"Dictionary of Agroecology and Education": Water as a common good

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Source: Book "Dictionary of Agroecology and Education"

The creation of the commodity meaning of water, which is hegemonic in a Capitalist setting is largely attributed to processes of material objectification. Koch (1997) posits that meanings are constructed through social interactions that allow for subject-to-subject debates. And there are processes of symbolic subjectivation, such as the production of meanings of water as a common good.

In his book "Water and Dreams: Essay on the Imagination of Matter," Gaston Bachelard (2018) discusses the creation of meanings that have a drive for life and death. He offers avenues for exploring these senses, akin to an archeology of water.

In the choreography “Water”, from 2001, created for Brazil, Pina Bausch – inspired by Bachelard – recreates seven meanings of life for water. Clear waters take us “to all the games of clear waters, spring waters, sparkling with images, we need to add a component of poetry: freshness” (Bachelard apud Cypriano, 2005, p.123). The waters that bind invoke desires and desires in the relationship with the other, love. Mystical waters are purifying, renewing sacred forces and religiosity. In festive waters, play, bathing in the river, sea, and swimming pools accept excesses, desires, and transgressions (Cypriano, 2005). The warm waters are relaxing like the sunset, they encourage encounters and connections. The sensual waters refer to the game of encounters, relationships, affection, and pleasure. Finally, there are the energizing waters, of forests, rapids, and waterfalls, with their inhabitants, exuberance, and abundance of the landscape.

These seven waters, as a philosophical perspective and artistic expression of human and non-human existence on earth, shape the production of meanings of water as a drive of life, of subjectivation, which contribute to producing and reproducing life, materially and symbolically.

Another production of meaning in water is related to the death drive, objectification, and appropriation by capital: water as a commodity. The artificialization of water courses for accumulation in reservoirs, such as dams and hydroelectric plants, and the artificialization of rivers, such as channels and river basin transpositions, are characteristics of tamed waters. The waters captured are those appropriated by capital; sourced from tamed waters, but also from irrigation centers along rivers or through the extraction of groundwater. Contaminated water runs through the entire cycle of production processes in agriculture, with pesticides and fertilizers, and in livestock farming, with vaccines, medicines, hormones, and excrement. Virtual waters are those incorporated into productive processes in agriculture and constitute commodities. British Tony Allan (2003) coined the concept of virtual water, in which he defined mechanisms to estimate the volume of water used in production processes, and exported as commodities; thus connecting water, meat, grains, fruits, sugar cane, and business.

Ecologists call virtual water a water footprint. Dissipated waters are flows that no longer form part of the water cycle as a result of deforestation; soil compaction; reduction of infiltration and feeding of aquifers; increased surface runoff; silting; reduction of aquifer base flow; reduction of surface flow in streams and rivers; change in the rainfall regime. Salinized waters

result from saline intrusion into rivers caused by a decrease in river flow that reaches the sea below the ecological flow that environmental agencies have established as the minimum flow required at the river's mouth to prevent excessive sea entry. Surface and underground dams can also undergo a salinization process, due to the concentration of sodium chlorides. Exterminated waters are streams and rivers that have dried up in their upper or middle reaches or completely, as well as ponds, lakes, and aquifers. These processes result from changes in rain cycles, deforestation, desertification, and overexploitation of water.

Water as a Common Good

Based on a perspective of the common good, the rights of nature, and human rights, Acosta (2016, p. 140) argues that these must be interrelated in the construction of more democratic societies and that have life (human and non-human) as the centrality of collective action: “Human Rights and the Rights of Nature, which articulate a 'biocentric equality', being analytically differentiable, complement each other and transform it into a kind of rights of life and rights to life”. This perspective, based on the inclusion of the rights of nature in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador, offers new insights into thinking about water as a common good.

Indigenous peoples and communities that live a traditional way of life (indigenous, quilombolas, peasants, etc.) establish use-value links with water and ecosystems. Land, vegetation, water, and landscape are means of production and reproduction of life, which shape identity and therefore have a symbolic dimension. These people and communities are the ones who protect the environment. Where there are preserved ecosystems and biomes in Latin America, there is the traditional way of life. The protection of life and water requires the resistance of these people and communities. These territories are the common goods, where water is central, and where there is pressure from big capital to transform them into commodity production territories. The symbolic meaning of an Indigenous woman reveals that: “water cannot be privatized, water has no owner, water belongs to time, water belongs to the enchanted. Our fight is for life, water is part of us and water is also us” (speech by indigenous Tainá Marajoara, World Alternative Water Forum, Brasília, March 2018). In the same Forum, another dimension of the mystical waters: “When I raised my daughters, there was always one day a week when we would always leave very early in the morning, without saying anything. We went in silence to the water's

edge, singing to her, praising the water as a way of acknowledgment to the purity of our relationships" (spoken by Indigenous Maria Alice Freire, International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, 8th Alternative Forum World da Água, March 2018).

These waters also refer to forests, paradise, and myths, such as the boat trips and their carrancas on the São Francisco, which protected the nego or caboclo d'água. With the end of the ferries and the arrival of steamships, Carlos Drummond de Andrade (2015, p. 177) asks: "Where are the carrancas?/The São Francisco River is without mystery and poetry? [...] you no longer believe in the myths that the figurehead conjured [...]?" Destroying the myths, the symbolism, and the links with the waters is uprooting oneself. Where is the poetry?

Water as a Human Right

The human right to access to water is related to the fact that it is essential for the reproduction of life and, therefore, health. Access is fundamentally related to the needs of individuals and concerns water supply and sewage services, the latter being wastewater. This access can be through collective or individual services. The UN, through Resolution 64/292, of July 28, 2010, declared that access to clean and safe water and sanitation basic are fundamental human rights. These must be reasonably priced and people must contribute according to their means; the water must be sufficient for uses personal and domestic; water and sanitation facilities must be within or close to the home; the State must take measures to realize these rights (United Nations, 2010). Water "must be safe and of good quality and not pose a health risk; must have color, smell, and taste acceptable, preventing the individual from seeking unsafe alternative sources; and it must be accessible" (Neves-Silva; Heller, 2016, p. 1866).

The water supply and exhaustion sanitary are components of sanitation, which is characterized by the relationship between humans and their environment, referring to the quality of life; health – prevention, protection, and promotion; food and nutritional security; and environmental protection. In Brazil (2006), water was considered a human right before the UN Resolution, through Law no. 11,346, which established the National Food and Nutritional Security System, by considering water as food in Article 40, item I.

The difficulties imposed on adequate access to services have value substantial and are expressed in the law human fundamental, without impediments to available technologies, to social rights, given that "the individuals are equal only generically, but not specifically" (Bobbio, 2004, p. 65). In this sense, it matters to establish parameters for access to water and its barriers, such as the following dimensions developed and adapted from Fekete (1996):

i) geographic – physical aspects that make it difficult: distance, barriers, geographical features, topography;

ii) organizational – obstacles arising from the way services are organized: type of technology and solutions, quantity and quality of available water;

iii) sociocultural – population perspectives: gender, care with water, habits, participation in solutions;

iv) economic – time consumption, energy, and money: fare price services and need to purchase water (tank truck, mineral water).

The privatization of water supply and sewage services is part of the context of neoliberalism in Europe in the 1980s and in Latin America. In South America, the privatization occurred with important conflicts, such as in Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia – where the "water war" took place in Cochabamba –, but with processes of re-nationalization of services, which were emblematic. In Brazil, there was no significant expansion of privatization. In the new cycle of accumulation of capital, post-crisis of 2008, privatization resurfaced, including in Brazil. From a human rights perspective, it is possible to have privatized services and for these rights to be met. In societies with social inequities, such as in Latin America and Africa, it is not feasible for these human rights to be protected under private concession. The commodification of life, in this new cycle of capital, involves the appropriation of common goods, such as land and water, sanitation, and bottled water, objectified as a commodity. It is the control of life and its monetization.

Access to water supply and sanitation in rural areas has historically been characterized by disjointed initiatives between federal entities, with no national policies. In the semi-arid region, the Program One Million Cisterns-P1MC instituted, within the scope of the National Food and Nutritional Security System, rainwater cisterns for human consumption. The use of water as food and to increase food production for sale and

consumption by families, based on social processes and participatory technologies like agroecology, constitutes a power based on networks built in recent decades that ought to serve as a foundation for policies promoting universal access.

The human right to water, in urban services or rural areas, requires to be considered in its multi-scalarity (from local to national) and in its multidimensionality (relating to various themes, fields, and actions); they are dimensions of integrality for the formulation of public policies and organization of services.

Water as a commodity

Water devoid of symbols, thingified and objectified is the appropriation by capital and the denial of the traditional way of life. “Water resources” is the objectification of life, it is the dispute in arenas, in which the neoliberal State and capital dictate the rules and control the decision-making arenas. The denial of symbols, of the mystical, leads to the objectification of water.

The discourse of scarcity as a strategy for the capture of water and land, which generally occurs through land grabbing and brutality, consists of transforming a common good and use value into merchandise and exchange value. In this context, the monetization of the common good is transformed into merchandise. Reterritorializing water as a resource and a common good means moving the decision-making processes around access from the domain of human values and the rights of nature, and consequently the subjectivization of life, to the domain of markets, decision-making forums, and the commoditization of water.

This process occurs through the appropriation of water by capital and transfers the sphere of decision-making from the field of values to the sphere of the market, in a process of monetization of nature-life. The UN's assumption, in 1992, of water as an economic good (Flores; Mizoczky, 2015) is a milestone.

The economic centrality of developing countries is what Gudynas (2009) coined as neoextractivism, which is characterized by the export of commodities, especially grains, meat, cellulose, ethanol, ores, and oil. This model requires large areas of land and is water-intensive. Agribusiness, as the largest export sector, is the sector with the highest water consumption, around 70%. This sector exerts pressure on traditional peoples and

communities, in search of land and water, mainly through land grabbing. The water or land binomial is central to understanding the frontiers of expansion and the capture of these common goods by capital, especially finance, after the 2008 crisis. This process is characterized by the change in the territories of life, of use value, by the appropriation of capital, in exchange value, especially through financial speculation (Action Aid, 2017). Territories are reconfigured and water is stripped of symbolic meanings to be reified as a water resource. Water thus constitutes a commodity, in a hydrobusiness. Malvezzi (2012, p.395) characterizes it as "all types of businesses that today emerge from water". These include, according to this author, water energy, irrigation, shrimp farming, environmental sanitation, and bottled water. Add to this, mining, petrochemical complexes, and livestock farming.

From a broad perspective, it involves all processes of water capture by capital, with environmental impacts and processes of vulnerability for indigenous peoples and communities and also for human consumption in urban areas.

The expansion of conflicts over water signals a transition, in which the fight for land alone is no longer sufficient for the reproduction of life, but the fight for water becomes fundamental.

The expansion of capital, especially mineral, and agribusiness has induced conflicts in the countryside, which must be understood as conflicts over land or water, as pointed out in the Action Aid report (2017) regarding the Matopiba development region (acronym for the acronym of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia) in the Cerrado. Indigenous communities have been expelled from their lands through land grabbing, with capital appropriating land and water. Conflicts over water in Brazil, according to the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) (2017), have expanded in recent years, with a growth of 150% between 2011 and 2016. In 2017, in 197 conflicts over water, more than 35 thousand families were affected, with around 70% associated with mining. The binomial of conflicts over land or water is still not captured properly.

Tamed and captured waters are characterized as territories of exclusion – around large dams, canals, and irrigation centers – where there is high consumption of water and inputs, with low incorporation of labor, due to mechanization and chemical inputs. The peasant population is incorporated in small numbers as workers; another part participates as precarious labor for capital; and the largest portion has to migrate or live with low standards

of living. Hydrobusiness captures water and land, destroys and excludes it. The Indigenous leader and shaman of the Yanomami people, Davi Kopenawa, launches "[...] an appeal against the danger that the unbridled voracity of the Merchandise People poses to the future of the human and non-human world" (Kopenawa; Albert, 2015, p. 51).

The contaminated waters are those of large irrigation centers and large areas of agribusiness, where people and the environment are affected. An FAO report in 2018 titled " More People, More Food, Worse Water?" suggests that agricultural practices are unsustainable and threaten health and ecosystems. In many countries, the largest source of contamination of water is agriculture, not cities or industries. The most common chemical pollutant in aquifers is nitrates, originating from agriculture, which releases pesticides, sediments, organic matter, and salts into waterways. Billions of people are affected, with annual costs of billions of dollars that become, in economistic discourse, externalities of "development". And they are not incorporated into the sector's costs.

The symbolic meanings of water are reconfigured into concrete meanings in the process of appropriation and objectification of nature and shape senses/death drives. They contribute to reducing or eliminating life on the planet. Industrial agriculture – or agribusiness – is responsible, according to Raj Patel (2017), for the sixth mass extinction of species on the planet – the fifth extinction was 65 million years ago –, resulting from the reduction of biodiversity through deforestation and contamination by fertilizers and other chemicals, creating dead zones in the sea. The artificialization of agriculture through the production of unique species follows a strategy of controlling life through GMOs. Large-scale deforestation completely alters the water cycle and creates a new vicious cycle: deforestation increases soil compaction, which increases surface runoff, which increases water course siltation, reducing water infiltration into the soil, lowering aquifer base flow, decreasing average river flow, and minimizing average precipitation. This cycle changes the rainfall regime, with long dry periods and intense precipitation concentrated in short periods. The change in the rain cycle and the average reduction in precipitation cause water to dissipate in river basins, with a flow that no longer forms part of the basin's water cycle and which needs to be considered and estimated, as it is not yet recognized by science. This process results from predatory practices of water exhaustion and makes traditional peoples, but also urban populations, vulnerable due to restrictions on access to water supplies. The São Francisco basin, due to its national relevance, is an emblematic case of predatory production

processes, with deforestation and overexploitation of water and flow dissipation, characterizing what Harvey (2004) calls accumulation through spoliation. Such accumulation practices intensified after the 2008 crisis, with the financialization of capital in the countryside associated with land-grabbing practices and the expulsion of traditional populations. The São Francisco River is a prime example of salinized waters due to decreased flow and salt intrusion; this rendered agricultural production processes, animal and human consumption, and the continuation of ancient ways of life inconceivable.

The processes of water appropriation by capital, transforming common goods essential to life into merchandise, in a context of increasing income concentration via financial capital, tends to deepen the death drive and capture common goods. The tendency is for the commodity people to expand the concentration of capital via the inseparable binomial land/water via the territories of traditional peoples and communities, as well as in areas of environmental protection and preservation.

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