



‘Nature-based Solutions’: Concealing a Massive Land Robbery



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'Nature-based Solutions': Concealing a Massive Land Robbery

Our Viewpoint

Nature is NOT a 'Solution'



Ph: Flickr/mariusz kluzniak

We have seen the introduction of concepts that cause damage in territories and justify continued devastation of forests and violent extraction of anything from minerals to timber before. Certification schemes, carbon offsetting, net-zero deforestation supply chain promises, [net-zero and carbon neutral promises](#) are just a few of them. The latest dangerous idea goes by the name 'Nature-based Solutions' or 'Natural Climate Solutions.' It creates the illusion that 'nature' is a 'solution' to corporate destruction. And the more often we hear words that associate ideas with one another - like 'nature' and 'solution' – and the more we repeat and use these terms, the more likely that this association is considered 'common sense.'

Corporate 'nature-based ~~solutions~~ *dispossessions*' include much of what communities have been fighting against for decades: industrial tree plantations, Protected Areas, REDD projects, carbon and biodiversity offsets, biofuel plantations, etc. Another thing these 'solutions' have also in common is that they allow the continuation of another set of corporate activities that similarly have faced resistance in the territories: mining, oil and gas extraction, large-scale infrastructure, agribusinesses, etc.

The idea that 'nature' is a 'solution' pushes these destructions and dispossessions even further. Almost every month, another major polluter announces its plans to turn its operations 'carbon neutral', mainly through investing in the so-called 'Nature-based Solutions'.

This bulletin brings together reflections on what drives these dangerous corporate dispossessions.

One article in this bulletin shows that despite the enthusiasm of polluting industries to use these 'nature-based ~~solutions~~ *dispossessions*' for their greenwashing and profit-seeking purposes, the concept was in fact developed by big conservation NGOs as a mechanism to fund Protected Areas. Based on the [colonial and racist idea](#) that 'nature' is better off without people, part of the [conservation industry's plan](#) to turn 'nature' into a 'solution' for corporations, is to increase the area of land it controls.

Another article reflects on the meaning of 'nature' in this discourse, which is based on the destructive relation of Western culture with 'nature'. The article shows how the romantic idea of 'untouched nature' goes along with a happy talk about new 'solutions'. An idea that can be sustained as long as the factual loss, the destruction of 'nature' and livelihoods, that follows its instrumentalization as an exploitable resource, remains hidden.

A call for reflecting on the concept of 'intersectionality' is put forward in another article. The author highlights the importance of understanding how various layers of oppressions can coalesce or intersect in one subject, for example, for an indigenous, landless migrant woman. Schemes such as the 'nature-based solutions,' which instrumentalizes 'nature' in itself, the author concludes, require inclusion of 'nature' as another essential 'intersection' of various oppressions.

The concept of 'nature-based solutions' might be building a dangerous perverse 'collective imaginary' of what 'nature' *should* do for humans. When understanding the interests at play and its proponents, it becomes clear that the concept is a dangerous threat for forests and forest populations. There can be no discussion on 'solutions' to the climate crisis, as long as the real drivers of this crisis are not named and their destruction stopped.

Three bulletin articles in this bulletin highlight how three different polluting industries are at the forefront of promoting what is perhaps more appropriately called 'nature-based *dispossessions*': the mining industry, the oil industry and the agro industries. Each of these articles asks: Who are these 'solutions' for? What are they actually solving? Who is profiting? and Who is at the losing end?

Another article in the bulletin shares some experiences of women in Brazil who have been impacted by the 'green economy' –as a starting point for a reflection on what today is called 'nature-based solutions'. The article warns, among others, about the *purplewashing* by big conservation NGOs: a gender agenda that seems to put women at the center of these projects but which promote models of relations with nature that are ultimately patriarchal and excluding.

Another article in this bulletin emphasizes how the ecological crisis does not mean the same for everyone. What ecological crisis means to the richest men on Earth, as capitalists, is the effect it has on their investments. So the 'solution' to this effect (not to the crisis, of course) must be found somewhere, somehow... By exploring questions like where can the rich invest their money on an increasingly debilitated and uninsurable planet full of potentially crippling environmental lawsuits, unruly affected communities, restive green consumers, and troublesome carbon regulation, so that profits can continue accumulating in their hands?, the author takes us along the assumptions of some of the 'space cadets' of our green times.

It is imperative to understand and name the concept of 'nature-based solutions' *dispossessions* for what it is: another lifeline to the destructive capitalist economy. This destruction can now not only destroy livelihoods, territories, forests, water streams, basins, grasslands, and the many more life spaces on Earth, but also can enclose forest peoples' territories in the name of 'conservation' and peasants' fertile land for planting industrial plantations in the name of 'saving the climate.'

'Nature-based solutions' *dispossessions* are a dangerous threat to territories, forest populations and the climate.

Conservation NGOs Gift Polluters a Massive Land Grab called 'Nature Based Solutions'



Illustration: Conservation magazine/Michael Gibbs

The concept of 'Nature Based Solutions' (NBS) (also often called 'Natural Climate Solutions', NCS) has enthusiastically been seized upon by polluting industries to greenwash climate-changing emissions and by governments to avoid unpopular political decisions needed to quickly reduce fossil fuel use. The consequences of allowing these nature-based distractions to form a significant part of any global climate strategy could be catastrophic. But the idea was originally developed and promoted by institutions which claim to be acting on behalf of the planet – large international conservation groups, in pursuit of their own corporate interests.

Origins – a plan to cash-in on protected areas

The terms 'Nature-Based Solutions' and 'Natural Climate Solutions' first appeared in December 2009. In a position paper for the UN climate negotiations in Copenhagen (COP15), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) stated that it "*is promoting nature-based solutions to climate change as an integral part of broader adaptation and mitigation plans and strategies. REDD-plus is a rapidly implementable mitigation option...*" (1). Simultaneously, IUCN published a book entitled 'Natural Solutions: protected areas helping people cope with climate change'. (2) This claimed (dishonestly) that "*Protected areas play a major role in reducing climate changing carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere*". (3) The book noted how protected areas in Canada sequestered four billion tons of carbon dioxide "*estimated to be worth \$39-87 billion in carbon credits*". IUCN is self-proclaimed as "the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it", whose members include 91 governments and nearly 1200 NGOs.

This first-ever report on so-called 'Nature-Based Solutions' resulted from a pact ('Pact 2020') (4) formed at the World Conservation Congress organized by IUCN in October 2008, which aimed to:

“Ensure that protected areas and protected area systems are recognised as an important contribution to climate change adaptation/mitigation strategies for biodiversity and human livelihoods”.

The concept of NBS was developed by the conservation sector and was foreseen as a mechanism for increasing funding available for protected areas, supported by carbon markets and private sector investment. Despite long-known and unresolved global problems of conflict with displaced communities, the conservation industry has sought to progressively increase the area of land it exclusively controls, at the expense of rural people.

From the outset, trees and forests were central. According to more recent (and highly exaggerated) estimates (see below), 75% of NBS’s claimed climate mitigation potential relates to plantations and forest management. (5) Largely a re-branding of REDD+, the concept allows pollution to continue by offsetting it with plantations or forest carbon sequestration.

Following the December 2015 adoption of the UN Paris Agreement, international conservation groups started ramping up pressure for support to so-called ‘Nature-Based Solutions’ or ‘Natural Climate Solutions’. In early 2016, the US-based NGO The Nature Conservancy (TNC, the world’s richest conservation corporation) started a campaign describing ‘Natural Climate Solutions’ as “The Forgotten Solution”, emphasising that the claimed climate mitigation potential for this should attract a commensurate amount of ‘attention’ (i.e. funding). (6) In September 2016, IUCN adopted a definition of NBS at the World Conservation Congress (7) and by the end of the year had published an ‘NBS manifesto’. (8)

From the outset, conservationists saw themselves as essential brokers and providers of so-called ‘Nature-Based Solutions’, and saw it as a mechanism to generate carbon credits for polluting industries, thus mobilising corporate money. (9) The leader of The Nature Conservancy’s NBS work, Justin Adams, said in 2015 that:

“We need to find new ways of bringing private sector actors in...The Nature Conservancy has relationships, it has land assets, it has field programmes around the world. If we can leverage all of that, then the Nature Conservancy can play a very, very important role in addressing the climate challenge”. (10)

Creating a pseudo-scientific underpinning

A significant boost for the idea was the publication in October 2017 of the paper ‘Natural Climate Solutions’. (11) The lead author, Bronson Griscom, and more than a third of the 32 authors of the paper, worked for The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The central and misleading claim in this paper – that ‘Natural Climate Solutions’ *“can provide 37% of cost-effective CO2 mitigation needed through 2030 for a >66% chance of holding warming to below 2 °C.”* - has been re-cited many times over, including at the highest policy levels, gaining plausibility through its repetition. Appearing in various forms (“37%”, “one-third”, “more than one third”, etc.), the claim ultimately derives from the TNC paper and is often accompanied by a demand that a third of climate funding should go to NBS programmes (i.e. to conservationist groups).

Organisations such as the UN Environmental Programme and IUCN have repeated these claims as if they were real and achievable policy goals. However, the paper actually consists of entirely hypothetical calculations for *potential* carbon absorption by ‘natural’ ecosystems, which are based on a vast array of highly implausible or outright impossible assumptions buried in the paper’s lengthy technical annex. For example, roughly half of the claimed mitigation potential comes from afforestation or re-afforestation. The land required for this, it turns out, would be nearly 800 million hectares, or roughly the size of Australia, most of it – the paper suggests - evidently in Latin America. The political, economic, social, ecological and logistical challenges and problems with such a continental-scale change in land-use are entirely ignored. The paper assumes that most of the afforestation would first have to be done by private companies for commercial crops, meaning, industrial monoculture plantations.

Constituting another quarter of the claimed mitigation potential, the paper similarly assumes that all deforestation can be stopped globally, and all wood production made sustainable almost instantaneously. However desirable such outcomes might be, decades of experience shows that this is simply not feasible. Likewise, the paper argues that much wood production would have to be switched to plantations, which would somehow simultaneously be storing more carbon. And much of the remaining 25% of the mitigation potential would come from global changes in agricultural practices, again ignoring the huge accompanying challenges.

So-called ‘Nature-Based Solutions’ are largely neither ‘solutions’, nor ‘natural’.

NBS to take centre-stage in 2021?

There are clear efforts to push NBS into the mainstream of the next UN climate negotiations, the UK-hosted UN COP-26, now scheduled for November 2021. The UK government has stated that it is one of its five priority areas for the negotiations. (12) The UN’s important Standing Committee on Finance will dedicate its 2021 annual ‘Forum’ meeting entirely to NBS. (13) It doesn’t seem to trouble the Committee that it will discuss in detail a concept which is entirely undefined within the UN system and only very vaguely defined in any terms anywhere. The Committee has received submissions of gushing support from the conservation industry, as well as numerous governments including those of France and Germany.

NBS has recently been portrayed as a unifying solution to both problems of climate change and biodiversity loss, and a parallel effort has been taking place to inject it into the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The term is included in a draft new plan called the ‘Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework’, which will set out the CBD’s targets for the next decade and is scheduled to be adopted by the CBD in October 2021.

Given the origins of NBS, there are concerns that NBS could fund a plan by IUCN and other major conservation groups (i.e. corporations), such as WWF, to increase the cover of protected areas to 30% of the planet by 2030. This ‘target’, which is also a key objective for the conservation industry within both the CBD and UN climate negotiations, would potentially represent a vast grab of indigenous and community lands.

Meanwhile, 2020 saw the conservationist groups starting to win the corporate funding jackpots they have long sought. TNC, WWF, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and other

pro-NBS offset groups each received US\$100 million in funding from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. (14)

The Emperor's NBS clothes...

Of course, little or no NBS mitigation has actually been achieved in the four years since the Griscom/TNC paper was published. The real world has seen the worst forest fires ever in many regions, huge new areas of carbon-dense peatlands have been allocated for oil exploration in Africa, and existing natural sinks such as Amazon rainforest instead becoming carbon sources. Despite the fact that its wild claims are now entirely unachievable, The Nature Conservancy has issued no re-assessment or retraction of its highly influential 2017 paper, which continues to mislead policy makers and the public. (15)

NBS represents a serious danger in perpetuating climate change, a greenwashing monster that has been unleashed and fed by self-interested conservationist groups. They should be relentlessly challenged for the damage they have done to efforts to protect the planet.

*Simon Counsell,
March 2021*

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- (2) IUCN, 2009b. Natural Solutions: protected areas helping people cope with climate change. IUCN-WCPA. <https://bit.ly/34Cb9PY>
- (3) IUCN, 2009b. *ibid*
- (4) According to IUCN, 2009b, “PACT 2020 involves a partnership led by IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas, together with the IUCN Secretariat, IUCN members and international organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, WWF International, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Conservation International, the Wild Foundation, Fauna and Flora International, the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance, The World Bank, United Nations Development Programme and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre.”
- (5) Lang and Counsell, 2019, Offsetting fossil fuel emissions with tree planting and ‘natural climate solutions’: science, magical thinking, or pure PR? <http://bit.ly/2XLRJFU>
- (6) TNC, 2016. The Forgotten Climate Solution, TNC website. February 17, 2016. <https://bit.ly/2OuwjdT>
- (7) IUCN, 2016a. Resolution at the World Conservation Congress, 2016. WCC-2016-Res-069-EN, Defining Nature-based Solutions. <https://bit.ly/3vzeJ9k>
- (8) IUCN, 2016b. Nature-based solutions to address climate change. IUCN French Committee. <https://bit.ly/3tEkMrp>
- (9) TNC, 2016, *ibid*.
- (10) TNC, 2016, *ibid*.
- (11) Griscom et al. 2017. Natural Climate Solutions, PNAS. <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645>
- (12) UNFCCC, 2020a. UNFCCC, 2020. COP Presidencies Speak at Launch of Race to Zero Campaign. 05 June 2020.
- (13) UNFCCC, 2020b. <https://bit.ly/3lqRnhd>
- (14) Ecosystem Marketplace, 2020. Natural Climate Solutions Win Big in First Bezos Grants, <https://bit.ly/3tEgxfT>
- (15) Elgin, B. These Trees Are Not What They Seem, Bloomberg Green, <https://bloom.bg/2W083R2>

Analysing the Discourse of ‘Green’ Capitalism: The Meaning of Nature in ‘Nature-Based’



Photo from book cover, “Nature Capital. Theory and practice of mapping ecosystem services,” which illustrates the dichotomous vision that comes with the financialisation of nature: land divided up without remnants into high-tech agribusiness and uninhabited ‘pristine’ landscape.

Discourse and development

The power of discourse lies in its ability to establish ‘regimes of truth’. When philosophers, sociologists or linguists use the term *discourse*, they generally refer to a set of social and linguistic practices that legitimize certain kinds of knowledge, consolidate certain notions, problem definitions, worldviews etc. in a way that they end up being accepted by society as if they were self-evident. A central element for the establishment of such truth regimes are dichotomies – pairs of opposite, mutually exclusive terms – like, for example, ‘sane’ versus ‘insane’, ‘normal’ versus ‘abnormal’, ‘developed’ versus ‘underdeveloped’. The truth regime serves to determine what can legitimately be said and by whom. By establishing such a regime, a discourse institutes and solidifies certain power relations. Discourse analysis, as introduced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in the late 1960s, (1) seeks to reveal the truth-power nexus of a particular discourse in order to dismantle it, to deconstruct the concepts that have been constructed and naturalised through it.

Applying this approach, Colombian thinker Arturo Escobar (2) exposed the power relations within the discourse of ‘development’ implemented after the second world war, between industrialized countries and the so-defined ‘third world’. By producing a notion of ‘wealth’ as something that could be quantified and measured in terms of per capita income or gross national product, peoples whose economies were not primarily based on money – like traditional livelihoods and subsistence communities – were now perceived as ‘poor’, and bringing development to them as a moral obligation of the ‘first world’. The wave of development projects over the next decades gave western industries access to natural resources and created new outlets for them by introducing consumer culture in the global South.

In the 1980s, the disastrous consequences of globalised capitalist economic growth could no longer be ignored, and the adjective 'sustainable' was prefixed to the word development. New narratives needed to be created by development agencies and big NGOs about peasants, indigenous peoples, women and the environment. In reality though, the 'sustainable development' projects were implemented in a top-down manner, resulting in rural communities being invaded by environmental specialists, forest engineers, anthropologists, etc., who came to 'teach' them how to use their lands in a 'sustainable' way. In essence, these projects and programs reiterate the paradigm of economic growth and reproduce neo-colonial power relations until today.

The discourse of 'green' capitalism

More recently new and somehow different discursive constructions have emerged. Twenty or thirty years ago terms such as sustainability, biodiversity or emission reduction were used to suggest a scientific foundation of projects. During the last ten years, however, more technically vague and audience-pleasing, business-friendly expressions have increasingly come to the fore.

'Green economy' was propagated ten years ago as a new economic model, including a huge range of technologies – from solar energy to carbon trade – conveying the general idea, that capitalist economy is not a problem, but the solution. (3) Likewise, the idea of 'circular bioeconomy' (4) evokes associations with the harmonic circle of life and promises to save the planet through valuation of 'natural capital' and a transition to the 'butterfly economy.' (5) Also recently, the idea of 'nature-based solutions' is intensively being promoted as a supposedly new model for combating climate change and providing "human well-being and biodiversity benefits." (6) The massive introduction of such ecological-economical all-purpose terms indicates, that the 'sustainable development' discourse, as described by authors like Arturo Escobar in the 1990s, is now in a different new phase and that it would more aptly be described as the discourse of 'green' capitalism.

So what is the reason for this change? What are the new economic and power interests that demand the adaptation of the truth regime?

The typical sustainable development projects of the 1990s, following the motto "use it or lose it", sought to make economic use of nature by physically extracting products from protected areas, like non-timber forest products (e.g. latex, brazil nuts) or 'sustainably harvested' timber. Projects in the last decade, by contrast, are increasingly driven by interests in environmental and climate compensation. By this logic, in protected areas, in order for them to serve as a pawn for destruction or pollution in other areas, any human interference with so-called 'ecosystem services' (e.g. carbon stockage, biodiversity preservation) that are to 'compensate' for destruction of the same 'service' elsewhere, must be minimised or interdicted. What distinguishes current projects from previous ones are new mechanisms of appropriation. Environmental and climate compensation extract commercial value from nature by 'virtualizing' it. The so-called 'ecosystem services,' once quantified, are considered interchangeable. By this means, without anything being physically extracted or produced, 'financial assets' are created from the land in the form of certificates.

The foundational logic of such projects is not only flawed (since pay-to-pollute is not a solution), (7) but also deeply inhumane, once it ultimately aims at the criminalization and eviction of traditional peoples from their land.

In order to conceal this hardly defensible underlying rationale and its flaws, the discursive production has to be split: On the one hand, there is the highly technical jargon in technical papers, largely incomprehensible to lay people, about assessing 'anthropic impact' (i.e. human-induced disturbances) in ecosystems, along with calculations of emissions or biodiversity losses supposedly reduced or avoided by a project. This discursive strand is understandable only for a small group of consultants and technicians tasked with making this new form of extraction happen.

On the other hand, for the broad public the superficial euphemistic discourse of 'nature-based solutions' is produced. Here, the romanticisation of untouched nature goes along with a happy talk about new solutions and 'win-win' situations. The win-win fantasy can easily be sustained for the general public, as long as the factual loss, the destruction of livelihoods that takes place, where the impacted subaltern communities are not in a position to make themselves heard, remains hidden.

An extensive study from Brazilian researchers (8) evidenced this kind of split in the context of a prominent REDD+ project in an Amazonian indigenous territory. (9) The technical descriptions of the project, in order to 'prove' that the project measures will avoid deforestation that otherwise would have taken place, depict the indigenous community as notorious forest-destroyers. This information is held on the back stage, or, as the authors put it, concealed in the 'black box' of expert language.

On the front stage – in popular YouTube videos, glossy brochures etc. – the narrative of the indigenous people as nature-loving forest guardians is exploited. While the forest-destroyer narrative is the technical requisite for selling 'avoided emissions' as carbon credits, the forest-guardian narrative is necessary in order to effectively greenwash the image of the buyer, in this case a large cosmetics industry.

The mechanisms of appropriation of nature for the purpose of environmental and climate compensation are so obscene and violent, and so far from contributing to the resolution of the crises, that the general public, if they were transparent, would not accept them.

Another effective strategy to hide something is to put it in a haystack. Terms like 'green economy' or 'nature-based solutions' cover a very wide range of initiatives, programmes and projects, blurring the distinctions between them. They function as an all-encompassing label that lumps predatory offset programmes together with initiatives such as urban building greening and small-scale agroecological projects. The use of a common label suggests that all these initiatives – despite some of them seem more 'technically complex' than others – strive in the same direction and must ultimately have the same goal, namely preservation of the environment and climate. The purely commercial interests that are driving the compensation projects and their exclusionary nature thus remain unrecognized by much of society.

The broadness of the new terms and the 'positivity' of the discourse serve to further neutralise critical voices. Those who reject these terms automatically fall into the disrepute of being against any constructive contribution and can therefore easily be excluded from the discussion as notorious 'naysayers'.

The expression 'nature-based' conveys the idea that the supposedly new 'solutions' arise from a new relationship with nature, that humans are now coming to peace with nature and learning from it. Of course, the exclusionary and predatory character of the projects behind this term makes a mockery of this notion. But the expression 'nature-based' in the context of such projects reveals something more fundamental.

The meaning of 'nature'

At this point we need to ask: What is actually the meaning of 'nature'? And for whom does it have this meaning?

The anthropologist Felipe Descola (10) shows that the culture-nature dichotomy – i.e. the radical split of these two terms as mutually exclusive – is a specificity of Western society. This naturalism – the assumption that 'nature' exists as its own domain of being, determined by causal laws and separated from 'cultural' reality, which in turn would be governed by human's self-determined action – guides both our common sense and our scientific principle.

Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, who coexist with the land, the forest, the river, the plants, the animals and their spirits, and who suffer the consequences of both the destruction and the attempts to 'save nature' undertaken by Western Man, do not have this generalized and anthropocentric concept of 'nature'. As, for example, anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro explains, the cosmology of Amazonian indigenous peoples can be understood as a 'multinaturalism.' (11) In their view, each one of the various worlds – the world of the jaguars, the world of the snakes, of the tapirs etc. – constitutes a nature of its own, within which these non-human beings exercise social or cultural practices equal or analogous to those of men, that is, for Amazonian indigenous peoples there is only one culture and countless natures.

This leads us to the insight that the destructive relation of modern humans with his environment and fellow living beings is rooted precisely in his notion of nature. It is in this line of thought that some thinkers propose that we relinquish this notion completely and develop what they call an 'ecology without nature' (12). In such a perspective, there would be no separation between humans and non-humans and no more basis for domination and extermination of the latter.

However, the occidental construction of nature cannot be understood as just any discursive construction, which we could, as soon as we have identified it as such, simply abandon or easily deconstruct. This is a deeper problematic. Nature is the fundamental alterity – the 'other' that constitutes the 'I' – of Western Man. His cultural identity is defined by this antagonistic relationship. The history of occidental civilization, from the ancient Greeks to late capitalism is marked by this phantasmagorical and hostile relationship, by the white man's violent attempts to dominate what he projects as nature, promoted in the name of enlightenment and development. (13),

The romanticisation of nature, as we see it coming up in the new 'nature-based' discourse, can be understood as an essential component of this troubled relationship. Instrumentalization of nature as exploitable resource on the one hand and veneration of untouched 'pure' nature goes hand in hand. This phenomenon is analogous to a condition described in feminist literature (14), known as the madonna-whore dichotomy: Frequently men in our patriarchal society are unable to have respectful sexual relationships with women,

because they can only conceive them as either despicable beings that can be degraded to exploitable sex objects or as pure 'virgin-mothers'.

In a similar fashion, nature – objectified as 'resource' – can be aggressively exploited without moral scruples, living beings can be crammed into monocultures or industrial livestock farms and genetically manipulated in order to maximise production. This predatory attitude is contrasted with the romantic veneration of an ideal distant 'motherly' nature, bringing forth images of untouched natural landscapes and 'virgin forests'.

This dichotomy ultimately does not leave space for a dignified relation between humans and other life forms. It strives towards a world where uninhabited islands of forests are surrounded by high-tech agricultural production sites. "Expropriation of the rural population from land and soil" is, as Karl Marx (15) and Rosa Luxemburg (16) explained, the primary and permanent condition for capitalist growth. Compulsive capitalist growth, rooted in the occidental nature-relationship, goes along with ever new mechanisms of expropriation and a constant creation and adaptation of truth regimes.

The new 'nature-based' discourse must be understood and rejected for what it is: a functional component of late capitalist mechanisms of exclusion and dispossession. The exclusion and extinction of human and non-human living beings through the financialisation of their living spaces, is embellished and concealed by a discourse that worships the Western phantasmagoria of nature.

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- (2) Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Vol. 1. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- (3) UNEP, UNEP. "Towards a green economy: Pathways to sustainable development and poverty eradication". *Nairobi, Kenya: UNEP*, 2011.
- (4) WEF. "What's a 'circular bioeconomy' and how can it save the planet? | World Economic Forum", 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/circular-bioeconomy-nature-reset/>.
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 Lohmann, Larry. "Carbon trading, climate justice and the production of ignorance: ten examples".
- (8) *Development* 51, n° 3 (2008): 359–65. (7) Rajão, Raoni, e Camilla Marcolino. "Between Indians and 'cowboys': the role of ICT in the management of contradictory self-images and the production of carbon credits in the Brazilian Amazon". *Journal of Information Technology* 31, n° 4 (2016): 347–57.
- (9) The authors of the study have anonymised the data, but there is little doubt that it is the Suruí Forest Carbon Project (SFCP) in the Brazilian state of Rondonia, as I pointed out in: Schmidlehner, Michael Franz. "Guest Post: Between Suruí and 'Acapú': REDD and scientists' ethical dilemmas | REDD-Monitor", 2016. <https://redd-monitor.org/2016/07/21/guest-post-between-surui-and-acapu-redd-and-scientists-ethical-dilemmas/>
- (10) Descola, Philippe. *Beyond nature and culture*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.



In Western patriarchal culture, the dichotomous view of nature goes hand in hand with an equally polarized conception of women. The fifteenth-century painting "The Madonna of Humility with the Temptation of Eve" by Carlo da Camerino illustrates the so-called Madonna-whore dichotomy: While the virgin Mother Mary is adored on a throne, deprived Eve, is depicted as sexually available.

(11) Castro, Eduardo Viveiros de. "Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio". *Mana* 2, n° 2 (1996): 115–44.

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When different forms of oppression come together on the same subjects



Photo from the cover of the publication entitled: "Nature Hires: How Nature-based Solutions can power a green jobs recovery," WWF and ILO.

It is not possible to talk about so-called "Nature-Based Solutions" (NBS) removed from the green economy; or to talk about the green economy without addressing capitalism and its new—and old—forms of accumulation, which are tied to colonialism, racism and patriarchy, the pillars without which it could not work.

So one must ask: What is racist, colonial and patriarchal about proposals such as NBS? And to answer this, we can use a powerful tool of analysis, such as intersectionality.

Intersectionality as a concept was first defined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an Afro-descendant woman from the United States. It has emerged as a tool to understand how different forms of segregation, or multiple forms of oppression, come together—or intersect—on a single subject.

This vision allows us to understand, for example, how Afro-descendant or indigenous women are doubly oppressed, given that racial or ethnic and gender issues intersect in them; and many times, issues of class, nationality, body structure and age do as well. It is a conjunction of complex situations of oppression that befall the same subjects.

The intersectionality approach allows us to understand questions such as: Why do more women than men die in climate disasters? Why are there more women than men with cancer

in areas where oil is extracted? Why are more impoverished people dying of COVID-19? Why are Nature-Based Solutions implemented mostly in countries in the global South?

The answers do not lie in genetics, nor in the type of ecosystem. They lie in issues of race, gender and class.

For example, women are in charge of the sick, the elderly and children. If there is a flood or hurricane, the women will not be able to escape, because they are doing caretaking work. In many places, few women know how to read, and announcements about possible disasters are often made in public places—where women do not go; or women are not able to understand the written information. We also know that one of the problems caused by global warming is a rise in diseases, and so more caretaking work falls to women. Likewise, with growing water scarcity and the hoarding of water sources, women must work harder to bring water to their homes, or they must go increasingly farther to collect firewood for cooking.

The same occurs in areas with oil or mining conflicts. As territories are masculinized and violence in communities grows, police or military forces, company workers, private security forces, illicit drug deals and bars arrive. This causes an increase in alcohol consumption, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. In this context, women suffer the most—from both the escalation of violence and the diseases associated with pollution. In the northern Ecuadorian Amazon, it is mainly women who are affected by cancer: Of the documented cases, 71% are women and 29% men. That is, they experience the combination of being indigenous and peasant women, and of having their bodies more exposed to polluted rivers where they wash clothes, and to gas burners next to their homes—among other ills.

From a perspective of intersectionality, one can say that in these sacrificed territories, several forms of socio-ecological oppression intersect in women's bodies. Or in other words, feminist body politics and political ecology join together in the territories.

Now in the new context of COVID-19, we can say that just as indigenous, peasant and impoverished women are more impacted by climate disasters and extractivism, it is impoverished, Afro-descendant, indigenous, migrant or Latina women who are more exposed to the disease—and thus at greater risk of contracting and dying from it. And due to the very conditions of economic and social marginalization, they suffer the most from the economic effects of the pandemic.

Solutions designed to create more dispossession

Throughout history, capitalism has needed to make distinctions among races. Where these distinctions already existed, it has exacerbated them; where they did not, it has had to introduce them. The same is true of distinctions between the genders and conditions of poverty. In this way, it has justified the exploitation of peoples in the South, migrants, women and millions of workers.

The new phase of globalized, financial and digital capitalism has been depressed by recurring crises—environmental, financial, social,—which in turn provoke crises of accumulation. To try to defray these crises, capitalists invent more markets and new commodities based on the cycles and functions of nature, as well as new frontiers to implement their new businesses.

This is why the Paris Agreement was conceived, as well as all the facets and frameworks that have been developed from it. One of these is “Nature-Based Solutions,” (NBS) which are designed to get even more out the environmental and climate crises. NBS are a collusion between international conservation organizations, the financial sector and the corporate sector. But so were the carbon, biodiversity, water and other offset mechanisms. The CDM and REDD, for example, were already “nature-based solutions.”

As commercial and financial products, NBS are one step further in the advancement of the green economy, and they are also somewhat more sophisticated. They talk about nature in a utilitarian fashion, they extensively use computer technology, both for their ultra-fast transactions and to control territories, and they create even more mixed up commodities. But NBS continue, outrageously, to use language that deceptively suggests they are inclusive of women, indigenous peoples, and now workers.

We can see that Nature-Based Solutions are now playing up the idea that climate change can be better faced with “women *in alliance* with nature,” and that nature is now *hiring*, as stated in the title of an ILO and WWF document from October 2020 (1). The cover of this document shows a woman, black and hardworking, managing nature in South Africa.

Just because she is smiling broadly while doing her “green job,” does not mean she is not just another hardworking woman—no doubt exploited with a low-paid, one-off job. Capitalism requires women that are paid poorly or not at all, women from the South, and now women to do work for green capital.

Nature-Based Solutions create jobs such as stewarding the carbon in rainforest trees, or cooking for squads of men cutting down balsa wood in Ecuador—which will be used in China in the *green job* of building blades for wind turbines. The turbines are also manufactured with metals that come from areas where women are violated, where they must walk increasingly farther to find clean water and firewood to have energy in their homes; and they must do so because these same resources are extracted by companies that claim to offset their damages using none other than Nature-Based Solutions.

Nature as a subject itself

While intersectionality is a very useful tool to look at the conjunction of various forms of oppression, it falls short when looking at the complexity of the new forms of green capitalism. We must therefore broaden the group of subjects. Why not include nature as a legal subject? This way, we will be able to look at the oppression not only of human beings, but also of non-human beings.

Nature is also exploited, objectified, feminized, racialized and turned into an exploited worker that produces environmental resources, goods and services. Clearly, the oppression of women, indigenous peoples, peasants and workers, and the oppression of nature occurs simultaneously. In fact, we cannot—we must not—talk about the history of patriarchy, the sociology of work, or the essence of racism, without taking into account nature as a subject in this process.

With green capitalism and its same-as-always, nature-based solutions, we see that the concept of intersectionality takes on new meaning. Any analysis derived from just one point

of discrimination—be it ethnic, gender or social—hides nature from the context, reducing the analysis to identity experiences isolated from the territory in which the discrimination occurs.

Thus, in the face of discrimination against body-territory subjects, we will be better able to understand the relationship between oppressors and those who are exploited in capitalism using a diverse intersectionality approach. And in this way, we can advance the defense of human rights, women's rights and the rights of nature.

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Food and agribusiness corporations peddle a deadly scam



Photo from Rainforest Rescue's campaign "Fact check: Nestlé Palm Oil is not Sustainable"

After years of having done nothing to move towards the already compromised targets established by the 2015 Paris Agreement, dozens of big polluters are now making 'net zero' pledges. These pledges are made mainly to satisfy the public relations needs of the financial players that fund them. Offsets, not reductions of emissions, are at the core of these pledges. And offsets are now mostly hidden under the latest corporate greenwashing brand: 'nature-based solutions,' which risk generating a massive land grab for forests and farmlands, particularly in the global South. Food and agribusiness corporations are leading actors in this deadly scam.

Corporations are, without a doubt, the number one obstacle to meaningful action on the climate crisis. These almighty actors have spent the past two decades undermining scientific consensus, blocking meaningful legislation and greenwashing their own responsibility. Since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, with its lame voluntary commitment to keep the world to a still disastrous 1.5 degrees of warming, and its promise of market-based solutions, few corporations have even done the bare minimum to disclose their emissions, let alone to take actions to reduce them.

Food and agriculture companies are among the worst performers. The latest IPCC report estimates that the food system accounts for up to 37% of total global GHG emissions. This has not prevented these companies from receiving billions of dollars from global financial corporations, including those that claim to be committed to responsible investing.

Not a day goes by without the announcement of a corporate initiative or pledge to achieve 'net zero' emissions by 2050. These 'net zero' initiatives and pledges rely on offsets, which are now hidden behind the euphemistic term of 'nature-based solutions'. Many of these corporations are at the same time lobbying hard against government intervention into their financing of polluting companies, insisting that somehow they are best placed to decide how investment in climate solutions should be allocated. This corporate greenwashing, so deeply based on offsets, is shaping up to be even worse than the days of climate denial.

Nestlé's 'net zero' plan is all about offsets

BlackRock is the world's largest and most influential shareholder of both fossil fuel and agribusiness corporations. Despite its deep integration with the world's worst climate villains, BlackRock has recast itself as a leader for climate action and "expects companies to articulate how they are aligned to a scenario in which global warming is limited to well below 2°C, consistent with a global aspiration to reach net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050". Corporations are now collectively referring to the offsets under the 'net zero' pledges as 'nature-based solutions'.

One of the corporations that BlackRock is heavily invested in is Nestlé, the world's largest food company and one of the worst corporate GHG emitters outside of the energy sector. **BlackRock is Nestlé's largest shareholder** and, despite Nestlé's massive climate footprint, the company is an easy fit with the actions BlackRock 'expects' from the companies it invests in. In December 2020, Nestlé launched its "Net Zero Roadmap", committing to reduce its emissions by 50% by 2030 and to 'net zero' by 2050. The majority of these emissions occur in the sourcing of dairy, meat and commodity crops (coffee, palm oil, sugar, soybeans, etc). Nestlé's annual emissions in these sourcing activities are roughly double the total emissions of its home country, Switzerland.

Nestlé's climate plan does not involve a reduction in its sales of foods based on dairy, meat and other highly-emitting agricultural commodities. To the contrary, **its climate plan is based on a projected growth of 68% for both its sourcing of dairy and livestock products and of commodity crops between 2020 and 2030.**

Part of Nestlé's plan to achieve this is a commitment to invest US\$1.2 billion over the next ten years in "regenerative agriculture practices". To put this into perspective: Nestlé paid out a dividend of around US\$8 billion to BlackRock and its other shareholders in 2020. From adding feed additives to cutting the methane produced by animals to introducing agroforestry practices and soil management in crop plantations, these plans remain unclear on how suppliers will implement these practices, on what they exactly mean and on who will pay for that to happen.

In the absence of any serious plan to reduce its emissions, Nestlé is banking on offsets to salvage its 'net zero' ambitions. "We see enormous potential for the removal of GHG emissions from the atmosphere as a way to counterbalance those emissions that we cannot reduce directly," says Nestlé in its Roadmap.

The precursor to today's 'nature-based solutions' is the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme, which not only failed to reduce deforestation or emissions over the past twelve years, but also badly affected local communities, especially by cutting off their access to agricultural lands and forests and contributing to land conflicts.

One of the early promoters of REDD+ was a Swiss company, South Pole Group, which is now working for Nestlé on its offset plan. South Pole led the huge Kariba REDD+ project, covering 784,987 hectares in northwestern Zimbabwe. That project, which was structured to channel money through several companies registered in tax havens, failed to bring material benefits to peasant communities and worse, prevented them from accessing the lands they depend on for food production, hunting and gathering. It did succeed, however, in providing the French energy giant Total with offsets to make its liquid natural gas shipments to China 'carbon neutral'.

Nestlé, an offset buyer, paid South Pole to develop a model for it "to calculate the GHG mitigation potential of agricultural land." At the same time, South Pole contracts with potential offset sellers, like the UK's Miro Forestry, which hired South Pole to certify the carbon absorption of its massive tree plantations in West Africa and help it sell offsets. South Pole, described as "one of the largest traders in carbon credits", gets paid making the calculations for companies on both sides of the ledger and then, if all goes well, arranging the trades.

Nestlé estimates it will need to offset 13 million tonnes of CO₂e per year by 2030, an amount roughly the size of the total annual GHG emissions for a country like El Salvador. But this number could be even higher if the 'regenerative agriculture' plans do not materialise. Although Nestlé does not detail its offset plans, it has already launched projects based on planting trees in locations where Nestlé sources its ingredients - such as planting three million trees in Malaysia, three million trees in key sourcing locations in the Americas, and a protected area in Ivory Coast. By saying that it intends to remove GHGs from the atmosphere "using natural solutions", its annual projected offsets would require the equivalent of zoning off or planting trees on at least 4.4 million hectares of lands every year.

If the rapidly growing number of corporate net zero plans move to implementation, even only partially, it will result in a massive grab of lands, forests and territories of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities in the global South. As stated in a recent report by La Via Campesina and a coalition of NGOs and social movements, the corporate net zero plans that are coming fast and furiously make it crystal clear that "*there is no desire or ambition on the part of the largest and richest in the world to actually reduce emissions. 'Greenwashing' hardly suffices as a term to describe these efforts to obscure continued growth in fossil emissions – 'ecocide' and 'genocide' more accurately capture the impacts the world will face.*"

FOLU: Yara and Unilever's new clothes

One of today's most sophisticated and covert lobbies for the food and agribusiness corporations is the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU). It was initiated by the Norwegian fertiliser company Yara and the Anglo-Dutch processed-food giant Unilever-- two of the worst climate polluters within the food and agriculture sector. With backing from the Norwegian government, also one of the world's worst climate polluters, they brought together a coalition of the usual suspects of corporate-funded NGOs and business associations. Today FOLU,

and the individuals and groups that inhabit it, are ubiquitous in international fora dealing with climate and food.

FOLU's agenda is firmly anchored in the interests of its two founding corporations. Unilever, the world's largest buyer of palm oil, has for years been promoting certification schemes, notably the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, to provide itself a "sustainable" source for a fundamentally unsustainable agricultural commodity. Yara, as the world's largest producer of nitrogen fertiliser, a product that alone accounts for one in every 50 tonnes of global GHG emissions produced by humans per year, has led a campaign to recast its fertilisers as climate saviours. Yara says its fertilisers have enabled people to produce more food on less land, thereby saving forests and cooling the planet.

Not surprisingly, then, FOLU calls for voluntary certification schemes and more efficient, fossil-fuel-based agricultural production as the main solutions to the food sector's climate emissions. It also puts the focus on reducing tropical deforestation, not eliminating fossil fuels from the food system, and expects this to be paid for by corporations in need of offsets for their net zero commitments, described by FOLU as "making the business case for a nature-based net-zero future".

Both Yara and Unilever have long been united in their desire to maintain and expand the industrial production of agricultural commodities. Prior to FOLU, they initiated the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture-- launched in 2014. That alliance, which had a similar membership to FOLU, was a failure in terms of climate action, but that was never its intention. The alliance was conceived to block efforts to push real solutions like agroecology and food sovereignty in the international fora dealing with food, agriculture and climate.

The climate revolution will not be financed

Corporations are simply not going to take actions that impede their profits, and they will fight against any actors, be they governments or frontline communities, that stand in their way. They will only change when forced to. Corporations will not and cannot be part of the solution.

This is particularly important to keep in mind with the financial industry. Financial corporations like BlackRock and even the corporations that manage pension funds are built to finance corporations. If money is left in their hands, it will always flow to corporations. Corporations may have to make net zero pledges that will enclose massive areas of land as 'nature-based offsets' to access that money, but this is not going to drive down emissions and will take a huge toll on communities that have done nothing to contribute to the climate crisis. There is no victory for people or the climate if a financial company is shamed into shifting its holdings from Exxon to Nestlé.

Solutions must be developed and defined by people, not corporations. When it comes to food and agriculture, peasants and other small-scale food producers have already articulated a vision for food sovereignty and solutions to the climate crisis that excludes these huge corporations altogether. There is no place in this vision for Nestlé's Roadmap or BlackRock's empty environmental promises. The big challenge is to take back control over the funds, resources and governments that are currently captured by corporations in order to stop the real causes of the climate problem.

We have to confront the rising tsunami of corporate, greenwashed solutions with clarity and solidarity. Offsets must be rejected full-stop, as must any scheme that makes allowance for them, such as "nature-based solutions".

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["Corporate greenwashing: "net zero" and "nature-based solutions" are a deadly fraud"](#)

Corporate enthusiasm for forest protection and tree planting driven by determination to protect profits from fossil fuel extraction



Illustration: DesmoqUK

Over the years, oil, coal and gas companies have destroyed large swaths of forests and polluted many more. Yet all of a sudden, they proclaim to have discovered a love for forests. Moreover, they are putting them at the heart of the new climate strategies they are promoting after spending decades and billions of dollars casting doubt on any link between fossil fuels and global warming. (1)

Why the big change? Several factors probably play a role. First, governments are increasingly leaning toward legislation to rein in greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning. Second, more and more lawsuits are being filed against oil and coal companies for their role both in climate change and in denying that climate change is happening. And extreme climate events are happening much more frequently and in a way that is harder to ignore.

Accordingly, the oil industry has started to amend its climate denial strategy. Their new line is that climate change is real but that forests will take care of much of the problem. No need to be in such a rush to phase out burning oil or gas, they say. Why not just prevent forests from releasing carbon instead? Or plant new trees to soak up some of the carbon dioxide that is accumulating in the atmosphere?

Talking about nature protection while pocketing profits from destroying nature

Take the Italian oil and gas company Eni. Its website now includes a large section outlining the company's "commitment to protecting forests", showcasing glossy images of lush forests, and urgent calls to take action on deforestation. Meanwhile, Eni's long-term strategy projects that 90 percent of its energy production by 2050 will come from burning fossil gas.

The Anglo-Dutch oil company Shell is also proclaiming its enthusiasm for nature, and forests in particular. "Nature-Based Solutions and Shell" is the title of a video on Shell's webpage of the same name. It talks about how "Shell is harnessing nature", "supporting reforestation projects" and "protecting forests under threat". These activities, the video claims, are "making it easier for our customers to tackle their emissions." A world map presents the projects that have received funding from Shell or its customers who are paying a little extra to fill up with "climate-neutral fuel". The company says its oil-based energy production has already peaked but like Eni, Shell plans to increase its fossil gas business. Over half of its energy sales by 2030 will be from fossil gas.

Total, the French oil company wants to extract near and transport oil and gas through a World Heritage Site in the Albertine Rift in eastern Africa and destroy carbon-rich peat forests (along with the fossil carbon in oil and gas deposits underneath these forests) in the Republic of Congo's Cuvette region. (2) It set up "Total Nature Based Solutions" in 2019. With a budget of US\$ 100 million (in 2019, Total spent US\$ 1.55 billion on fossil fuel exploration), the new unit "is tasked with funding, developing and managing projects in carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions reduction." And the Total Foundation "has made forest preservation and restoration a key focus of its program" while the corporation Total plans to generate 85 percent of its energy sales by 2030 from either fossil oil or fossil gas.

Documents obtained by the UK-based organisation Culture Unstained show that Norway's oil and gas company Equinor (formerly Statoil) has been offering to fund tree planting and forest protection projects, if that opens the door to sponsorship of the next UN climate conference in Scotland, planned for November 2021. (3) In 2018, Equinor wrote that it would be ready to invest in forest carbon projects "when there is more clarity on the market development." That clarity, it seems, the UK government is preparing to deliver. Notes from a May 2020 meeting between UK government officials and Equinor representatives confirm that the UK government wants to use its position as host of the UN climate meeting to push through a decision to set up "robust carbon markets which unlock private finance for mitigation, including through nature-based solutions."

The documents obtained by Culture Unstained show that UK government officials also met with representatives from BP and Shell. (3) And BP has been preparing for such a carbon market to emerge: its subsidiary BP Ventures bought a majority stake in the largest US-based forest carbon offset development company, Finite Carbon, in December 2020. (4)

Corporate non-solution will cause massive land grab and fuel more climate chaos

Because oil companies have no intention to drastically shrink extraction of fossil carbon in the near future, their nature-based non-solutions - if implemented - will require huge areas of forest and land planted with trees as corporate carbon storage facility. Total's Nature Based Solutions unit will be looking for projects to store at least five million tonnes of the company's

CO₂ emissions **annually** from 2030. Shell announced ramping up the purchase of carbon offsets, including from tree planting and forest conservation projects, to 120 million tonnes **a year** by 2030; Eni is counting on forests to store 40 million tonnes of its carbon dioxide emissions **annually** from 2050 (and six million tonnes **annually** from 2024). And that is just the demand for land from just a handful of oil companies to use as carbon offset. Over 1,500 large corporations have in the meantime made pledges to become carbon neutral, and corporations like Nestlé and Unilever or tech companies like Microsoft and Google and other corporate polluters such as the aviation industry are also demanding land for above-ground carbon storage.

The numbers thus suggest that this corporate nature-grabbing non-solution will turn into a major threat to food sovereignty and community control over their territories in the global South because it will enclose forests and land for tree planting on a massive scale.

Conservation industry presents nature as solution to corporate polluters

Corporations have had a lot of help from large conservation groups in designing this latest corporate non-solution to climate change. Back in 2009, conservation groups including The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and IUCN were discussing ways to turn the carbon stored in protected forest areas under their management into money for their organisations. From these discussions grew the “nature-based solutions” idea (see article in this bulletin issue).

Their proposal involves enclosing forests and land planted with trees, declaring them as above-ground corporate carbon storage facility and trading the carbon stored in them as compensation for digging up more fossil carbon from underground oil, gas and coal deposits.

So, let's recall the bogus reasoning behind the idea of offsetting which starts from believing that damage caused by pollution or destruction in one place can be undone by preventing pollution or destruction that was going to take place elsewhere.

Take the example of forest carbon projects, which are also often called REDD offsets. A for-profit conservation company based in an industrialized country such as Wildlife Works Carbon or a conservation group such as The Nature Conservancy claims that without their intervention, a forest would have been destroyed. It is worth noting that no REDD project site includes a forest actually threatened by destruction for, say, expansion of oil palm or soy plantations or industrial logging. Nor are REDD projects located where a fossil fuel company was planning to extract oil, coal or gas from underground carbon deposits. Almost without exception, offset project owners identify peasant farming, ‘population pressure’ and shifting cultivation as alleged drivers of deforestation. The identified deforestation threat then must be prevented by the REDD project. In reality, this has meant undermining and controlling peasant farming practises and bad-mouthing and restricting shifting cultivation. (6)

The story from which an offset project calculates its emission savings (the alleged deforestation threat that was prevented) is always hypothetical, because it is not possible to know what would have happened to the forest without the offset project. Studies suggest that many, if not most REDD and tree planting offset projects exaggerate the emissions they allegedly prevented. (7)

The oil company emissions, by contrast, are real. This is a risky combination for the climate.

The result is that emissions from burning fossil fuels keep accumulating, heating up the planet. Yet, their customers and governments pushed by oil industry lobbyists are led to believe that the climate damage of these emissions has been dealt with.

Carbon cycle chaos

Offsets involving forest conservation and tree planting also confuse two carbon cycles that have very different impacts on the climate. The carbon in the tree is part of a much faster-moving cycle than the carbon stored in underground oil, gas or coal deposits. These underground carbon stores are made up of fossil carbon, carbon that has been locked up in these deposits for millions of years. By contrast, even old forests store carbon only for a few hundred to thousand years before it is released again into the atmosphere when trees decompose. In industrial tree plantations, the trees are often cut after as little as seven years.

From a climate perspective, underground carbon and above-ground carbon are therefore not the same. One (fossil carbon) is safely locked away for millennia - unless companies drill oil wells and dig up coal mines. The other (carbon in vegetation) has always been part of the cycle that is shaping the climate, but never to an extent that will cause climate chaos like adding more fossil carbon does.

REDD as precursor

It was at the UN climate conference in 2019 that Shell, BP and others joined the carbon markets lobby and the conservation industry to launch a market for what they then called 'nature climate solutions' (today's 'nature-based solutions'). (5)

Whatever the words used, however ("net-zero decarbonization", "climate neutral," "carbon neutral" are other popular terms used in relation with nature-based corporate solutions), such company initiatives have one thing in common: the oil industry's resolve to keep destroying underground carbon deposits for decades to come.

Their long-term extraction plans show that for Shell, Eni, Equinor, Total, Exxon, BP and their industry, 'decarbonization' means they will continue to extract and burn fossil carbon to produce energy and release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere – which is causing the climate to rapidly change. Nature-based enclosures merely provide a dangerous cover for this destruction ([Bulletin 247](#)).

Like enclosing forests as above-ground corporate carbon storage facility through REDD, this latest greenwashing of fossil carbon extraction also risks depriving countless peasant farming communities and forest peoples of their livelihoods. (6) Although REDD stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, REDD projects and programmes never even tried to reduce corporate-led large-scale deforestation - which has continued largely unhindered by REDD initiatives. Instead, REDD led to stifling restrictions on peasant farming practises, and shifting cultivation in particular.

What started as REDD 15 years ago has now been expanded into corporate nature-based non-solutions that stand to enclose not just forests but also mangroves, grasslands and soils as corporate above-ground carbon storage facilities. For the time being, the oil companies claiming to be supporting this latest idea are mainly financing existing REDD projects: Shell

is buying carbon credits among others from the Katingan REDD project in Indonesia, and three REDD projects in Peru; Eni is involved in the Luangwa REDD project in Zambia; Total has bought carbon credits from the Kariba REDD Forest Protection project in Zimbabwe for its first 'carbon-neutral' liquid fossil gas shipment in 2020. BP has focused on forest carbon projects managed by the US-based carbon offset company Finite Carbon which it recently acquired. During its first venture into forest carbon offsets, BP invested in the Noel Kempff forest carbon conservation project in Bolivia which has been managed by The Nature Conservancy.

These carbon offset projects have been shown to either exaggerate the emission savings they are selling as carbon credits or to cause conflict and restrict peasant farming practises and community use of the forest – or both. (8) By supporting REDD projects like these, conservationist groups helped put the spotlight of the deforestation discourse on peasant farming - and away from the forest destruction driven by the corporations that so generously donate to their organisations. (9) Through their support for corporate 'nature-based solution' offsets, these same groups are now siding with the oil industry in delaying the winding-down of fossil fuel burning.

In short, these corporate nature-based non-solutions are a PR coup par excellence for oil corporations with limited intention to forego profits from fossil carbon extractivism at the scale and with the speed needed to reduce the risk of climate chaos. Let's not be fooled by the oil and conservation industry's latest deception. They will inevitably support some genuinely community-run forest conservation initiatives. There will be the same tireless promise as there was with REDD: that any 'problems' can be resolved through better oversight, certification standards, stricter monitoring of safeguard policies and more community participation. Such efforts mistake the root of the problem: The danger of nature-based corporate solutions does not arise from bad implementation (though that will happen, too); the danger lies in this non-solution triggering a massive land grab and distracting from the urgent need to end corporate destruction of underground oil, gas and coal deposits.

Jutta Kill

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(1) In the past five years alone, Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, Total, and Chevron are believed to have spent more than US\$1 billion on lobbying against climate legislation that would endanger their profits from fossil fuel burning. The website of the US-based group Climate Investigation Center contains a large collection of documents showing the history of oil company funding of climate denial: <https://climateinvestigations.org/category/climate-deniers/> . See also *The Problem with Big Oil's Forest Fever*, by Phoebe Cooke. <https://www.desmog.co.uk/2020/07/06/big-oil-forest-fever> and InfluenceMap report 2019: *How the oil majors have spent \$1Bn since Paris on narrative capture and lobbying on climate*. <https://influencemap.org/report/How-Big-Oil-Continues-to-Oppose-the-Paris-Agreement-38212275958aa21196dae3b76220bddd>

(2) *Anatomy of a 'Nature-Based Solution': Total oil, 40,000 hectares of disappearing African savannah, Emmanuel Macron, Norwegian and French 'aid' to an election-rigging dictator, trees to burn, secret contacts, and dumbstruck conservationists*, by Simon Counsell. April 2021. <https://redd-monitor.org/2021/04/16/anatomy-of-a-nature-based-solution-total-oil-40000-hectares-of-disappearing-african-savannah-emmanuel-macron-norwegian-and-french-aid-to-an-election-rigging-dictator-trees/>

(3) *Docs Show Equinor Pushing 'False Solutions' to Climate Change While Lobbying UK Government on COP26*, by Phoebe Cooke, DESMOG UK. October 2020. <https://www.desmog.co.uk/2020/10/01/docs-show-equinor-pushing-false-solutions-climate-change-while-lobbying-uk-government-cop26> . Documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests filed by the organisation Culture Unstained are available at <https://cultureunstained.org/bigoilpushtosponsorcop/> .

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'Nature-based Solutions' and Corporate Territorial Control: A Fabricated Consensus



It is nothing new that States and the business sector misappropriate environmental issues; this has led to the creation of seemingly good concepts that claim to have the best intentions, but whose purpose is to serve corporate interests and justify interventions in, and control of, territories in the Global South. Dominant knowledge, developed by 'experts' from Northern countries, promotes a certain way of perceiving nature. This knowledge, which is aligned with political and corporate interests from the North and South, is considered to be both neutral and unanimously accepted when it comes to environmental issues. It establishes what the problem is, what must be done to solve it, and who is responsible. Narratives of an alien, untameable or out-of-control nature—requiring specialists' knowledge in order to be controlled—have led to the development of policies based on market logic and the idea that it is possible to “offset” emissions and destruction.

There is currently a lack of commitment around halting the expansion of extractive industries, which historically have been shown not only to generate CO2 emissions, but also to cause environmental crimes and human rights violations. It is within this context that the idea of 'nature-based solutions' has emerged (NBS). Large oil companies, such as Shell, Chevron, BP and Petrobras, as well as large mining companies like BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto, Glencore and Vale, are most vested in this idea. They also have the legislative, financial and ideological support of States.

The conservationist organization, IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), introduced the idea of Nature-based Solutions (NBS) into the 'environmental vocabulary' in 2016. Different actors use this concept frequently with different meanings, including in proposals that range from REDD+ mechanisms (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), to carbon capture and sequestration technology and other geoengineering techniques (1). The idea progressed until it was incorporated into the language of various United Nations organizations and conventions. For example, the 2015 Paris Agreement, which does not define a particular emissions reduction target for the energy and transport sectors, establishes the possibility of achieving "a balance between anthropogenic emissions by source and removals by sinks" in the second half of the century (2). This language has given rise to the concept of 'net zero emissions,' by claiming that carbon sequestration will be able to offset the emissions generated by burning fossil fuels.

In 2012, the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—the private arm of the World Bank—introduced the use of offsets to argue that there would be no net loss in biodiversity in the projects it financed. Since then, the institution has promoted biodiversity offsets, which "not only can, but must, lead to a net positive impact." To this end, it contends that biodiversity offsets—that is, quantifiable conservation outcomes deriving from actions designed to offset a project's significant adverse impacts on biodiversity—must follow the 'like-for-like or better' principle. Offsets must conserve the same biodiversity values that are being impacted by the project (3). As if this were possible...

Corporate appropriation: The case of mining

One sector that deserves to be highlighted in this discussion, along with oil companies, is the mining sector. Using a discourse of sustainability, the mining sector seeks to legitimize its activities and expand its frontiers of accumulation and territorial control. We have seen this industry increase its investments in so-called nature-based solutions in order to offset its ongoing extraction of 'natural resources.' For example, Vale—the second largest mining company in the world after BHP Billiton, and leading iron ore producer—has committed to investing at least USD 2 billion to reduce its carbon emissions by 33% by 2030, as part of its commitment to become 'carbon neutral' by 2050, and to achieve no net loss in biodiversity in the long term (4). To be 'carbon neutral' means to calculate the total emissions of a project and use offset projects to counterbalance the emissions that cannot be reduced.

These actions are an essential part of Vale's legitimation strategy; it uses them to claim that it offsets the negative impacts of mining extraction, exploitation and transportation. "We protect, and help protect, an area approximately six times greater than the area occupied by our operations," says the mining giant. It also contends that "Vale has been protecting the Amazon rainforest for decades, while operating the largest iron ore mine in the world." The company maintains that while almost the entire area around its operations in the Carajás mine in Pará, Brazil was deforested in the last 30 years, only the area that Vale "helps

protect” remained intact. This same company has been denounced for engendering conflicts in various countries, such as Malaysia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Canada (5). In Brazil, in addition to conflictive projects like the Grande Carajás Program in the states of Pará and Maranhão (the Amazon forest that Vale claims to protect), the company is responsible for the collapse of the Mina do Feijão dam in Brumadinho. This occurred three years after the collapse of the Fundão dam in Brazil, which destroyed an area the size of Portugal.

The Fundão dam belongs to the Samarco mining company, which is owned by Vale in partnership with BHP Billiton. Five years after the disaster, none of the repairs planned for the group of affected people—which includes farmers, washerwomen, artisans, fishermen, fisherwomen and small merchants—have been completed, nor has the environment been restored. The disaster killed 19 people and destroyed the sources of livelihood of almost two million people living along the Doce River basin, whom the 43.8 million cubic meters of iron ore waste reached in 39 affected municipalities in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. Serious environmental racism also characterized this crime, as it disproportionately affected the black population of the region: For example, in the district of Bento Rodrigues, which was the area most affected by the waste, 84.3% of the population is black. The perpetrators of this murder have not been prosecuted and remain free. To make matters worse, BHP was not found guilty in its country of origin, England; this was in response to the collective lawsuit that included almost 200,000 individuals, as well as prefectures, small businesses and the Krenak indigenous community. The judge determined that the lawsuit was ‘abusive,’ and that England had no jurisdiction over the case (6).

Yet, what is abusive is that BHP has also profited from the creation of the NBS market. Since 2016, this company has generated products by incorporating so-called environmental justifications. In alliance with Conservation International, it developed forest bonds to finance REDD projects—bonds which the IFC newly issued at a value of USD 152 million (7). Also, in 2008, BHP supported a REDD project managed by Conservation International (CI) in Peru. The Alto Mayo project, which involves communities of more than 5,000 people, was accused of ‘carbon colonialism,’ because it delegitimized and violated the traditional ways of life of communities that depend on the territory where the ‘standing forest’ is located. This forest, ‘intact,’ generates carbon and lucrative offset possibilities (8). More recently, CI and BHP created the “Finance for Forests” initiative (F4f) to expand these kinds of investments. The initiative involves the most predatory and polluting industries: oil, gas, mining and aviation.

BHP also participates in the “Markets for Natural Climate Solutions” initiative (NCS). This initiative is spearheaded by the “International Emissions Trade Association” (IETA), which includes Chevron, BP, Shell, and others. For these corporations, nature-based solutions are “one of the most economical ways to manage CO₂” and to meet the Paris Agreement targets. However, they are also one more way to expand the power and reach of the already problematic carbon markets.

NBS: Solutions so that nothing really has to change

These initiatives enable companies to convey the notion that their activities protect and create biodiversity, rather than destroy it. They make sure that extractive capitalism is seen not as a cause of environmental problems, but as the solution. Companies use these initiatives to encroach upon communities’ territories, claiming that it is possible—using dangerous and costly technologies and practices—to offset the unprecedented damage they

cause. Thus, in addition to hiding the root of the problems, conflicts, crimes and human rights violations suffered by communities, these initiatives increase the already strong economic, political and cultural presence of companies, granting them legitimacy in society. This means expanding and intensifying the usurpation and private appropriation of lands and territories, and the violation of the food security and sovereignty of communities and peoples who live and survive thanks to their relationship with their territories.

Nature-based solutions presume consensus on the idea that we are all responsible for the environmental crisis. And therefore, because ‘everybody’ is responsible, in fact nobody is. The “techno-managerial eco-consensus maintains that we need radical change, but within the framework of the current situation [...] so that nothing really has to change” in the capitalist system (9). Problems are not solved, but rather moved to another place. Sustainability discourse around the use of natural resources is once again used to promote the image of a corporate sector that is concerned and committed to fighting climate change and poverty. The exclusive focus of environmental policies on offset-based concepts, such as ‘carbon neutral’ or ‘zero emissions or net impact’—which have now been redesigned based on the idea that “nature holds the solution,”—represents a reductionist and depoliticized perception of the environmental problem. For whom is the solution, and what does it solve? And what nature are we talking about?

Focused on measurement and quantification, as well as technological adjustments as a goal, these processes provide capitalism with one more opportunity to appropriate discourse that is critical of the system—in this case discourse about environmental destruction—and thus generate new sources of accumulation and legitimation. These processes are developed and implemented using a power structure that involves scientific groups, the corporate sector, governments, big conservation organizations, multilateral financial institutions and UN agencies, such as the Convention on Climate Change and Biodiversity. The strategy now is not to deny the harmful nature of industrial extraction, but to recognize it and claim that it is possible to offset—in order to get ahead in the race for ‘environmental resources.’

However, it is clearly impossible to offset the negative effects of extractive capitalism. And even if it were possible, there is not enough land on the planet for the number of projects that are being proposed. That land, that territory, is already occupied. It is not possible to expand fossil fuel production and mining, or to increase agribusiness productivity, while utilizing these same sectors to combat climate change or guarantee environmental protection. In practice, we have seen that constantly prioritizing the extractivist model, the logic of extraction-exportation of goods, colonialism and neocolonialism, and racism and patriarchy leads to the expropriation of bodies-territories and traditional, indigenous and peasant communities—especially in the Global South. It is a process that creates new territorial configurations which allow for the intervention in, and appropriation and use of, territories.

It is therefore necessary to reflect on the following questions: What are the concrete effects of these processes on territories, ways of life, and the ways in which we perceive and relate to the environment? What problems are we actually trying to solve when we talk about ‘nature-based solutions?’ Are we talking about the environment for communities, for people who actually protect it and show us that another, non-capitalist, way of life is possible? Or are we talking about the environment for business, death and destruction? The current coronavirus pandemic is one more element that can help us answer this...

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Brazil: The Impacts of Nature-based Exclusions on Women's Bodies-Territories



The new so-called 'Nature-based Solutions' has the same logic of the old false solutions based on the market and the Green Economy. In this text we seek to share reflections that emerged from our discussions with women impacted by Green Economy projects in the Ribeira River Valley (in the southeast region of Brazil, between the states of São Paulo and Paraná) and in Acre (a state in the northern region of the country). In order to understand these women's forms of struggle, one must first recognize their knowledge and ways of relating to nature. It is through this recognition that we departure ourselves from analysis to practice, and build our alternatives and routes out of the maze.

The experiences of indigenous women from Acre, where there have been consolidated REDD+ projects since 2012 (1), demonstrate very well the contradictions and tensions

brought upon the territory by the arrival of the Green Economy. They are not informed about the terms of the programs that arrive in their territories – with difficult terminology and contracts often written in English – and have no place at the bargaining table, since the large-scale organizations that bring these projects only discuss the matter with the men. In the rare occasions when the women take part, they need to make twice the effort and take their children along to meetings, and when they get there they are not heard or taken into consideration. As well as not having a voice in these processes, the women also demonstrate that the logic of their relation with nature is incompatible with conservation projects. During an exchange about this question organized by the WRM in partnership with the Indigenist Missionary Council (Conselho Indigenista Missionário – CIMI) and Sempreviva Feminist Organization (Sempreviva Organização Feminista – SOF) in 2019, they demonstrated a very good understanding of the logic behind these projects, by observing how they got to their communities.

One of the participants explained that the matching measures offered by the projects are actions with no relation with the communities' way of life, and that often serve only to insert them in the capitalist market circuit and to concentrate income, thus disrespecting traditional ways of living. She gave as an example a project that offered the construction of small dams to create fish farms in the community. In criticizing the proposal, she alluded to the importance of keeping alive in the community the idea that life depends on the river that runs through their land, if for no other reason so that people continue to protect it and not to allow the entry of megaprojects that privatize water in the region.

Upon returning to their community, the small-scale female farmers of the Ribeira River Valley who participated in this meeting explained what they had learned, i.e., the logic of compensation. "It is as if they were funding a person here, for things to be beautiful here, for them to be able to destroy everything over there," concluded one of the *quilombolas*. "We have to think about where our money comes from, how this limits our way of working, and whether this is causing harm somewhere else."

The women who take care of the forests are either invisibilized or considered service providers within the same logic of what happens with nature. Their very bodies become appropriated nature. As reported by thinker Ana Isla (2), during the 1990s, while Costa Rica constituted itself as a paradise of conservation and ecotourism, more and more land was being fenced off, communities expelled, and women and girls sexually exploited. Their commitment to care is instrumentalized in the form of services that start to be supported because they potentialize nature's services.

More recently, the large-scale organizations that promote this kind of project have been introducing this new term 'Nature-based Solutions' to encompass the old compensation projects. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is an example, among others. Strictly speaking, this organization is an NGO, but it is similar to major transnational corporations in the way in which it exploits communities in various parts of the world. It is important to highlight the fact that in Brazil we witness both the advance of the brown economy (represented by mining, agribusiness and megaprojects) and of the Green Economy, promoted by organizations like TNC. Our reading is that the two are no different in nature. Rather, they are two sides of the same coin: the more destruction advances, the greater the field opened up to compensation initiatives. The more nature becomes scarce, the higher the value of the green bonds that trade it according to the law of supply and demand. In this equation, communities' territories

and common goods enter the financial markets as collateral for these bonds, and become mere assets.

We draw special attention to TNC's actions in Brazil vis-à-vis the dissemination and control of the Rural Environmental Registry (Cadastro Ambiental Rural – CAR). The New Forest Law of 2012 instituted the CAR as one of its mechanisms. Since then, by law the country's rural territories need to be geo-referenced and registered in the National System of the Rural Environmental Registry (Sistema Nacional do Cadastro Ambiental Rural – SiCAR). The new legislation also instituted the Environmental Regularization Program (Programa de Regularização Ambiental – PRA) and the Environmental Reserve Quota (Cota de Reserva Ambiental – CRA). These actions feed into a single process: permitting environmental compensation and placing conserved areas on the market.

Through projects that take place mainly in the states of Pará (Amazon biome) and Mato Grosso (Cerrado biome), TNC has sought to accelerate farmers' registration at all costs. It has even gone so far as to make available its own system, called CARGEO, for states that wish to use it to gather information and register it on SiCAR. By means of partnerships with governments, it offers services like geo-referencing by sweeping rural properties and production of geo-referenced municipal digital databases (3). This represents the power of this organization over data belonging to communities and public bodies. It also contributes to the insertion of more and more protected areas into the compensation market.

Purplewashing

At the same time, TNC carries out actions that we call purplewashing. Based on the reports of women from communities affected by conservation projects, we have seen that in practice they bring neither justice nor autonomy. Despite this, the gender agenda is present in several of TNC's actions and statements. In an attempt to display a supposed social responsibility, women are placed at the center of projects, as the main beneficiaries. Training courses are organized and women's groups are formed in the communities. However, the main actions of the organization continue to be the promotion of models of relations with nature that in and of themselves are patriarchal and excluding. A paradigmatic example of this is the training cycle on mining that TNC developed mainly for women on the Solomon Islands (4). The starting point is that the problem is a lack of information among women, rather than extractivism itself – as if having information about destruction were enough to stop it. The organization's policy toward women is all about placing them within market-based solutions (5), and not about withdrawing the market from the center of one's life.

The women farmers, *quilombolas* and *caçaras* with whom we interact in the Ribeira River Valley are constantly managing the forests where they live. Each time they walk among their plants, even if this is not the initial intention, they pull out dead leaves, bring stalks closer to the soil to generate roots, bury seeds and plant seedlings, combining them with enormous diversity. They know every square meter of their land – and an attentive observer does not fail to notice their interventions/interactions in each one. In areas near their homes, the management of organic matter is common to many farmers, who produce rich and structured soils.

Their relation with nature, their painstaking work, is opposed to conservation and restoration practices centered on a single species and on economies of scale, for these follow the same rationale of industrial agriculture (single species value chain, scale and absence of people).

One example is a tree known in Brazil as *Caixeta* (*Tabebuia cassinoides*), which grows in flood-prone areas along the coastal strip of the Atlantic Forest. Its seeds are wind-dispersed, and it develops sprouts from its roots. Its wood is used by *caçara* communities in the production of crafts and musical instruments, like the *viola* (a ten-string guitar-like instrument) and a traditional type of violin known as *rabeca do fandango*. The *fandango* is a tradition among these communities of the Ribeira River Valley: dancing and music originally practiced after collective work tasks were concluded. But this kind of wood also had intensive industrial use to produce pencils and toothpicks. Together with this intensive use came the destruction of its ecosystem due to the silting up of rivers, to alterations in the water regime owing to dam construction and to increased construction of luxury condos along the shore. *Caixeta* extraction was banned in 1989, but pressure from *caçara* communities led the São Paulo state government to establish in 1992 that its exploration would depend on permission from the state Department of the Environment. In the mid-2000s, a group of women came together in the Juréia Young People's Association to produce crafts in *Caixeta* wood with designs of flowers, plants and animals of the Atlantic Forest. These were well received wherever they were offered. However, the initiative had to be suspended because the state Department of the Environment did not authorize the craftswomen to extract *Caixeta* wood. The delay and even the lack of authorization are very likely to relate to the persecution of the Rio Verde community. This is a community that insists on and renews its presence in its territory, through the building of homes for its young people. The territory is understood by the state government as an 'Ecological Station', an area of very restricted use that implies the expulsion and permanent persecution of its community (6).

It is also worth highlighting the case of *Juçara* (*Euterpe edulis*). This medium-sized palm tree grows in the Atlantic Forest in humid and shaded places, and ends up standing out above the canopy of other trees. It does not reproduce by sprouting, just via seeds that are mostly dispersed over a small distance. *Juçara* is under threat owing to the destruction of the Atlantic Forest. It is also estimated that climate change and the extinction of the birds that disperse its seeds will affect the genetic variability and existence of the species. However, the major concern of environmental agencies centers on its illegal extraction for consumption of the *Juçara* palm heart. The extraction of the *Juçara* palm heart is an environmental crime, the penalty for which may reach one year of incarceration. This has been a focus of tension in the relation between public bodies, including the environmental police, and communities. Even though managed extraction by traditional communities is allowed, the process is very bureaucratic and 'misunderstandings' are always a risk. Gradually, *palmiteiro* (palm heart extractor) has become a specialized occupation and, because it is a criminal one, has become associated to the dynamic of other criminal businesses (drug trafficking, child prostitution) and to police corruption.

Recently, the Forestry Foundation, an agency of the state Infrastructure and Environment Department, dropped *Juçara* seeds from a helicopter on a *quilombola* territory, considered a reservation by the state. The program in question (7) talks about tons of seeds, thousands of hectares, and hopes to replace the helicopter with drones. It is as if the good intention of repopulating the area with *Juçara* justified that each square meter painstakingly cared for by the *quilombolas* should be 'rained on' with something like a blessing provided by technicians who hold more knowledge and power than them. The drones further deepen the sense of technology without people; the 'rain' further deepens the sense of a territory without a community, a reservation.

It is based on these examples that the term ‘Nature-based Solutions’ should actually be ‘Nature-based *Exclusions*’ in order to represent this form of dealing with nature. Women and all of their knowledge, traditional communities, ways of relating to nature not governed by profit and exploitation, all the different ways of inhabiting the earth, of understanding it, of symbolizing it – all of this is excluded. We are left with extractivism, the advance of capital over the commons, and the mentality that nature – like women – is a being that serves only to carry out services that sustain exploitation.

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Attack of the Space Cadets. Offworld Colonies, Racist Repression and ‘Nature-Based Solutions’



For the world's richest and most powerful men, the global environmental crisis has finally arrived. But what it means for them is not what it means for most people.

Take the examples of Jeff Bezos (Executive Chair of e-commerce giant Amazon), Elon Musk (CEO of electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla), Larry Fink (CEO of the world's largest asset manager BlackRock), Mark Carney (former governor of the Bank of England and Bank of Canada) and Bill Gates (co-founder of technology giant Microsoft).

For these men, ecological crisis doesn't mean a planet warming so fast it is threatening their own civilization. It doesn't mean the worldwide decline of insect life that is now undermining human subsistence. It doesn't mean dangerous pandemics emerging out of industrial agriculture, deforestation and globalization. (1) It doesn't even mean the deteriorating vitality of ordinary workers, who have seen so much of their wages, benefits and living conditions stolen by the rich over the past 50 years.

What ecological crisis means to these men, as capitalists, is the effect it has on investment. Ecological crisis means popular rebellion, as livelihoods are ruined and workers get fed up. Rebellion means pressure on governments to regulate and repress. To do either has a cost. Worse, to do either can result in further reductions in the living work that living things can be induced to donate to corporations to ensure profits. Fewer handouts to corporations mean fewer destinations for profitable investment.

A Science-Fiction Solution

Bezos and Musk (the two richest men in the world) have one colourful solution to the difficulty. If environmental catastrophe and the popular movements that result from it have become a problem for capital accumulation, then we must move to outer space. We must mine the moon and the asteroids, devastate Mars, or put the earth's inhabitants in colonies in orbit. Both Bezos and Musk are investing billions in such schemes. Bezos calls it "going to space to save the earth." (2)

To normal people, this might seem like what logicians call a *reductio ad absurdum* (an argument whose impossible conclusion demonstrates the absurdity of one of its premises). If capitalist assumptions ultimately require shifting the earth's people into space to exploit nature there, there must be something wrong with the assumptions.

But as capitalists, Bezos and Musk have no other option but to affirm those assumptions. For Bezos, the sole choice is between “dynamism and growth” and the horrors of “stasis and rationing.” (3)

So for them, climbing into rockets is only logical. And they are right. Their interplanetary fantasies are not an eccentric or amusing hobby like dressing up in Star Trek outfits. They are a deeply reasonable outcome of their capitalist commitments.

Back on Earth

Fink, Carney and Gates – who occupies the No. 3 spot on the world rich list – lack the imaginative flair of Bezos and Musk. They would prefer not to be seen as ‘space cadets’ (US slang for people out of touch with reality).

But their own favoured approach, though seemingly more mundane, is basically no different. For them, the challenge is what Fink calls “capital reallocation” here on earth. Where can the rich invest their money on an increasingly debilitated and uninsurable planet full of potentially crippling environmental lawsuits, unruly affected communities, restive green consumers, and troublesome carbon regulation, so that profits can continue accumulating in their hands?

Fink, Carney and Gates figure that one answer might be green technology. (Musk does too; for all his interplanetary enthusiasms, his real claim to fame is still earthbound electric cars.) To all these men, the current crisis of the old ‘brown’ technology signals one of those bouts of “creative destruction” (4) that periodically spur capitalism into reinventing itself. They know that rewards will go to those who pick the right commercial gambles for a new age of ecological disasters.

The trouble is that the gamble these privileged men have chosen – green tech – is fundamentally no different from the old brown variety. Green tech extends racist frontiers of extraction just as brutally as brown tech did, demanding basically the same old unsustainable sacrifices from nature and workers. More and more cobalt, nickel and copper must be mined in the DRC, Indonesia and Chile for ‘low-carbon’ digital devices and infrastructure. Wind farms are projected to take over 50 million hectares of land in the US alone by 2050, (5) and even more in China, with modern wind turbines requiring many tonnes of balsa wood each, mostly from Ecuador. Electric cars need lithium from Bolivia and elsewhere, to get which, as Musk has forthrightly declared, “we will coup whoever we want.” (6) And all this mainly just to supplement – not supplant – oil, coal and gas. Alexander Dunlap, a US expert on green tech, puts it bluntly: “industrial-scale renewable energy is fossil fuel+.” (7)

What can all that mean in the end but yet more exhausted frontiers, accumulated waste, rebellious communities, extinction events, meddling regulators, police payrolls and desperate attempts to locate even more untapped resources in even more out-of-the-way places? It's enough to make any capitalist into a space cadet.

Outer Space Here on Earth

Luckily, there are still other ways to try to colour the old brown tech green. One is to extend the earthbound plantation frontier and dig deeper into the ‘ecosystem services’ of forests, oceans or underground caverns. The idea is not to escape the earthly devastation clogging up industrial capitalism by rocketing off to other planets. Nor is it to halt the destruction itself. Instead, you just grab, manage, retool and exploit the living things that haven’t yet been destroyed here on earth in order to try to ‘compensate’ for those that have. The oil company BP, for example, wants its customers to invest in wind turbines in China and forest conservation in Mexico to help make up for its participation in six billion tonnes of additional crude oil production in the Russian state-subsidized Rosneft development project in the Arctic. (8)

Welcome to the world of ‘carbon neutrality,’ ‘biodiversity offsets,’ ‘net-zero emissions,’ ‘circular economies’ and now ‘nature-based solutions.’ Mark Carney wants to multiply voluntary carbon offsetting 15-fold in the next nine years to help make the world safe for industrial investment a bit longer. (9) Using forests, electric vans and the like to ‘compensate’ for its greenhouse gas pollution, Jeff Bezos’ Amazon pledges to be ‘net zero’ by 2040. (10) Larry Fink claims that BlackRock already is. (11) Floating similar gambits, Microsoft is even promising to be ‘carbon negative’ within a decade. (12) In the last two years, these businesses have been joined not only by hundreds of other large banks and corporations, but also by 127 nations worldwide now busily preparing to become ‘carbon neutral’ instead of stopping fossil fuels coming out of the ground.

All this amounts to a kind of Ponzi scheme. In a Ponzi scheme, you string along naive investors by assuring them that they are backing some (fictional) commercial enterprise while paying them fake ‘dividends’ consisting solely of cash swindled from new investors. In an offset or ‘nature-based solutions’ scheme, you tell naive economists that investments in unsustainable, waste-multiplying extraction are being made ‘sustainable’ by what in fact turns out to be ... yet more unsustainable, waste-multiplying extraction.

Bill Gates takes the idea still further. Not only does he urge corporations to seize land and underground geological formations, transform them into sponges to soak up carbon, and then sell the result to others in the form of permits to pollute more. He also says that the proceeds from this expropriation can be used to scale up industrial production of imaginary ‘green steel,’ ‘green cement’ and ‘green airplanes,’ making them commercially competitive with the old ‘brown’ varieties. (13)

Of course, you can’t expect any Ponzi scheme to last forever. Tree plantations designed to clean carbon from fossil fuel burning out of the atmosphere – like biofuel plantations or solar farms that supposedly ‘replace’ those fuels – leave behind waves of devastation and exhaustion among humans and nonhumans that are just as unsustainable as anything else in industrial capitalism. Biodiversity offsets, too, used mainly by the mining industry, just add a new layer to the old extractivism. Indeed, as Ivonne Yanez of Acción Ecológica in Ecuador has long argued, offsets may be even worse than mining, in the sense that they threaten to take away vital sustenance from communities for even longer than mining concessions do. No wonder so many opponents of extractivism, like Acción, are also standing in the front lines against ‘nature-based solutions.’

But then again, Ponzi schemes aren't *supposed* to last forever. At best, they fill the pockets of clever fraudsters for a few years until they can make a getaway, are thrown into prison, or kill themselves. Similarly, 'net zero' policies and 'nature-based solutions' aren't designed to sustain the earth and its inhabitants. Their job is just to allow fossil-fuelled business as usual to spin out a few more years, relatively safe from lawsuits and still insurable, while the public is asked to look the other way as ecological collapse accelerates.

Back to the Future

The 'nature-based solutions' concept isn't new. It goes way back to the beginning of the neoliberal era in the 1970s US. Then, as today, business was moaning about environmental regulation potentially becoming a 'growth ban' (read: ban on capitalism). Then, as today, there were no other planets available to flee to.

Business' solution was never to stop governments from regulating. Capitalists have always needed and craved state regulation, in order to keep control over workers, guarantee private property rights, tax the poor, help business exploit nature for profit, and dress the whole thing up with plausible, mutually-agreed fake numbers. Instead, the strategy was to get out in front of any temptation the state might have to overreach and put really serious checks on industry's drive to rob the earth from end to end. After all, subsidies from nature (including human nature) have always been the source of all capitalist profit – and, indirectly, of much state revenue as well.

That's why business-support organizations such as the US's American Legislative Exchange Council have never opposed state regulation as such. They just want to write it themselves. Hence the last half-century's flood of national and international environmental laws that permit and encourage offsets for devastated wetlands, depleted biodiversity, degraded water and land, extinct species, nitrous oxide, sulfur hexafluoride and carbon dioxide, all the way down to the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. Much of the detailed technical planning for offsets and 'nature-based solutions' legislation comes from corporate-friendly Washington-based NGOs including Environmental Defense Fund, the Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Defense Council, WWF, World Resources Institute; universities throughout the world; and United Nations and other international bodies such as the World Bank and IUCN.

Naturally, this approach is controversial even among capitalists. Right-wing despots like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Narendra Modi take a somewhat different view. Their own instinctive formula for capitalist renewal is to turbocharge racial and patriarchal repression while ditching as much regulation as possible. Their dream is that this will make labour and resource extraction just as cheap as it was in the old days. Neither offsets nor green consumption nor green accounting nor even green tech, Trumpistas suggest, are options for 'real men.' Instead of fleeing into outer space, Trump and his global followers propose escaping into a different fantasyland – one of perpetual, unquestioned ethnic and male dominion over humans and nonhumans alike. For them, it doesn't matter that their particular fantasyland's ecological lifespan would be even shorter than that of a Disney World of 'nature-based solutions' or daily Mars shuttles. As with Gates and Carney, all they are hoping for is some way of holding an imploding capitalism together for a few more years.

Institutions, not just Individuals

Of course, these squabbles rage not only among powerful individuals like Bezos, Carney, Bolsonaro or Modi. They reflect a debate over ecological strategy that is convulsing every institution of capital around the globe.

Bezos and Musk, for example, are not isolated space cadets, but well-regarded industry leaders in the suppression of labour rights. (14) Green-tech advocate Larry Fink is not just a fabulously rich Wall Street executive but the “fourth branch of government” in the US, his investment firm BlackRock holding major stakes in more than 90 per cent of the 500 biggest publicly-traded companies there. Mark Carney, similarly, is not just a retired Goldman Sachs banker but also an ideologue appointed by the United Nations to further the interests of the whole financial sector. And Bolsonaro and Modi are riding a huge global wave of racist and patriarchal reaction that may still be a long way from peaking. Whatever their differences, the diverse factions that these elite figures represent are strongly united in their collective search for innovative ways for capital to continue to plunder an earth that is almost plundered out. Figures like Modi and Bolsonaro, for example, while promoting racial and gender violence as one capitalist approach, are also very happy to be used by commercial interests behind green tech and ‘nature-based solutions.’

Where will undecided middle-class environmentalists and conservationists place themselves in this intra-capitalist dispute? Will they refuse Trumpist racism only to welcome ‘nature-based solutions’? Will they reject offsets only to embrace a Green New Deal dependent on resource colonialism? Will they throw in their lot with the explicitly outer-space politics of Musk or Bezos?

Or will they instead join the thousands of grassroots movements who are already confronting directly the root of the crisis: the old capitalist imperative of finding ever new ways of getting something for nothing while leaving the earth and its inhabitants in ruins?

Larry Lohmann
The Corner House

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(2) Musk’s space ventures are also already posing a severe threat to West Papuan peoples and their forests and seashores here on earth. Musk plans to contract with the Indonesian government to convert Biak island off the West Papuan coast into a ‘space island’ launching pad for 42,000 satellites. See [an Internation Appeal to stop this here](#).

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(8) Financial Times, Rosneft’s massive Arctic oil push undermines BP’s green turn.

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https://youtu.be/iP_3NrV8CtU

(14) The Intercept, Amazon Workers are Organizing a Global Struggle, 2020.

<https://theintercept.com/2020/12/03/amazon-workers-union-international-strike> ; The Guardian, Tesla workers speak out: 'Anything pro-union is shut down really fast', 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/10/tesla-workers-union-elon-musk>

RECOMMENDED

“Attacks on Forest-Dependent Communities in Indonesia and Resistance Stories” A Compilation of Bulletin Articles.

The WRM has compiled articles in Bahasa Indonesian and in English in order to expose the many processes of corporate control that are threatening forests and people's territories across the islands. The compilation also highlights the strong and persevering resistances against the many attempts to destroy and grab land and territories from forest populations.

Access the compilation in Bahasa Indonesian and in English here:

Bahasa: <https://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Ancaman-terhadap-Komunitas-Yang-Bergantung-Pada-Hutan-di-Indonesia-dan-Kisah-Kisah-Perlawanannya.pdf>

EN: <https://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Attacks-on-Forest-Dependent-Communities-in-Indonesia-and-Resistance-Stories-WRM-bulletin-compilation.pdf>

European development banks shamefully indifferent to violence and killings at industrial oil palm plantations in the DRC they have been financing for years

Another two young men have been killed at the industrial oil palm plantations of Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC). European development banks have been financing PHC for years, and agreed to hand over the plantations to an obscure private equity fund after the previous owner, Feronia Inc. went bankrupt in 2020 – after having received more than USD 100 million in development funding. Witness statements indicate that PHC's security was responsible for the killings of Joel Imbangola Luneza, Blaise Mokwe and Efolafola Nisoni Manu and a recent spate of violence at the Lokutu plantations, including accounts of rape and sexual abuse of women. Yet, the European development banks remain shamefully indifferent to the violence and killings, their silence condoning impunity for those responsible for these atrocities.

See the statement of Efolafola Nisoni Manu's mother on the circumstances of his death and the struggle to hold those responsible for this heinous killing to account:

<https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/30275-rdc-entretien-avec-mme-augin-nolofana-la-maman-d-un-jeune-villageois-de-mwingi-qui-aurait-ete-tue-par-les-agents-de-la-societe-phc-kkm> (in FR only).

More information on the community struggle against PHC:

<https://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/struggles-against-oil-palm-company-feronia-in-drc/> and at <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/cat/show/511>

Toxic river: the fight to reclaim water from oil palm plantations in Indonesia

The booming demand for palm oil has come at the high price of rainforest destruction, labour exploitation, and brutal land and water grabbing. Communities living in and around oil palm plantations in Indonesia and elsewhere are deeply concerned about their freshwater sources. But this long-term impact on freshwater streams around oil palm plantations seems to have been overlooked until now. The reality is that along the destruction of these plantations, is also the serious problem of water grabbing. Read further in the report from ECOTON, GEMAWAN, GRAIN and KRUHA here.

<https://grain.org/en/article/6578-toxic-river-the-fight-to-reclaim-water-from-oil-palm-plantations-in-indonesia>

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