what they represent (land, water, fire, air, ether, light and space), because they also symbolize our connection with nature and with the world of energies, beliefs, perceptions… and they help us make the grid circular and unite it with the beginning.

Final reflections

In places where extractive activities are imposed, companies tend to use the same tools that the Nazis used in the Holocaust and which the writer Primo Levi described to perfection: 1) ridiculing the population, 2) creating hierarchies of abuses, 3) destroying self-esteem, and 4) destroying any political, moral or judicial defence mechanisms that organizations could use to defend themselves. However, I have left until the end a fifth element that is actually the first one for them, the one with which the entire process of impoverishment begins: breaking down the internal solidarity in communities, by breaking the ties of the social fabric and the ties with nature that surrounds them. And that is why, today more than ever, what is needed is not only to recover this shattered solidarity, but to radicalize it.

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More detailed information on the Huipala Proposal can be found (in Spanish) at: http://www.clinicambiental.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=3&Itemid=5

(1) Huipala: The chequered, rainbow-coloured flag that represents indigenous peoples in the Andean countries.
(2) Minga: Community work in which the members of the community join together to undertake a task that benefits everyone.
(3) Reiki: A Japanese art of healing through the hands.

Indian Forest Struggles: the quest for alternatives

The world over, social movements resisting the neo-liberal aggression on nature and on the various forms of common property regimes, have to grapple with the thorny question of 'alternatives'. The clamour for such 'alternatives' is provoked most often by proponents of the free-market economy and even a section of the mainstream left, as if the neo-liberal model of economic development is always a given, by default meant to inform and control the idea that nature, including forests, is there to be used and appropriated. This short article will look at the issue of 'alternatives' in the limited context of Indian forests to better understand three things: 1. What meaning(s) one could reasonably attach to the word/concept of 'alternatives', 2. Whether grassroots resistance appreciates and internalizes such alternatives as 'alternatives', and 3. Whether such alternatives, singly or collectively, offer some form of politics for social transformation, by overwhelming the capitalist production relations on the ground where such alternatives are being practised, and also, on a more general level, posit a transition to a more egalitarian and post-capitalist economy, society and political order.

What is an alternative?

In the Indian context, the prevailing meaning is that of an 'independent village economy', which mainly derives from the Gandhian concept of *Gram Swaraj*. This, in essence, implies a return to pre-capitalist (and also pre-colonial) social formations, where both forests and land usually did not have private property rights. This also means, in the case of indigenous *adivasi* (1) peoples, a return to a more 'natural' state of society, where the cycles of nature shape the production system, and hence the social and economic order. More often than not, this return is intrinsically linked with the religious belief

systems of the communities.

Going back to the 'Independent Village Economy' or Forest Commons

Both have roots in history. However, there are doubts whether forests and uncultivated areas like pasture and scrub in pre-colonial India were 'commons', which Marx termed as 'communal' properties, over which there was a 'possession in common'. These were not private properties in the sense that no person using those commons had exclusive or private rights, codified or not, over them (2) This is important because there is a tendency among both scholars and activists to see all forests in pre-colonial era as communal or common properties, which the colonial state took over and commercialized (3). However, in recent years, this notion of unchanging commons regimes in forests has faced serious challenges, including a range of historical evidences showing conclusively that commercialization of forests and generation of surplus were both present in pre-colonial societies (4).

Perhaps it would be prudent to say that because pre-colonial India was a vast and a sparsely populated geo-ecological space, many social and ecological variations could co-exist, without being overwhelmed by each other, or becoming entirely extinct under pressure.

Defending/Reinventing Forest Commons

Another popular meaning to ´alternative´ emerges out of struggles which continue to defend forests/nature as *de facto* commons, irrespective of their present ownership/tenural status. Many forest struggles in central and eastern India against large-scale projects (mainly mining and hydro power projects, but also official 'forest conservation', which increasingly opens up these areas to tourism and other forms of ecosystem services trading) believe in this mainly because these projects threaten the forests that support their livelihood activities. This alternative is 'in-situ' or already there: if the community successfully defends the forests from outside invasion, it posits an 'alternative': forests alive in place of forests dead or destroyed.

Reinventing forest commons within the state framework is relatively a more recent phenomenon. It derives mainly from state-sponsored schemes such as 'joint forest management', and more recently, the 'forest rights act', which legitimises the notion of communal ownership over forest commons. Theoretically, the existence of state-recognized common properties is a paradox, since it is the same state which systematically hands over large chunks of forests to corporations also allows community institutions the freedom (legally speaking, the ground reality is different) to reject such transfer of forest areas.

In recent years, taking advantage of the 'forest rights act'(popularly known as FRA), several social movements in India have focussed on creating/reinventing new forest commons, which, they expect, in addition to securing existing livelihoods, will provide new economic opportunities to people. In a way, this is also a call for creating 'independent village economies'. However, most of these new initiatives have too much dependency on state institutions and processes. The experience of Menda-Lekha villages in Maharashtra (see below) provides a good example.

Alternatives to what: how the movements perceive them

These meanings of 'alternatives' are largely hypothetical. It is doubtful how many of the contemporary forest struggles in India see themselves as 'alternative providers'. While for most it is a struggle for survival (communities threatened with displacement by large projects) or for immediate and achievable economic gains (state-recognized community forest resources), for others it is an issue of both biological survival and spiritual/cultural integrity (the Niyamagiri struggle in Odisha) (5). Despite this, though often not properly articulated and still in an extremely limited way, forest movements are also being seen as struggles against a coercive state and various feudal and capitalist forces.

Grassroots Struggles for the Commons: Medha-Lekha, Niyamagiri and others

It is uncertain how many social movements are currently active in Indian forests: besides some groups/processes that are already part of the various known alliances, there are many local movements

sometimes limited even to a single village. The twin villages of Menda and Lekha in Maharashtra provide the most famous example of the struggle for commons. A *Sarvodaya* (Gandhite) worker (6) and his team worked for years with the villagers to develop a functional commons regime, a practice of collective functioning and decision-making borrowed from the *adivasi* past, while also remaining strongly rooted in the present. It created (or restored) the forest commons and used the FRA strategically to obtain state recognition for this practice. This was the first case of state-recognized common property in Indian forests. One reason for giving this permission was the presence of Maoist guerillas in the Gadchiroli forests where Menda-lekha is located :the state has a declared policy of using pro-poor legislations like FRA in containing what it considers as Maoist insurgency.

The questions of surplus

Menda-lekha villagers have to face considerable opposition from a section of state officials(forest department), the powerful Ballarpur Paper Mills which had monopoly rights over local bamboo forests, and even the Maoists, who threatened the villagers and other *Gram Sabhas* (7) in the vicinity with dire consequences if the bamboo was not given to the Paper Mill, from which it used to extort fat taxes (8). But the irony of the situation lies in the fact that the Menda-Lekha commons worked and survived because of the surplus(in form of revenue) that came from selling bamboo in the open market. Only a small fraction of the sales proceeds is used by the *Gram Sabha* for paying the wages of the *Gram Sabha* memberswho work as forest guards or in other capacities. The rest is kept in the general fund for development works and a host of other purposes, as decided by the *Gram Sabha*. The villagers decided to do away with private ownership of land—they donated all their lands to the *Gram Sabha*, to make the common property regime stronger.

Similar tales are now common in Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal. Communities are now waking up to the monetary (in other words, surplus generation) potential of their communal property. In some places it is *tendu* leaves, while in others even the sand and gravel in the local rivers, much in demand as construction material.

Wherever there is a surplus that can be sold as marketable commodity, there has to be an owner who controls the production of the surplus—how can the entire community own it, particularly in a market economy? Won't the ownership over the surplus and the control over production relations turn into major discordant issues over time and enhance (or create) new inequalities and disparities even in a 'commons' situation, with large sums of money at stake? Won't the market take over and create a new class of privileged people? (9) These questions become very relevant when looking at the diverse spectrum of communal properties that exist to this day. In North Eastern states of India for instance, communal rights and ownership often allow the selling of community-held resources in the marketplace. The market has found an ally in the financially mobile elite within communities (clan leaders, village chiefs) and the result is not only environmental degradation but also growing class differences within the erstwhile 'community'.

One way to preventing this might be development of local markets or participating in larger markets under communal supervision. Another answer might be outright rejection of outside market altogether in the face of all odds. The "Niyamagiri struggle" provides such an answer when the *Dongria Kondhs*, an *Adivasi* community, prevented a concerted assault by the state and corporate power on their communal swidden cultivation land and forests (and also, their sacred hill called Niyamagiri—the abode of the Niyama *Raja*) in the Eastern Ghats mountain range along the east coast of India (10).

Perhaps there is no single answer to the questions, doubts and paradoxes that keep on surfacing as new struggles emerge and newer forms of movements come into being. One can only wait, but not passively. Despite ideological confusions and dangers of both co-option and repression, the movement for the commons as an 'alternative' to capitalism and class oppression is gaining ground in India.

Forest Commons as a political alternative to capitalism: emergence of a new 'left' practice?

Despite many unresolved issues and contradictions, the task of re-establishing or reclaiming the

‘commons’ is gaining centrality in Indian forest movements.

The call for Revolution: A New Path

Sometime in early 2013, four constituent groups from the social movement alliance Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), which campaigned for FRA, came out with a ‘manifesto’ for a new organization called ‘New Path’, with the goal of furthering the revolutionary process in India (11). The ‘manifesto’ highlighted the need for linking the people's struggle and the revolutionary transformation in the Indian context. It claims that, “New Path is not and does not aim to be a traditional revolutionary party. Rather, it is a political formation that seeks out opportunities, through struggle, to weaken bourgeois hegemony in this country”.

Though before this National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), a now defunct alliance overtly tilted towards the left, interpreted forest struggles as class struggles of primary producers against capitalism, caste and ethnic oppression, and against state’s hegemony over natural resources, the New Path ‘manifesto’ however is by far the most direct and ‘left’ political message to come out of a social movement in India. The ‘manifesto’ gives a somewhat generic call for establishing ‘a society of free associated producers’: “The revolution…must transform the entirety of society as well as the producers themselves….the revolutionary process has to focus on the demolition of ruling class power, including the state, but not only the formal state... it would seek to smash ruling class power and to build the collective power of the producers”. This echoes the political objectives (more forest-centric, though) of the NFFPFW (12): “Through the struggles, NFFPFW will try to establish social control of the primary producers on forests and other natural resources of the country. By social control NFFPFW means equitable and totally decentralized resource management by all primary producers… The equitable social control of resources will also lead to the end of class exploitations, the ultimate dissolution of the caste system and the end of gender discrimination against women…”. Even though many things were left unsaid, the ‘manifesto’ is indeed a historic document. By questioning the rationale of seizure of state power in a capitalist regime, it also indirectly questions the Maoist war for establishing a new state in place of the old.

Framing the problematique: the crucial political questions

However, the new path manifesto contains little on action strategy and programme: it is silent on how the diverse and extremely localized movements will reorient themselves as catalysts of social and political change beyond their niche focus and geographic boundaries, and also, more importantly, whether such movements have decided perspective on state and capital. Also, questions about organisation-building and decision-making remain unaddressed. How will the local struggles for commons come together and coalesce politically? What will be the organisational process followed that will retain the local nature of such struggles and yet be effective beyond the local level?

Trying to identify the main organizational and political issues, another alliance formation, All India Forum of Forest Movements**(**AIFFM), which recently emerged from NFFPFW, makes the point that all engagements (including probable negotiations) with the state on any issue have to be politically and strategically assessed before the movement commits itself. A draft political paper being circulated within the alliance emphasizes the inter-relationship between the organizational process of any mass movement with its politics, and raises pertinent questions: If forest movements **attempt a Marxist interpretation of the production process in forests, do they discuss how to use this interpretation in the battle for greater social transformation? Or how can the grassroots groups look forward to a bigger and unified battle against capital**? Such issues are seldom in the agenda, the paper points out, and the alliances could not successfully communicate the political ideas beyond those who have a shared Marxist/socialist past. Commenting upon the NFFPFW/AIFFM process, the paper says that only after a decade of struggle people have started taking a position: there is now an increasingly shared realization that the battle for forests is a political one and that people’s power need to be built through a protracted and pitched battle with the state, capital and other forces. The Paper concludes**: “**Now, we are in a more coherent position to say that this is not a position shared by a few of us, but by the

grassroots movements as well**….it becomes important to decide how we view this forum: a broad, organizationally anarchic democratic alliance will not carry us forward to our political vision. On the contrary, this will hold us back** (emphasis added) …we realize that for days to come there would be uncertainties in organizational and political issues….in a country as complex and plural as ours, people's and hence movement groups' perceptions and practices vary widely. We will try to accommodate these plural perceptions and practices while trying to reach at some broad political understanding".

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(1) *Adivasi* is a generic term for heterogeneous indigenous peoples in India
(2) Habib. I, *Marx's Perception of India* in *Essays In Indian History*, Delhi, 1995.
(3) Ibid, also Rangarajan. M and Sivaramakrishnan. K, *Introduction* to *India's Environmental History*, supra note 2. See also Guha.S, *Claims on the Commons: Political Power and Natural Resources in Pre-Colonial India*, ibid. In a thought-provoking study of folklores associated with Kerala's sacred forests: *Folk Models of the Forest Environment in Highland Malabar* in Volume 2 of *India's Environmental History,* Rich Freeman suggests that indigenous communities' in the Malabar highlands perceived their forest environment not as ecological paradises—deep caste and class divisions within the society guided both the actual usage and perception of forests.
(4) Habib, ibid and also *Ecological History of India*. Singh. C: *Forests, Pastoralists and Agrarian Society in Mughal India*, in *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, Edited by David Arnold and Ramchandra Guha, Delhi 1999
(5) http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/india-forest-struggles-at-the-crossroads/
(6) Gandhians in post-independence India who strive to ensure that self-determination and equality reach all strata of Indian society
(7) As defined in 'forest rights act', the *Gram Sabha* is the open assembly of all adult residents in a '*gram'* or village. Though it is notionally convened by the *Gram Panchayat*, a local self-government institution at the village or small town level in India, the *Gram Sabha* in the 'forest rights act' is an independent body. It can come up in all forest areas with a population of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and/or other traditional forest dwellers, irrespective of whether such forest settlements are officially recognized as villages.
(8) Pallavi. A, *Don't Say Bamboo*, in Down to Earth, May 24, 2012, http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/don-t-say-bamboo. See also, Pallavi. A, *Mendha Lekha Residents Gift all their Land to Gram Sabha*, in Down to Earth, September 7, 2013. http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/mendha-lekha-residents-gift-all-their-farms-gram-sabha
(9) For instance, *Gram Sabhas* in Orissa are finding to tackle the market over which they have no effective control an extremely difficult task. See Mahapatra. R and KumarSambhab. S, *Bamboo Rising*, Down to Earth, January 31, 2013. http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/bamboo-rising
(10) http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/india-forest-struggles-at-the-crossroads/
(11) http://kafila.org/2013/05/24/new-path-manifesto-of-a-new-initiative/
(12) NFFPFW, *The struggle of Forest Workers*, Nagpur, 2002

PEOPLES IN ACTION

Declaration of the People's Summit on Climate Change, Lima, Peru

The People's Summit on Climate Change was held December 8-11 in opposition to the false solutions being discussed at the UN climate negotiations in Lima, Peru. In its rejection of the privatization and financialization of nature, the People's Summit demanded "recognition of the territorial ownership of communities who have traditionally lived on their lands." At the same time, it firmly condemned "external control of territories and the negotiation and implementation of false climate solutions." The Peoples' Summit also declared that mechanisms like the carbon market, REDD+, agrofuels, so-called "clean" hydroelectric power, etc., are capitalist strategies aimed at greater accumulation.

Read the full declaration here:
http://cumbrepuebloscop20.org/es/conozca-la-declaracion-de-lima-y-su-entrega-la-cop-20/

Legal action in defence of the rights of nature of the Tangabana páramo

The Ecuadorian environmental defence organization YASunidos has joined with *Acción Ecológica* and the indigenous pastorate of Chimborazo to file a legal action to protect the rights of nature of the Tangabana páramo – rights that are enshrined in the Constitution of Ecuador – in relation to a vast plantation of pine trees established in 2013 in the fragile evergreen forest and parámo grassland ecosystems of Pallo-Tangabana, in the Andes high mountains.

The plantation is opposed by the vast majority of local population, with the support of organizations of indigenous peoples and communities in struggle, who are those who know the most about (and depend the most on) the fragile Andean mountain ecosystem. Scientific studies have demonstrated that the impacts of pine plantations on the water cycle and soil acidification are reason enough to prohibit plantations in this region, since they represent a violation of the rights of nature to exist, to vital cycles like the water and carbon cycles, and the right of the páramo to natural restoration. Ecuador is the only country in the world that legally recognizes the rights of nature. This legal action is the first of its kind in the world, as it considers the Tangabana páramo a subject of rights and seeks the direct application of the Constitution for the defence of nature and the communities who depend on it. The opponents to the plantation are also opposed to its owner profiting from it by reasoning that pine plantations are "carbon sinks" in order to sell carbon credits.

The action was filed at a hearing held on December 5, 2014, and although the accused did not demonstrate that the pine plantation does not violate the rights of nature, the judge did not grant a protection order in defence of the páramo, and as a result the activists have filed an appeal. While awaiting the new hearing, the defenders of the rights of nature are calling for international support through a letter writing campaign. The letter, directed to the Ecuadorian authorities, is available (in Spanish) here: http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/tangabana-carta-internacional.pdf . An article on the case by Terisa Turner is available here: http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/YASunidos.pdf.

For more information and to offer your support, visit:
www.accionecologica.org; www.agenciaecologista.info; and www.yasunidos.org

Women fighting against extractive industries

During the UN climate negotiations in Lima, the World March of Women expressed its active solidarity with Máxima Acuña, who is facing legal proceedings for her resistance to the transnational mining company Yanacocha in Cajamarca, northern Peru. The company has filed suit against Acuña for "aggravated usurpation of land", and a judge in a court of first instance sentenced her to a prison term of two years and eight months, a fine, and the seizure of the land she occupies and owns. "Máxima Acuña is a peasant woman who symbolizes the struggle of a wide diversity of women who are fighting back against the advance of extractivism in their territories. In her we see the peasants, women, fighters who are being criminalized for defending their lives and their ways of life." From their struggles in countries like Colombia, El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru and Mozambique, the women expressed their solidarity as well as their agreement that the logic of the occupation of territories is the same everywhere in the world.

Read the full article (in Spanish) here:
http://www.marchemondiale.org/alliances_mondialisation/cop/extractivismo/es

How the industrial food system contributes to the climate crisis

The non-profit organization GRAIN has released an educational pamphlet that clearly demonstrates the fundamental role of the industrial food system in emissions of carbon dioxide and other toxic gases that contribute to the climate crisis. It notes, for example, that industrial agriculture accounts for between 15% and 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions through the deforestation that it causes. At the same time, the brochure outlines essential steps towards the recovery and reaffirmation of food sovereignty as way of moving away from the industrial food system.

See the brochure at: http://www.grain.org/article/entries/5102-food-sovereignty-5-steps-to-cool-the-planet-and-feed-its-people

Environmental and Social Justice Photography contest

The Critical Information Collective is launching a new annual environmental and social justice photography competition, which will be open for entries between 1 January 2015 and 28 February 2015. Acceptances and winning entries will be notified by 31 March 2015. The 24 winning images will be printed and exhibited in Paris during the UNFCCC climate change summit in November 2015. All competition 'acceptances' will also be exhibited online until 31 December 2015. The Critical Information Collective hosts an image library which aims to enhance the visibility and voice of activists and

communities around the world who are challenging growing corporate power and inequality, and to rekindle public optimism about new ways of running our societies.

See further information at:
http://photos.criticalcollective.org/index.php?module=menu&pId=101&page_name=competition

RECOMMENDED

"Energy Alternatives, Surveying the Territory"

This report from the organization Corner House explores the question "What's the alternative to current energy systems?" in a context of a growing climate crisis and increasing uncertainty over the future of fossil fuels. In energy policy today, the main conflict is among the different proposed alternatives themselves. Figuring out what the assumptions and audiences of the various alternatives are is half the work of assessing where a democratic and survivable energy future might lie. The point of this report is not to simplify the debate over energy alternatives, but to clarify how complex it is. If the need for action is urgent, then so is the need for an understanding capable of making that action effective.

See full report at: http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/sites/thecornerhouse.org.uk/files/ENERGY%20ALTERNATIVES%20--%20SURVEYING%20THE%20TERRITORY.pdf

Mekong Commons Internet site

This site examines the questions surrounding the Mekong Region's 'development', and tries to identify new ones, giving particular importance to both the consequences that are masked from mainstream explanations, as well as alternatives that are already practiced. The site is divided into five sections: "Deconstructing Development", which explores how development is explained and justified, and how knowledge is used or misused; "Environmental Justice", which explores how in the name of 'development' injustices result to people; "Better Ways", which shares practices, activities, organizations and individuals working on alternative modes of and visions for development that can inspire; "Voices of the Next Generation", which provides a space for young people; and "Women and the Mekong", which features both the everyday and the unusual struggles of women as they seek to exert influence and redefine their role in often male-dominated arenas of decision making.

Visit the site at:
http://www.mekongcommons.org/

Mapping popular alternative proposals of envisioning infrastructure

The NGO network ECA Watch is mapping social movements' alternative proposals to the large-scale infrastructure projects, including water, energy or transport infrastructure. The aim is to spread information and proposals, and to contribute to linking people and groups with each other, in order to enrich the narrative on alternative infrastructures.

See map here: http://www.eca-watch.org/node/3637

Forests as important as farming for some rural communities

A global study carried out by the Poverty and Environment Network has helped in understanding the role forests play in enhancing people's livelihoods, confirming that forests do provide an important source of rural income, but challenging some of the long-held assumptions about how these resources are used. This is key when discussing how forests are conserved, as cutting off or limiting use of forests among forest peoples "could jeopardize the livelihoods of local people considerably".

See full article at:

http://news.mongabay.com/2014/0714-dparker-forest-livelihoods.html