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Political ecology at the frontiers of knowledge and power in a traditionally occupied territory: the know-how of coconut breakers in the amazon

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Abstract: This article aims to promote debate for scientific thinking about the role of political ecology in the decoloniality of knowledge and power in the Amazon region. The work is divided into two parts: the first part discusses the expansion of modernity to the South and the construction of modern coloniality; in the second, we bring the experience of the babassu coconut breakers, in view of the construction of a “nature-world”, the result of the colonization and globalization processes. The current moment expresses an intensification of conflicts involving different ways of representing and using the nature of these communities. The methodology uses the concepts of political ecology, pluriverse, well-being and decoloniality as bases for the idea of a nature in Amazonian communities that constitutes a conflict with the “nature-world”, which is based on the logic of the resource as the material substrate of a market economy.

Key words: Political ecology. Decoloniality. Amazon. Coconut breakers.

A ecologia política nas fronteiras do saber e do poder em território tradicionalmente ocupado: o saber-fazer das chamadas quebradeiras de coco na Amazônia

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é fomentar o debate para o pensamento científico do papel da ecologia política na descolonialidade do saber e do poder na região Amazônica. O trabalho está dividido em duas partes: a primeira faz uma discussão sobre a expansão da modernidade para o Sul e a construção da colonialidade moderna; na segunda trazemos a experiência das chamadas quebradeiras de coco babassu, em face da construção de uma “natureza-mundo”, resultado dos processos de colonização e globalização. O momento atual expressa um acirramento dos conflitos envolvendo distintos modos de representação e uso da natureza dessas comunidades. A metodologia utiliza os conceitos de ecologia política, pluriverso, bem-viver e decolonialidade como bases da ideia de uma natureza das comunidades amazônicas que se constitui como conflitante à “natureza-mundo”, que se alicerça na lógica do recurso como substrato material de uma economia de mercado.

Palavras-chave: Ecologia política. Decolonialidade. Amazônia. Quebradeiras de coco.

La ecología política en las fronteras del saber y del poder en el territorio tradicional ocupado: el saber hacer de las llamadas rompedoras de coco en la Amazonia

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es fomentar el debate sobre el papel de la ecología política en la decolonialidad del saber y del poder en la región amazónica. El trabajo se divide en dos partes: la primera analiza la expansión de la modernidad hacia el sur y la construcción de la colonialidad moderna; en el segundo, traemos la experiencia de las llamadas rompedoras de coco babassu, en vista de la construcción de una “naturaleza-mundo”, resultado de los procesos de colonización y globalización. El momento presente expresa una intensificación de conflictos que implican diferentes formas de representar y utilizar la naturaleza de estas comunidades. La metodología utiliza los conceptos de ecología política, pluriverso, bienestar y decolonialidad como bases para la idea de una naturaleza de las comunidades amazónicas que constituye un conflicto con la “naturaleza-mundo”, que se basa en la lógica del recurso como sustrato material de una economía de mercado.

Palabras clave: Ecología política. Decolonialidad. Amazonia. Rompedores de coco.

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Introduction

When treating nature as a historical issue, as a research problem, we introduce the affirmation that is no universal history of nature exist, but stories and conceptions of nature (LENOBLE, 1990). There is no history of rivers, plants, mountains, animals or an orderly set of everything that forms an idea of a universal nature (PESSOA, 1993); what exists are human conceptions about these dimensions of the natural and of nature itself as mother-earth. A history of nature can only be thought in the human perspective, which, even though men and women are also natures, they organize and materialize ideas. Systems of thought and action produce their relations with nature and, from that, structure logics of modern-western uses (CASTREE, 2005).

Based on this conception of a social nature, that it is appropriately and conceptually produced by systems of thought, economies, and policies, historically, models of organization of life in societies have developed forms of relationship and use of nature that have enabled their conservation or exploitation. The industrial urban model, which started evolving in the XVIII century and was consolidated in the post-Industrial Revolution, inaugurated a new environmental rationality, where nature became the main material substrate of the modernity project, since this was the source that started to support this model.

In its territorial dimension, the project of modernity expanded with the process of colonization of peoples from other continents. In conjunction with economic and political interests (MARTINS, 2007), a conception of nature-resource is projected, as an externality to men and women. The author also inserts an approach on this process of exploration of lands overseas as an expansion of the European crowns' own frontiers, which was substantial for the political and economic constitution of the modern, but also as a symbolic dimension. As such, thinking about modernity as a frontier allows us to understand the frontier as a device, because it is capable of eliciting, consolidating and sustaining processes of domination, adequacy, submission, symbolic incorporation, etc. Historically, modernity shows that the frontier worked as an emulator device over non-Western peoples, with an emphasis on the African continent and Latin America.

Modernity as an environmental frontier consisted, on the one hand, of incorporating the ecosystems available on the globe, with the objective of building and maintaining the urban-industrial model. It also meant the colonization of the project of modern knowledge and power over the people who inhabit the lands that have undergone colonization processes. Colonizing is an action of violence par excellence. Through the colonization process, the other (as territory, people, person, culture, etc.) is devoured by the colonizers and transformed into the anthropophagic ritual of the frontier. The frontiers of western modernity that affected spaces overseas were instituted as a

knowledge and power expansion, which inscribed new religions, new cultures, new uses of the body, and new ideas of man, woman and nature.

This modern project, which placed society on one side and nature on the other, needed to expand on world ecosystems. The goal was centered. It was about feeding the project of modernity in the constitution of this urban-industrial society. This project, from the XVIII century to the mid-XX century, produced an appropriation of nature based on the idea of nature-resource, under the discourse of progress – in the sense that all peoples would reach this stage.

In this perspective of exploring a “nature-world” that would lead to development for all, the modernity project also did not materialize, producing as reflexivity the idea of “environmental crisis” as a crisis of modernity, according to Ulrich Beck's thesis (2011). What we conceive as “nature-world” is the constitution of a universal idea of nature, which served both for the appropriation-exploitation of resources, and for the construction of knowledge-power over all ecosystems on the planet¹. It constituted, and still constitutes, an “environmental anthropophagy”, because by the strategy of invisibility, it transformed the diverse natures in an idea of modernized universal nature, whose greatest expression is the urban-industrial model. As such, the thesis that modernity left us the legacy of the anthropocene does not seem absurd, since the characteristic of this urban-industrial society was present.

For Leff (2006, 2016), the modernity project that produces this nature-world starts to be more vehemently contested from the second half of the XX century, with the emergence of activist movements and researchers in the environmental field. Therefore, political ecology evolves as a scientific field that opposes the colonality of knowledge and power that has advanced over non-Western territories.

Regarding this that we bring the necessity to look at the Amazonian territorial collectives that have developed forms of relationship with the use of the elements of nature in a sustainable way, such as the babassu coconut breakers that are organized around a movement in the Amazon, study of case referring to our discussion of the role of Political Ecology in the decoloniality of knowledge and power in babassu forests.

Thus, once we conceive the existence of an idea of nature-world instituted in the constitution of modernity, this conception of nature was fundamental for the legitimization of the processes of economic appropriation, the formulation of the idea of politics and the construction of the symbolic on natural resources, and also on the thought systems already existing in the colonized territories, in which the Brazilian Amazon is inserted.

¹ We recommend the text by Fernando Coronil (2016), which updates the reflections on this idea of “nature – world” in the contexts of Latin American countries.

As such, considering that the system of thought that gave the scientific and philosophical framework to the project of modernity was enlightenment, its reflection in the environmental field was due to the reductionism, fragmentation, and simplification of the complex (CAPRA, 1982). Nature, which is multidimensional, multi-conceived, and complex, in the economic field undergoes the process of reducing the materiality of the resource and its function in urban-industrial society; in the field of knowledge, it becomes the main metaphor of the mechanistic world that is configured in the field of the enlightenment philosophy (COSTA; RICHETTI, 2011; CAPRA, 1982).

In this aspect, when we propose to look at nature in the Amazon based on Political Ecology, our goal is to bring decoloniality to the debate, the concepts of the pluriverse instead of the universal, the multi-conception of nature instead of nature-world, the multidimension of the regional, the knowledge dialogue, and not only the conception of traditional academic science as the only valid form of knowledge.

Political Ecology, frontiers of modernity to the limits of nature-world in the Amazon

The modern has acquired a polysemy of meanings in the academic environment and in the social imagination. Latour (1994, p. 15), writes that “modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists. yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The idea of time marks the constitution of what is new and modern and, therefore, accepted as an evolution in the project of human emancipation from its natural characteristics, considered wild and backward. Thus, the modern constitution inaugurates a new statute for the social, where science and technology offer cultural extensions to leave what is considered a state of barbarism.

Through the modern adjective, we signal a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution of time. When the words “modern”, “modernization” and “modernity” appear, we define, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. In addition, the word is always placed in the middle of a controversy, in a fight where there are winners and losers, the Ancients and the Moderns. “Modern”, is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished. (LATOUR, 1994, p. 15).

Also as a project for the emancipation of “man”, modernity constitutes a double asymmetry. Firstly, it marks a rupture between the natural and the social, expelling the human from nature, *a sine qua non* condition to leave the state of savagery. And, as a consequence of the first, it also institutes ruptures between humans, whose parameter was Western society itself, which is considered evolved. As such, the expansion of knowledge developed in the West, the institutional structures of rationality formulated within the scope of the Modern European State (WEBER, 2004)

and Western culture on colonized peoples were fundamental in the constitution of the coloniality of knowledge and power.

By decoloniality we conceive the processes of knowledge and living that have been developed and are developing in an absolutely different way from the knowledge and power coloniality of instrumental modernity. The “local models of nature”, described by Escobar (2016), express this sense of living and doing that we attribute to Amazonian communities.

With this we infer that the colonization project in Latin America, in which the Amazon is inserted, was not only of a political and economic nature. The project meant a process of institutionalized governmentalization over the centuries. By governmentality, we understand a system of bureaucratization of State actions that focuses on the ways of doing and thinking of a population, which produces a space for the exercise of state power and systematization of a thought structure disseminated by a power that is horizontalized and reproduced in institutions and for institutions, but also by individuals, for the maintenance and defense of ways of thinking and acting in societies organized for this purpose (FOUCAULT, 2008).

Foucault's conception of power is a contribution to the understanding of coloniality because it removes the power of a hierarchical exclusivity: that its exercise does not depend only on the power control of the State and economic powers, but also on its ramification in the spaces of social experiences institutionalized, which are systems of discipline, action, and the symbolic. Thus, power is a device for the organization of social relations fed by institutions, that moves at the heart of the population itself, which feeds and is fed by it, power is part of everyday life. Therefore, understanding coloniality and decoloniality, goes through this understanding of power as multidimensional.

Hence, we understand that the modern heritage of colonized peoples was coloniality itself. For Memmi (2007), colonization was not the exclusive work of the great colonizer, conceived as the European destined to be an entrepreneurial leader of the colonial company. Colonizing was only possible as a systemic project, which involved since the great figure of the major-colonizer, passing by the employees of the colonies (mostly also European) and, also, by the colonized itself. The latter, even though it is not an oppressive element in the colonization process, was also fundamental because it incorporated and disseminated habits, ideas, mechanisms, continuing the project. Therefore, coloniality is the consolidation and continuity of the colonial system that was instituted in the project of modernity, hence “because it is not only an immense, but urgent task to decolonize the Eurocentric order of knowledge” (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 53, *free translation*).

The decolonization process also involves science, since the scientific discourse is one that continues to give the true status to knowledge and power established by modernity.

Any form of knowledge that does not fall within the Eurocentric order has been continually rejected, on the grounds that it is not a credible science. Science is not, thus, a simple apolitical study of the truth, but the reproduction of racial relations of power that dictate what must be considered true and in whom to believe. (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 55-56, *free translation*).

But the modern did not develop in a linear way in history. Habermas (2002) writes that modernity is an unfinished project. The author identifies periods in which the modern appears and invades as an event, a project that operates through discontinuity. To say that modernity is discontinuous means that it feeds on the new and on the reinvention of the old or the forgotten. An example is how, until today, the invention that the peripheral remains as a territory of constant realization of the old. But it is also characteristic of modernity to produce expectations, because through them the logics of attachment to the world-system are maintained. Thus, Habermas infers a fundamental question, that modernity adapts to historical contexts and events.

Habermas (2002), identifies three important devices that served for the expansion of the modern project outside the West: progress, development, and modernization. Progress institutes the project of unlimited things: unlimited knowledge, unlimited economic growth, emancipation from human body limitations, and it also means the election of a society model to be achieved. The history of the first two hundred years after enlightenment can be defined by the expansion of this project in the world. This world-system also produces the conception and operationalization of a world-nature, which mainly serves a process of insourcing of the economy in the non-Western world. The last two, modernization and development, started to operate together from the second half of the XX century. Therefore, we affirm that these two devices, especially development, replace progress as a discourse for the expansion of the modern form-content. Habermas defines modernization as:

The modernization concept refers to a set of cumulative and mutually reinforcing processes: capital formation and resource mobilization; the development of productive forces and the increase in labor productivity; the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 05, *free translation*).

Nevertheless, we do not intend to turn this issue into a North vs. South conflict (or the West against the rest). We understand that this geographic opposition is not sustained, as it is enough to look at the Chinese example that currently prints the expansion of its activities in the world, including using the modernization discourse. And, also, because the modernization served internal projects, of the State and of the Brazilian businessmen. In the Amazon, this process started in the

second half of the XX century, with the integration and modernization projects in the territory. From there, the region undergoes a double insertion: to the national territory and to the world-system, through the following strategies: a) the process of occupation of the Amazon, from the second half of the XX century, occurs, as it has already been widely discussed in academic literature for the implementation of big mining, agribusiness and strategic infrastructure projects (ports, roads, hydroelectric). Thus, we have the implantation of a technical apparatus (BECKER, 1982; MELLO, 2002). b) The creation of an institutional apparatus to support the occupation: Superintendência de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia - SUDAM (development agency) – Banco da Amazônia - BASA - development agency (whose emergence suppress the regional bank) – Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária - INCRA (soil regulation agency).

In that first moment, the forest and everything that lived on it, appeared as obstacles to modernization and development. Therefore, capital production from the Amazon would come from underground, with mineral resources; from the soil, with agribusiness projects; and the forest, with timber forest products. This process has three significant inseparable consequences: the first is the environmental impact it caused (MELLO, 2002), the second is the generation of conflicts between this process of modernizing the territory and the local economy (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2018) and the third is the insourcing of the economy based on the implementation of big projects. There is only one economy here about the forest - because it has no relationship with the forest system, with the human and with the non-human that inhabits it, only the exploitation of resources.

This modernization process was precisely what led Bertha Becker to formulate her idea of the techno-ecological vector. To this vector proposed by Bertha Becker, we speak of the importance of another vector: the socio-environmental one. This vector considers that biodiversity is not a biological concept, but a cultural one. The spaces where the biodiversity exists are cultural-environmental territories, where everything in it, human and non-human, forms a history of that territory that is hybrid of nature and culture. In other words, biodiversity is the result of a conservation process that culture has developed with the environment, where the environmental component of biodiversity is immersed in the daily lives of the people who live there and in the economy of their relationships.

Thus, Nature and the environment are knowledge. What nature is and how it relates to the environment finds meaning in the organization of thought systems, cultural systems, and economic systems, inseparably. We consider knowledge because it is constructed historically knowledge and it becomes the means by which people materialize their environmental values in a territory. This is the basis used by Enrique Leff for the idea of an eco-collective society (LEFF, 2006). As such, the *socioecological vector* would combine the conditions to value and recognize other possibilities for

the use of nature and environmental conservation through ecosystem services as alternatives to the current development in Amazon, such as the environmental know-how of the coconut breakers, which will be addressed in the latter part of that work.

Ecosystemic is understood to be that action that, when using nature's material substrates for human life, does not compromise the optimal performance of the system in which the resources, people and other living beings are inserted. In this concept, an ecosystemic service does not work in the opposite direction of environmental dynamics, it uses environmental properties as a material basis for the maintenance of all existing life forms (COSTA, CUNHA and LIRA, 2019, p. 07, free translation).

From the perspective of the socioecological vector, an economy in the forest has visibility and value - characterized by the relation between ways of life and use of forest products with environmental conservation and that is also capable of generating value beyond collective representations, because these peoples also have the possibility to exploit these resources sustainably and establish a relationship with the respective production chains.

That said, Political Ecology is the form of knowledge that seeks to study and understand the strategies of knowledge and power of this coloniality and proposes alternatives for thinking about other forms of social organization, other ways of relating to nature, other worlds that, although existent for a long time, their existences were denied because they were, throughout history, being measured only by the constitution of western modernity. This is not a denial of modernity, nor is it the scientific and cultural knowledge that was consolidated in this period. It is also not a question of denying the importance of studies on Nature (ACOSTA, 2016). What studies from the perspective of decoloniality propose is the study of modernity and the construction of decolonial criticism.

The emergence of Political Ecology and the critique of the modern was only possible because the modern itself had a crisis. And nature appears as the “Achilles heel” of modernity. The environmental crisis is the modern crisis itself, because it questions the limits of the separation between the social and the natural, between what is considered new and modern and what is said to be archaic and backward, between the urban-industrial model and the capacity for its maintenance by current productive matrices. For Leff (2016), Political Ecology appears as a new social criticism in view of the limits of explanation of the environmental crisis by the social sciences at that time, and defines “its field within the social conflict and the power strategies that cross the processes of ecological and social distribution in the construction of environmental sustainability” (LEFF, 2016, p. 219, *free translation*).

Political ecology thus takes place in a theoretical-epistemological-disciplinary field and is manifested in a political territory: the one of struggles for the – conceptual and practical –

reappropriation of nature. Environmental struggles are territorial struggles. The field of political ecology is established in processes of territorialization in which strategies, practices, and political-social-cultural processes are developed in the social reappropriation of nature. Political ecology therefore explores the power relations between society and nature that have penetrated the spaces of social interest, the institutional orders instituted in modernity, the modes of knowledge and production, the imaginary that are interwoven in people's worlds of life (LEFF, 2016, p. 220, *free translation*).

From the perspective of political ecology, we studied the Amazon region from the perspective of valuation disputes. At the heart of distributional ecological conflicts are ways of seeing and being in communities that when living in a given territory, have built, with nature, a systemic relationship of reciprocity, founded on a know-how that does not promote the split between humans and non-humans, both are nature. The notion of “bien vivir” or “vivir bien”, which are expressed in the constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009), provides for the fundamentals of respect for peoples' ways of life and, in this way, builds a new coexistence status.

In Ecuador, “buen vivir” is manifested by the harmony between human beings individually and collectively, as well as the conservation relationship with nature, which is seen as a subject of rights; it considers the economy as solidarity and sovereignty of the peoples that inhabit different universes as forms of life (ACOSTA, 2016). These peoples, through their ways of life, also develop ecosystem services, understood as forms of environmental relationship that do not jeopardize the balance of ecosystems (COSTA; CUNHA; LIRA, 2019), recovering the idea of resource².

In this dispute, the interests of the State and of actors, such as large companies, conflict with the ways of life of local communities: communities that manage non-timber forest products (COSTA; CUNHA; LIRA 2019). Thus, we start from the assumption that environmental issues involving the Amazon and the discourses of its conservation by the State and companies are directly related to the construction of a discourse of institutionalized valuation as governmentality through the coloniality of knowledge and power, which disregards and disqualifies the ways of life built in the region as “alternatives to development” and nature conservation.

In the words of anthropologist Arturo Escobar: “The struggles of these peoples can be interpreted as contributions to the ecological and cultural transition to a world where many worlds fit, that is, the pluriverse” (ESCOBAR, 2014, p. 19, *free translation*). The pluriverse is a proposal to overcome development as a universal project for organizing life and the territories where people live, it brings a plurality of ways of seeing, doing, and being in the world. These are questions that

² It is worth recovering Vandana Shiva's discussions about the meaning of resources. For her, the word “[...] is the Latin verb, suggests, which evoked the image of a spring that continually rises from the ground... The concept thus highlighted nature's power of self – regeneration and called attention to its prodigious creativity. Moreover, it implied na ancient idea about relationship between humans and nature – that the Earth gifts on humans who, in turn, are well advised to show diligence in order not to suffocate her generosity.” (SHIVA, 2005, p. 206).

place us in face of the necessity to reposition the being in the cultural and environmental territories of life (LEFF, 2016).

In this aspect, the notion of an epistemic alternative means building other concepts and other world-ontologies resulting from the dialogue of knowledge. The struggle of the coconut breakers is, for example, an empirical reference to these processes that denote the plurality of ways of living in the world. These disputes were constituted as distributive ecological conflicts (MARTINEZ-ALIER, 2007). By distributive ecological conflicts we conceive those that involve processes of appropriation and reappropriation of natural resources, their management, their ordering, and their spatial distribution.

Political ecology is interested in studying territorial issues, where we highlight the relationship that traditional peoples and communities have built and maintain with nature, in the sense of alternative ways of living to the projects of modern rationality that institute a pattern of development in the urban-industrial model (LEFF, 2006; LEFF, 2016; CASTRO-GOMEZ; GROSGOUEL, 2007). The action of actors, such as States and companies on natural resources and ecosystems, is also a field of study of political ecology, when these involve conflicts in the face of their distribution, intervention, ordering, conservation, etc. In relation to thinking about political ecology and development, it is assumed that distributive ecological conflicts can manifest alternatives to the development of modern instrumental rational cut, with a Gross Domestic Product and Income pattern (LEFF, 2006; ESCOBAR, 2014).

Therefore, political ecology is inscribed as the field that challenges the frontiers of modernity in the constitution of nature-world, it irrupts with new epistemologies and new ontologies of being in the constitution, organization, and preservation of the territories of life.

The Struggle of Coconut Breakers: know-how and decolonial practices

In the last decades, the Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB - Interstate Movement of the Coco Babaçu Breakers)³ has been invited to sign “partnerships” and “contracts” with organizations, companies and the State itself, to have greater protection of the environment, more specifically of babassu forests that extend from the northeast of the state of Piauí, crossing Maranhão and north of Tocantins to the southeast of the state of Pará.

³ MIQCB has been organizing itself since the late 1980s in the region of babassu forests. The movement is composed only of women, who started to organize themselves in the face of conflicts involving the appropriation and use of babassu forests, as well as the non-institutionalization of their fighting agendas by rural workers' unions, mostly men. Regarding the organization of the MIQCB, we suggest Almeida (1995).

Recent episodes involving discussions around the “REED+ policy”⁴ or even the “benefit-sharing contracts” for access to traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity⁵, for example, are situations that reveal the MIQCB's difficulties in dealing with these environmental protection discussions, which involve an economical way of dealing with nature.

This way of dealing with nature denies what has traditionally been experienced by coconut breakers over the decades, as it refers to a universal idea of nature - considered as only a good or an environmental service, that of the “nature-world” available to society, as we mentioned at the beginning of the article⁶.

In this context, the universal constitution of nature has served both for the appropriation, exploitation, and plundering of natural resources, as well as for the construction of a knowledge-power over all the ecosystems of the planet, although it prevents and neutralizes any other forms of know-how, as these are considered primitive or even backward due to the development model established in the Amazon region due to the expansion of capital.

Despite this discourse content of universal pretension, it is emphasized: characterized by the coloniality of knowledge and power, it is worth remembering that in different spaces of the Amazon region, whether in urban or rural areas, we observe this intrinsic relationship between know-how involve “epistemic alternatives”, such as that of the residents of the Maracanã community, in the municipality of São Luís, MA, who live on the juçara economy. For juçara pickers: “Seeing, touching, and tasting, as has been observed on some occasions, are acts that go through a long period of learning.” (SHIRAISHI NETO, et al., 2018. p.107, *free translation*).

The extractive practices of babassu coconut breakers, as well as that of other social groups in the Amazon, such as the rubber tappers, who organized the “draws” to prevent the cutting down of rubber trees in rubber plantations, were fighting strategies used to keep the rubber forests existing. According to Candido Grzybowski

[...] “the draws are made through joint efforts by the rubber tappers. As the rubber tappers become aware that they have companions threatened by deforestation, that an area is threatened by the deforestation of farmers, several communities come together, especially the affected community, assemblies are organized in the middle of the forest and leadership

⁴ REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) is a set of economic incentives, especially services, with the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions resulting from deforestation and forest degradation. The idea is to include in the accounting for greenhouse gas emissions those that are avoided by reducing deforestation and degradation. Regarding this, we recommend the booklet prepared by the Management and Strategic Affairs Center entitled REDD in Brazil (2011).

⁵ Organizations linked to the MIQCB have signed benefit sharing agreements with access to the babassu mesocarp with the cosmetic company Natura.

⁶ Recent study by Shiraishi Neto shows the right role in building a universal idea of nature. The “legal homogenization” dictated by the globalization of American law attributes a single content to nature, as an object, in line with its economic utility (SHIRAISHI NETO, 2017).

is decided, resistance groups that will stand in front of scythes and chainsaws in a peaceful but organized way. They try to convince the blue-collars, who are at the service of the farmers, to retreat.” (GRZYBOWSKI, 1989, p. 38, *free translation*)⁷.

More than a simple strategy, this way of fighting of the families, embracing the rubber trees, reveals the senses and meanings attributed to nature by rubber tappers and breakers. For coconut breakers, palm trees resemble their mothers and as mothers they deserve all kinds of care and respect. Apparently, an imbricated relationship between these women and the babassu palm trees exist.

In the case of babassu coconut breakers, the MIQCB was organized around two traditionally lived ideals: the preservation of babassu forests, of mothers, and the guarantee of free access and common use of palm trees⁸, situations that pre-exist to the processes of fences and appropriation of land, conducted from the 1960s, in Maranhão, when Law No.2.979, of July 1969 (called Lei de Terras do Sarney), which made the State's vacant lands occupied by families of coconut breakers available to agricultural and livestock companies (ALMEIDA; MOURÃO, 1979).

These two ideals are intrinsically linked to the ways of making, creating and living of babassu coconut breakers and their families, being represented by the movement in the expression “free babassu”. The modes of common use of babassu palms express ways of representing and appropriating nature that are completely different from colonial projects, which have always promoted the plundering of natural resources in peripheral countries to serve their economic interests.⁹

When a bunch of coconut comes off the babassu palm and falls to the ground, it is a sign that the coconuts are ready, perfectly ripe, suitable for the fruits to be extracted (the almonds and the mesocarp), which are used for making different products (oil, soap, medicines, sweets...). That woman who sees the fallen bunch, gathers the coconuts, which can be taken at that moment or not, depending on their availability. Each coconut breaker collects enough to guarantee the reproduction needs of your family, there is no concern here in saving to accumulate.

⁷ In some regions where the MIQCB operates, leaders of the movement also describe ways to prevent the felling of babassu palms, which are similar to the draws made by rubber tappers. When women and their families became aware of the felling of palm trees, they soon went to the places to prevent them in an organized and peaceful way (SHIRAISHI NETO, 2017a).

⁸ Over the decades, several legal instruments have been discussed, proposed, and implemented by the movement to guarantee free access and common use of babassu forests, among which, we highlight, the projeto de assentamento extrativista (PAEX - extractive settlement project), the reserva extrativista (RESEX - extractive reserve), the servitude of babassu forests and the laws of “free babaçu”. About RESEX and “free babassu laws”, we suggest consulting (SHIRAISHI NETO, 2017a; 2006).

⁹ The recent strategies adopted by the empire for plundering nature reveal a hidden face of the current processes experienced in South America, such as the coups in Brazil and Bolivia. About the imperial interests of the USA in Bolivia's lithium reserve, it is worth reading the text by the sociologist Atilio Boron (2020) published on Luís Nassif's blog.

The coconuts gathered in the place, stay there, waiting until the breaker returns to take them to their home or somewhere where the coconut break is being conducted, usually, with the help of other women, these are called adjuncts or joint efforts. Breaking activities are always conducted together, this serves to strengthen the bonds and relationships between women and families who spend the day together, singing, talking, and working.

There is a whole set of senses and meanings related to the fact that palm trees are considered as “mothers”¹⁰, the mother is the most precious thing in life, deserving all the care, affection, and respect. The mother also provides to all children indistinctly, without any distinction between them. There is a concern in sharing the fruits in an isonomic way so that everyone can serve themselves and not experience deprivation.

Waiting for the bunch that comes off the palm until it falls to the ground reveals another dimension of the relationship of women with babassu palms, a deep respect for the cycles of life, violated in contexts of scarcity of the resource¹¹. This is related to the notions of reciprocity and care for nature, which is not felt and represented as outside of the life of coconut breakers. Coconut breakers and babassu palm trees are not separated, apart, as we hear from several women who go to the forest. In fact, this same way of living life is very similar to those experienced in other contexts in South America. Nature as a subject of law and the “bien vivir” and “vivir bien” provided in the legal texts of Bolivia and Ecuador represent another attempt by the indigenous peoples of those countries to express their ways of life in confrontation with colonial projects.

Final considerations

Political ecology is an epistemic alternative for criticizing modernity and coloniality in Amazon. Its proposal is to value the epistemes and ontologies of knowledge that produced the different territories present in Latin America and Amazon. Thus, as a critique of the universal knowledge of reductionist thought, of the binary formulas of interpreting the world, the political ecology reclaims the pluriverse and the different ways of seeing, being, and making other worlds.

The territory of babassu coconut-breaking women in the Amazon of Maranhão represents this know-how and points to a fundamental necessity: the urgency of valuing the practices of the

¹⁰ The babassu palm as a mother is linked to Vandana Shiva's discussions about the first idea of a resource, the resource as a source (SHIVA, 2005).

¹¹ In some periods, socio-environmental conflicts were observed. The notion of ecological war in babassu forests was used to explain the conflicts surrounding the collection of babassu coconut. The babassu coconut collectors, differently from the breakers, picked the ripe and green coconuts from the palm trees indistinctly for the production of charcoal, which was used in the region's low-iron industries.

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